

# UNEARTH

THE MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FICTION DISCOVERIES

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Introducing:

Paul Di Filippo  
Chris Dornan  
K. W. MacAnn  
Daniel C. Smith  
Debra Thrall  
Danny Williams

plus:

Hal Clement on science  
Harlan Ellison's first published story

# UNEARTH

**WINTER 1977  
VOLUME ONE  
NUMBER ONE**

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# Editorial

John and I established UNEARTH as a market solely for writers who had not yet made a sale, where their work would not have to compete with that of established authors. As far as I know, UNEARTH is the only prozine to work exclusively with unpublished writers.

We wouldn't have gone ahead with the magazine had we not been certain that we'd be able to publish fiction comparable in quality to that of other pro markets. This first issue vindicates our optimism, I think; each of the six first flights we're presenting in the pages that follow is a fine story. Not merely "good for a new writer," but *good* by any standards you'd care to apply. I recommend them to you, and ask that you note their author's names. You will be hearing more from these people.

Elsewhere in the issue you will find, among other things, a science column by Hal Clement, Harlan Ellison's first published story, "Glow-worm," and the author's introduction to same. So we do give the older

hands a chance to be heard: each issue will feature columns by Hal (science) and Harlan (writing), plus the reprinting of the first story sold by a major author. Harlan's first article will appear in UNEARTH #2; this issue's column on writing is by Editor John Landsberg.

All of the above will be regular features of UNEARTH. In addition, we will be introducing a letter column, interviews with writers and publishers, and we will be expanding both our classified and display advertising. In that we're pleased to give our new writers a place to be read and appreciated, this issue represents an end of sorts. But most of all, it is a beginning. UNEARTH is here to stay — not as a hobby, or as a semiprozine, but as a force to be reckoned with among prozines.

Yes, I'm that confident that we can succeed, publishing only work by new writers. (Don't forget that, even after we've bought a story from someone, we'll continue to accept further work from him or her.) There are times — usually after I've

read half a dozen clinkers in a row — when I would give my typewriter to be able to read a submission by, say, James Tiptree, Jr. But fortunately, before I can weaken enough to abandon our editorial policy, I come across a readable story, and the moment of temptation passes.

I should reiterate that there is no such thing as an unsolicited manuscript at UNEARTH. We will read anybody's work, as long as he or she has never sold fiction to a professional magazine. Our policy continues to be that we will comment personally and specifically (we use no form rejections) on each story we receive, within one week of the date we receive it. And, of course, we insist on a stamped return envelope with each manuscript.

We're looking for all kinds of SF and fantasy, whether staunchly traditional or radically experimental in style and theme. I'm determined that UNEARTH print quality stories from every branch of the genre. If someone says, "That's an UNEARTH story," that should mean that it's good, not that it's a specific kind of story. Quality is what I'm after, first and foremost.

I've already discussed the magazine's future a bit. I plan to add more of everything — pages, stories,

features, art, and advertising. I am going to do my damndest to keep the cover price where it is — no mean feat for a quarterly of our present size. Subscriptions will have to go up, probably to \$4.00 a year, after the second issue. That won't be a saving over the cover price, but it won't reflect out-of-sight mailing costs, either.

No initial editorial would be complete without a plea for support, so I won't disappoint you. As I've said, the staff of UNEARTH is fully committed to making our magazine for unpublished writers one of the major forces in the field. But to do it, we need your help. Please give us your support, any way you can — take out a classified (or display) ad, patronize our advertisers, write us a letter, subscribe, send in a manuscript, tell your favorite bookstore to carry UNEARTH (if they don't already), anything. One way or another, let us hear from you.

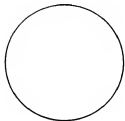
In closing, I'd like to thank everyone who helped put the pieces of UNEARTH #1 together, particularly Tina Zannieri, Steve Gildea, and Craig Gardner. And, of course, John Landsberg, without whom none of this would be.

—Jonathan Ostrowsky-Lantz  
Editor

# Thanatos Coming

by Debra Thrall

*The riddle became his task,  
then his quest, then his  
obsession. It led him to  
adventures he could not foresee,  
but not to the truth  
he would never know . . . .*





The Parum's riddle played in his head until he could think of nothing else. *Bring me the song that all must hear but no one welcomes.* Though he'd decided to decline the task the words danced in his head day and night, awake and asleep.

"It's like some foolish children's game," he complained to his friend Hallern. "Why must I play at riddles to obtain an appointment? My record should count for something — I've been six years in the legions, three times promoted in the field, decorated a dozen times, and not a mark against me. Does she care about any of that?"

Hallern leaned against a jeweler's booth, keeping both eyes on the flow and eddy of traffic in the marketplace. If it did not bother Tegis that the jeweler listened, then it was of no concern to him. He was a smaller man than Tegis, short and wiry and cinnamon-brown with trailing blond mustaches, a son of the nomads of the plains. "There must be good reason for it," he remarked.

"And I've the best blood," Tegis continued, "outside of her own, of course. My family has been recognized at court for generations — we made history in Ibsha before there ever was a Parum."

Hallern nodded. He'd heard that history over and again. "She plays a fair game," he observed, his voice especially quiet.

"And if it's strength or beauty she requires," Tegis muttered, "she cannot fault me there."

"Surely not," Hallern conceded. He glanced up at the city-bred officer, the tall slim young man with the classic Ibshan features, complexion half a shade lighter than the fine tawny hair. Surely not. Hallern swung his attention back to the bazaar. "And you've a fine education," he said, "not like mine."

"Education enough to fill any ministry," Tegis replied.

Apparently not quite enough, Hallern thought.

"What would it prove if I could accomplish this task — that I am good at riddles? I don't wish to be nursemaid to her children."

The song that all must hear, mused Hallern, but no one welcomes. With trained eyes he watched the river of people, scanning faces and costumes, attitudes and expressions, seeking clues to the violence it was his and Tegis's job to prevent. Perhaps Tegis, after his illustrious career, considered it beneath his dignity to patrol the city, or perhaps he was obsessed with his riddle to the exclusion of all else.

"I am confounded," Tegis sighed, "to think that an appointment to the court hinges on a riddle."

A hundred breeds and types mingled in the street. Every size and shape and color of humanity, every social caste, every nationality, every trade and persuasion was represented. Hallern's eyes were easiest drawn to his own kind, the small nut-brown folk of the open plains, come to swap cheese and hides and rough cloth for whatever they could get. There were darker

people too, lowland merchants from the jungle-choked coasts selling everything from hallucinogenic plants to human playthings for the bedchamber, and there were Ibshans striding tall and fair among them, buying. There was even a scattering of outlanders, looking fierce and a little confused in this confusion of scents and sound and color. In fact, among them was a highlander, directly across the street, bent forward to hear the prices of a dealer in steel blades. Highlanders — taller than the tallest Ibshan, and sickly pale, often sorely burned by the unfamiliar flatland sun, giants in plain wool and leather, with dark hair grown wild about their shoulders and in coarse beards. Fascinated by this rare sight, Hallern cast about for the companion — they never traveled the flatlands alone — and spotted two, both women, braced like bodyguards not far behind. Their hands rested on curious throwing blades at their belts and their pale eyes were as restless and wary as Hallern's own.

The song no one welcomes . . .

"Tegis," he said, "look there. Highlanders."

Tegis left off scowling to direct his on-duty gaze across the congested street. He grunted a single word. "Barbarians."

"Some believe so," said Hallern. "Do you know that though they acknowledge chieftains, no one among them is obligated to obey or even heed the advice of any other?"

Tegis eyed the smaller man with fond suspicion. "Have you become a student of the clans, then?"

"When I was a boy, two of them paused to take a meal with my tribe. They were old folk who had lived much of their lives outside the highlands and wished to go home to die. I spent many hours talking with them." Memory struck him a sharp blow to the forehead. "Tegis, that may be it. The riddle — I may have the answer."

Something leaped in the Ibshan's amber eyes. "You know it? The song?"

"The deathsong," said Hallern. He stared across the press of bodies at the three sunburned giants. "The highland deathsong. You must have heard of it."

"No," said Tegis, but there was a current of excitement in his voice. "But that must be it. No one welcomes death. Yes, that must be it." As quickly as his pleasure rose, it faded. "But how to bring it here. . ."

"That needs work," Hallern agreed. "The deathsinger may be only legend."

"If it can be done," said Tegis, lance-rigid, "I will do it, for I mean to be installed at court. Let us see what use we can make of these barbarians."

He, thought Hallern. The riddle was not his, nor open to his initiative, yet there might yet be some profit in having solved it. Shrugging, he chose to go along, if only for the adventure.

2

No air moved among the close-set trees. Tall trees, dusky black, their



gray-violet foliage clung to crooked branches like a mist. Neither wind nor sunlight penetrated that dense canopy. Three horses picked their way single-file along a twisting path through unnatural twilight.

The airless silence so oppressed Tegis that he raised his voice against it. "I'd not want to conduct war in these highlands," he declared, more to the forest shadows than the man riding behind him. "Not here, and not on the open heath. And not against these queer solitary beasts who inhabit them."

"Difficult to wage war against one or two at a time," Hallern remarked. "Perhaps they'd band together if more of us ventured among them."

"Only into their clans," said Tegis to the trees. "A handful here and another there, snapping at each other even as they braced against us. No, it strikes me as not worth doing. We could clean them out quick enough, but what would we gain by it?"

Only this strange and eerie land, thought Hallern. A place of windless silences, so cold that even at midday the sun is ineffectual, so empty that we ride for days without seeing a person or an animal or a beaten path. The only game was an occasional grouse flushed from the sparse-growing whin, and once in all the many weeks they'd spotted a single stag far beyond their bowshot. They'd seen a girl pull a fish from one of the many lakes and later dined with her, but that was no proof of plenty. The variety of fare was too meager and plain to be

appetizing to flatlanders. Tegis had lost what little flesh he carried; he was thin as death and equally grim. Not born to plenty, Hallern missed it less, nor was he much affected by the oppressive silence. But each passing day wore Tegis down another notch, and stiffened his resolve.

"We ought to have kept a record of our travels here," Tegis muttered in the direction of his horse's neck. "Hallern, do you suppose we are the first Ibshan expedition in these parts?"

"That may well be," Hallern replied. "Certainly the first to return to tell of it. If we do return."

"We've found them hospitable enough, when we've found them. It's only when we mention the death-singer that they close up like clams and shut us out." Tegis turned in his saddle to look back at his companion. "That was my mistake, back in the bazaar. I oughtn't to have mentioned our purpose. They might have agreed to guide us, otherwise."

Hallern shrugged. "They practically ignored us even before you mentioned that. I'd have been stopped right there."

Tegis frowned. "I grow desperate," he admitted. "Months we've been at this, and we haven't had a sight of this death-singer, nor even been able to learn if he exists."

"How much farther, Tegis, till you give it up?"

The other man stiffened and turned to face forward again. He did not answer.

Without warning, they came upon

a stream. It rushed up out of shadow, black as ink and coursing over a pebbly bed that blinked and sparkled like a path across the stars. Not a sound it made in its course, not a whisper. Tegis swung down eagerly, more thirsty than puzzled. It seemed forever they'd been in these woods, though it was only since that morning.

Hallern hadn't even raised himself to dismount when he heard a whistling sound like a sharp intake of breath. Tegis stiffened. Blood blossomed on the front of his tunic. Amber eyes wide in surprise, he pitched forward into the stream. Hallern was still staring at him when dark-cloaked figures materialized out of the gloom and closed upon him.

### 3

The house was built of quarried stone, gray as the shadows that drifted among the trees; it blended with the forest like a cloud of smoke caught in a cage of stiff black trunks. Low and squat, it was draped with garlands of the grayish leaves, its windows curtained with dried heather. Like everything native to this place, it emitted not the slightest sound.

The ambushers had overpowered Hallern without a struggle, disarmed him, and then promptly ignored him. And rightly so, he knew, for even though there were

only two of them, without weapons he was no match for even one. They'd hauled Tegis out of the water and carried him downstream. Hallern followed with the horses, uncertain what else to do. He was still feeling helplessly bemused when they came upon the house.

The highlanders carried Tegis inside and dropped him on a blanket before a massive cold hearth. The room was sparsely furnished even by highland standards — a table, two chairs, a chest in one corner, nothing that might be construed as decoration. Bunches of herbs lay drying on the hearthstone and the table held unwashed vegetables, the only signs of recent occupation. Their task concluded, the two hunters left the house. They stepped past Hallern without so much as a glance.

Hallern dropped down beside his friend. Tegis' chest was torn and wet with blood; something metal gleamed under the ragged flesh. He breathed noisily and with effort, but he did breathe.

Behind them a curtain rustled, and light entered the room. Hallern turned, blinked in the glow of the lamp, looked closer. There stood a young woman, a pale tall highland woman, but unlike any highland woman they had yet seen. In contrast to the usual rough cloth, leather, and fleece, she wore finely-woven flared trousers and a shirt covered with intricate embroidery. Her hair was loose but combed, long and wine-dark in the lamplight. Uncommonly plain, yet she moved with

an ethereal grace unknown in these parts. She met his eyes with hers, gray eyes akin to the forest gloom. She set the lamp on the table. Without speaking she knelt over Tegis, and peeled back his ruined tunic to expose the wound. Embedded in the flesh, a jagged bit of metal gleamed like a brass rib. Blood oozed sluggishly around it.

She turned her head to look at Hallern. This time her gaze transfixed him, held him pinned like a specimen to a board. His mind fogged, leaving him confused. She spoke to him and he understood plainly. It was his own tongue she spoke, the language of the plains which he had not heard or used since childhood.

"Were he conscious," she asked, "would he wish to live?" A weird question, he thought. He could only nod, unable to move his tongue.

She released him, looking away; it was like a mist had cleared from his brain. He felt alone in his own head once more.

There was water in a bowl, and clean cloth — magically at hand? Hallern could not say. Watching her blot the torn edges of the wound, he was entranced. The woman's hands moved as if in a dream, the long white fingers dancing a slow-motion ballet, hypnotic, seductive. They pried the weapon loose, releasing a rush of crimson they pressed back with the cloth. She dropped the weapon by Hallern's knee but he couldn't look at it, couldn't break his gaze away (he would study it

later, balance the crescent shape in his palm, heft it, test its cutting edge and its wicked points, and understand that, properly thrown, it could brain a victim or slice off the head of a gamebird, depending on which side of it was outward), could see only the bone-white hands moving over Tegis's chest and his glistening face. They came to rest at his temples, their tips lost in his tawny hair. Hallern experienced the tension in them as they arched, the knuckles going bloodless. He imagined he saw energy coursing along her arms in wavering blue flame. Her hair, pulsing with bloody lights, had fallen forward off her shoulders, curtaining her face and damaged chest. His own head ached with the pressure of those fingers, roared with the silence.

It ended, suddenly, like a branch snapping underfoot. Hallern's brain was calm, his vision clear again. He saw the woman withdraw her hands, sit slowly back. Tegis breathed evenly, no longer with effort. Hallern stared at his chest. Where the wound had been there was no trace of injury. The flesh was smooth and sound. Not a scar, not even a bruise remained to testify to the crescent's work.

She was looking at him. When their eyes met he felt no confusion, no fog in his head. He saw her as he had before: a plain-looking, tired young woman. *Highland* woman. She stood up suddenly and walked out of the room, through a curtain unseen in the shadows, leaving the lamp behind.

It was then that he picked up the weapon. And began to doubt his sanity.

Hallern looked at his comrade, resting comfortably before the cold hearth. Denying the evidence of the bloody tunic, his chest was whole, lightly glazed with sweat. Had it even happened?

As he pondered this, Hallern realized that he had performed poorly in this matter, unacceptably passive. He must act now, have answers for Tegis when he awoke. He covered his friend with his cloak. Then, rising, he pursued the young woman through the curtain.

Beyond it was a smaller chamber, lit and heated by a cozy blaze in a smaller fireplace. In the center of the room, filling it, stood a wood frame chair padded with fleeces. She sat motionless there, waiting. Her steady regard made his eyes water. He blinked, sending a tear down each cheek. When she looked away he was able to organize his thoughts again. Yet even before he could dab his eyes she was speaking, now in perfect Ibshan.

"You seek the deathsinger," she said.

Hallern stared.

"It is said that one who seeks the deathsinger will surely find her."

Someone had told her. The news had traveled here ahead of them, precipitating the attack. Of course. "Then there is such a person?" he asked. "A woman?"

Her gray eyes were mild, bringing no tears from Hallern's. "Have the dead not told you so?"

"You speak in riddles," said Hallern. "Why were we attacked? We have not been bothered till now."

"You had not ventured here, till now."

"These woods? Are they special?"

"Would you not say so?"

His annoyance faded before remembered awe. "The I did not dream what I saw you do?" She did not answer. "Who are you?" he asked.

"I am called Yayelet," she said. "I am the deathsinger."

But of course, he thought at once. Of course.

She was watching him with mild curiosity.

"If you can do *that*" — he nodded toward the room where Tegis lay — "why do you celebrate death?"

"The choice is not mine," she said.

Hallern had become aware of a bench to his left; he sank down on it gratefully, his legs too weak to support him. "I don't understand," he said.

"No," she agreed.

Unbidden her words came back to him, sounding in his mind: *were he conscious would he wish to live*. He forced his eyes from the hypnotic play of light on her hair, finding her eyes again. "You mean they choose death?"

"We do not fear death here," she said. "The riddle is in error."

The shocks were softer now, or maybe his senses had been dulled by them. "Then you know why we've come."

"I know," she said.

"Will you teach him the song?"

"Only the dying may hear the song."

Hallern had expected that, could accept it. Tegis would not. Even as he thought it, she nodded.

"He comes unprepared to conquer here," she said.

Hallern shrugged. "Yet he comes. You should have let him die."

"Go out now and sleep," she directed. "In the morning he will have my answer."

Hallern obeyed. He built a fire in the main chamber, made his friend comfortable, and saw to the horses before he settled down to sleep. In the morning he was not surprised to find that she was gone.

## 4

The day had been mild. A light breeze stirred the gorse, and the last of the sunlight lay like a reddish powder on the moor.

Above Ehryn-tal she paused to look down at the rusted mirror of the lake. A few brindled goats grazed untended along the nearer shore. The house was only a smudge against the heath; no smoke came from its chimney. Yet death had not finished there. She started down the path.

She was alone. Her tall horse was

a mile-eater walking on coiled springs, measuring the moor trail in a brisk gavotte — Death's horse, the color of her hair in the sunset. The hood of her cloak had fallen back, tugged free by the wind; there could be no mistake. Though neither man moved or dared breathe, Hallern communicated recognition to Tegis. After agonizing weeks of searching, their nerve endings stood up and shouted.

They lay in a thicket, painstakingly concealed. Their own horses were tethered at a stream an hour's walk across the moor. Since noonday they had lain in wait for her there along the path to Ehryn-tal, certain she must come. And now, as the sky pulsed crimson and grayed at the far edges, and the night wind came up bitter and stiff, she did come, drawn to death.

The predators tensed, gathering themselves to spring. But short of their lair the tall horse paused, rigid as a setter. The young woman sat at ease in the saddle. She blinked once, then closed her eyes.

"I've a death to sing," she said, quietly, as though to herself. "Can you wait a little longer?"

Hallern's held breath escaped him in a sigh; Tegis's tension snapped with the feel of breaking bones. They remained crouching until the gray eyes found them. Hallern stood up, and Tegis rose after him, the rope ready in his sweating grasp.

"I've a death to sing," she repeated.

"Ours," said Tegis, "if we let you pass."

"No," she said. "You have my word on it. After I sing this death I will go with you."

"Why should I believe you?" Tegis demanded. He stepped free of the thicket, loosening his coil of rope.

"Come with me," she answered. "I will not trick you. And there is no one at Ehryn-tal who can oppose you."

The strength gone out of him, Hallern stood with his arms limp at his sides. "How do you know?" he asked.

"I know," Yayelet replied.

"As you knew we were here?"

She nodded.

"And before, in the forest, you knew why we'd come."

The gray eyes were mild, half closed.

"Then why did you walk into ambush?" Tegis asked. His voice was sharp with suspicion.

"I've a death to sing," she said. "Nenim must not die alone. It will be over by dawn. Then I will go with you."

"To Ibsha," said Tegis.

She nodded. "To Ibsha."

"I'll go with her," Hallern offered, "while she sings the death."

"No," said Tegis. There was trust in his voice for neither of them, and something very like hatred for his prey. "You fetch the horses. I'll go with her."

Shrugging, Hallern started off across the moor. Glancing back, he saw Tegis shoulder the rope and seize the tall horse's bridle. Death's

singer and her horse docilely followed his lead.

## 5

It was fully night when Hallern reached the lake at Ehryn-tal. The low stone house stood sharply outlined in the haze of two moons, the lake and the surrounding moor shone brittle silver. Tegis's fire was the only spot of warmth, as the windows of the house were muffled with heather.

Tegis huddled at his fire, crouching in his cloak. He rose stiffly at Hallern's approach, grabbing blankets off the pack horse. Not for the first time Hallern wondered how they'd have fared in that thicket if she had come along any later than she did. He glanced once at the house, listened but heard nothing. Without a word he set about preparing a meal. Bred as he was to the aching cold of the plains, he did not suffer the highland night as his friend did.

Tegis stared out of his cocoon, his eyes glittering. "I've won," he muttered.

"Then you believe her?" Hallern asked.

"There is no way out of that house that we cannot see. I searched it thoroughly and removed every weapon."

"Why aren't you inside with her?"

"The ritual requires privacy," said Tegis grudgingly.

Hallern made no remark, though several came to mind. They ate in silence and Hallern cleaned up afterwards — he was used to the subordinate role, though they were of equal rank. Tegis soon gave himself to sleep, leaving Hallern to keep watch.

No sound issued from the house during the long hours he stared at it. He never investigated. A growing part of him wanted failure for his friend, wanted the woman to outwit him and escape. He wondered if they'd find her alive at dawn, or gone with the old woman to that place even Tegis could not invade. Twice he considered abetting her escape, and twice discarded the notion. He was doubly relieved when it came his turn to sleep.

Dreaming, he heard a song. It was faint but distinct, a voice without accompaniment singing in an unfamiliar tongue. Soft it was yet throbbing, matching his pulse. As his heart responded, beating faster, so did the song; he heard its gentle urgency above the pounding of his blood. In his sleep he moaned and trembled. Watching, Tegis frowned. Too long in this comfortless place, he thought, too long without women. When Hallern twitched and then lay still, Tegis felt certain of it, and turned back to his vigil. Yet it was a more final climax Hallern had dreamed. He would not hear the song again.

## 6

At dawn she came out.

Traces of the night mist lingered on the water, phantom purple streamers trailing across a lake the color of mercury. The wind soon whistled them away. Behind them the sun boiled up over the highlands, flushing the leaden sky crimson. She emerged alone, pulling the door closed after her. A rare gust of wind tore at her, drawing a curtain of reddish hair across her eyes. Wearily she brushed it aside.

Hallern, strangely unrested after his sleep, spoke first. "Is the old woman dead?" She nodded. "What about the body? Shall we bury it?"

"Her clan will tend to her."

Still shivering in his blankets, Tegis glanced warily around. "Her clan?"

"They will come to her," said Yayelet. Her voice was soft as the edges of the dawn and she did not look at them. "Are you ready, then?" she asked.

Tegis threw off the blankets.

## 7

They rode night and day for hours at a time, the tall horse lashed be-





tween them. When they paused to rest one of them always remained awake, though their prisoner did not. She never spoke to them in all the days and nights that passed, never shared their food, eating only vegetables and herbs she plucked from barren heath and sterile plain. In fact she seemed unaware of them much of the time. There was no question of binding her; it seemed that they did not even lead her. Rather they accompanied her, as though on a journey of her choosing.

The journey was entirely without event. They sighted an occasional herder or hunter on the moors, but no one accosted them; the flatlands accepted them back mutely. A border patrol met and conducted them to the town of Kesh on the great river. There they took a barge downstream to the capital of Ibsha. Not until the city's gemstone towers were in sight did Tegis allow himself a smile.

Standing at his flank position at the rail, Hallern watched the highland woman Yayelet. He had never been more aware of the fact that she was inches taller even than Tegis. Her motionless eyes reflected the asymmetrical sculpture that was Ibsha's hub and glory, the symbol of civilization and power to lesser nations across the known world. She seemed unmoved.

He touched her arm, causing her eyes to focus on him for the first time in weeks. "I am sorry for this," he said, "that you must come here in this fashion."

She regarded him for a time, her gaze brushing only the surface. There was no wind here strong enough to disturb her hair or tug the hood free; her face was half in shadow. "Do you think I come against my will?"

The words snagged Tegis's smile, drawing his mouth into a hard line. "You'd not have had to come at all, had you given me the song."

"I gave you your life instead," she answered.

"You speak boldly for a prisoner," said Tegis. "I could lead you through the streets in chains."

"Only if I permitted it," said Yayelet in her gentle voice.

Tegis's hand went to his belt, closing on the hilt of his dagger. The highlander stood her ground. Their gazes locked like the antlers of warring stags.

She waited until he began to draw the blade, then set the world exploding in his head. The dull flatland sky roared with scarlet flame, raining brittle tears of poison; the river vomited geysers of steaming spray. A fissure opened in the barge. Hallern and the nearest crewmen gaped as they saw Tegis lose his balance and, shouting his horror, claw the deck as though drowning.

The yawning earth closed upon him, crushed him in darkness, then spit him out upon the wild-burning deck. Tegis writhed in the pool of dancing flame. Big as his gods, the highlander woman loomed before him, her voice a spray of icy needles in his head. "I could have left you at any time," she said. A torrent of

blood smothered the fire and drowned his tortured senses.

Hallern stood rooted, frozen at the rail. At his feet sprawled Tegis with not a mark upon him. Hallern raised white-rimmed eyes to stare at Yayelet. Could her gaze have brought on the fit, touched off the seizure they had witnessed? Had Tegis gone mad from looking into them? She looked mildly back at Hallern.

"He is not dead," she said. "I do not bring death, but only sing its coming."

Hallern bowed his head. The barge gently bumped against the dock.

## 8

The Parum received the Death-singer in a private audience chamber, a place of cool milky stone muffled with patterned cloth. Heavy mesh filtered the brazen sunlight, and miniature fountains cooled shadowed corners. The Parum sat in a simple stone bench, attended by a subtly-armed member of her personal guard. She invited Yayelet to join her there.

"Tegis sought a position at court," the Parum explained. "He is a fine soldier, a man of good breeding and education, but these were not the qualities I required. I set him a task, to test him."

"Bring me the song all must

hear," Yayelet said, "but no one welcomes."

The Parum's golden eyes acknowledged mild surprise. "Then he told you."

"He did not."

"He made no effort to persuade you to teach him the song?"

"He saw that it would be pointless to try."

"So he kidnapped you," said the Parum. She rose gracefully and paced the chamber in a rustle of silken robes and floating amber hair. The guard remained at the bench. "That was not my intention."

"You meant him to persuade me," said Yayelet.

"That is the art I sought in him. He has failed."

"One could only fail at that task."

The Parum returned to the bench. "He will submit to your justice."

"I do not blame him," said Yayelet.

Cold eyes met colder eyes until the Parum blinked.

"Your riddle is faulty," Yayelet said. "Perhaps in your land no one welcomes death, but in my land it is otherwise." She spoke so quietly that the guard strained to hear her above the spray of the fountains, though every word sounded clear in the Parum's brain. "You were wrong to involve me in your riddles," said the death-singer. "She who seeks me will surely find me."

The Parum frowned at the shiver of fear in her stomach. "Do you threaten me?" The guard tensed.

"I threaten no one," said Yayelet. "That is not my function."

The Parum gathered her dignity around her like a shroud. "Ibsha apologizes for the mistreatment you have suffered. Ask what you will in recompense; it shall be yours."

"I require nothing from you."

"Then you desire no punishment for Tegis?"

Yayelet almost smiled. "Appoint him to your court." The Parum gestured to her bodyguard, who left the room reluctantly. She then turned to the young highlander. "If you would punish me," she said, "you have your chance."

"I know of no worse punishment than the lifelong dread of death," said Yayelet. "Yours is not far off, as you suspect. The headaches will not trouble you much longer."

The Parum's cream complexion went as white as the stone that framed her. "How do you know?" she whispered.

"I came," said Yayelet, "to sing your death."

"Then you come too soon," said the Parum stiffly, "for I have much to do."

The guard returned to stand rigid behind the bench. Yayelet rose. She nodded to the Parum of Ibsha. "You might have chosen life," she said. "But it is true, it has always been true. Those who seek me always find me."

They went out together to the tall horse waiting in the courtyard.

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*We told Paul Di Filippo to stay away from those Malzberg novels, but would he listen?*

# Falling Expectations

*by Paul Di Filippo*

Heller summons up his departing energies, marshals the pitiful forces at his command, and rises above his wife like a small nocturnal apparition, coming to rest on his forearms where he pauses a moment, unsure of his exact intentions towards this vacant-eyed woman. What sort of connection is he trying to make here, he wonders with a weak cupidity, what old pains and still-festering wounds is he trying to reopen? He waits for an answer, but none comes. Fuck it, he decides, entering her mechanically, harshly, pumping away like the automaton he has become, like the machines we all are. The surface of his mind is blank, the primal level is barely stirred.

Curiously tonight the responses he has come to expect from his wife are totally absent; usually, stereotyped as they are, meek as they might be, her small whinings and archings serve to remind him of his purpose, inform him, in mid-course, of his goal, supply him with some outside referents. Tonight, this is not the case. It is almost, he fanta-

sizes, as if she were not under him, as if she had vanished into the vacuum of his past.

Suddenly, dusty traps open within him and memory seeps in like bilge water. His wife is *not* below him, plastically receptive; he has, in point of fact never been married, never (if gratuitous truth be told) even made it with a woman. All this time he has been banging his mild erection against the starchy white sheets, lost in some institutional delusion, suffering from a vocational psychosis. Disgusted, he rolls over, to sink into a fitful sleep.

NASA does strange things to a man.

## II

Dull morning finds Heller in the office of Captain Caligula, his immediate superior at NASA, source of his anxieties and fits, by whom he has been called, to whom he has no choice but to go. Heller hates and fears the Captain, while the Captain finds Heller hard to understand, a situation both of them are uncom-

fortable with. Often, in the stainless corridors of the administrative building, the Captain will meet Heller and stupidly extend his tongue, simultaneously emitting a loud *whuffling* sound, then hurry away like a retreating roach. Later, Heller will contrive to tie together the Captain's shoelaces, all the while lusting for a grosser revenge totally beyond his grasp. Today, such a venomous interchange seems to be building.

The Captain walks wildly around the seated figure of Heller, maniacal eyes popping, labored lungs racing, working himself into the frenzy he finds so necessary to deal with Heller. Occasionally he will stop in his random course and fire off imaginary rounds from his cocked fingers; at other times he will apparently attempt to throttle someone. Heller suspects he is agitated.

Finally, after some minutes of this behavior, he sees fit to address Heller. "I dislike to use you, you know," the Captain says, ropes of saliva webbing his lower lip as he obviously strives for understatement and control. "As an astronaut, you are incomparably bad — we have no other like you — and as a writer, I believe, you stink — yes, I'm sure of it, you stink as a writer." The Captain plainly sees this as a fine statement, almost a revelation, in fact, and an aberrant smile twitches his lips for a moment before he continues. "And besides, I dislike you personally. But we have lost five men

on Mars, we have grown slightly piqued at this, our interest, you might say, has been aroused, and

you are our only uncommitted man at present. Yes, I think I might put it that way — our only uncommitted *man* at present," (this, reader, being a snide cut at Heller's rather pathetic sexual life, a life whose pale shadows we have just witnessed). "We are sending you there alone, to find out what happened, irrespective of your total lack of talent, overlooking, I might add, your whole grim and blunder-filled record. I only hope you succeed, because if you don't, you may as well not return." He motions to Heller to rise: "Any questions? The Captain neither expects nor wants there to be any questions as Heller well knows, so he replies with a negative shake of his head. "Fine, fine. Say" — the Captain extends his hand — "no hard feelings?"

### III

Heller suiting up for Mars: the man is outlined against the white walls of the room like an insect on cotton, oblivious to the ministrations of the acolytes attending him, intent only on a distasteful inner repast served up by a mind all too apt to annoy him with such courses at the most inopportune times: Heller is resavoring his last time in space.

Heller looks out the capsule window at the leprous moon and knows that he does not belong in space, knows, more to the point, that Man does not belong in space, mainly because of the national deficit and because he is vulnerable to explosive decompression. Heller would have

been quite happy (or, at least, less distraught) to remain behind on Earth, where he was a science fiction hack of long standing (or sitting) until he was recruited by NASA in an insane attempt to bolster the flagging public interest in their then-current Moon missions. Heller's job, minimal as it is, consists of tending the orbiting half of the space vehicle while his two companions disport themselves on the lunar surface, and sending back stirring and concise reports on the developing mission which will be released to the press and which, hopefully, will reflect his stature as a professional purveyor of wonder. Heller has his doubts about how well he will be able to achieve this.

The Men In Charge have, Heller now belatedly realizes, unfortunately but quite expectedly neglected to supply him with any of the tools of his trade; not paper, pen, typewriter or even cassette recorder, and Heller, proficient hack though he is, finds it impossible to compose anything of worth off the top of his helmeted head without even seeing or hearing the words take shape for that small amount of time needful to correct the most blatant grammatical and syntactical errors. Even Heller, after all, has his limits, even Heller has never tried simultaneously composing and delivering a story over the phone which is the equivalent of what these nameless technicians below would have him do, a task he doubts even the notorious C. C. Capaldi capable of (take that! you rotten pulp merchant!). No,

Heller realizes that he must exercise all his small talents to the utmost on this assignment, must plunge on regardless of accidental or contrived difficulties, if he wishes to improve his lot in the future, if he ever wishes to advance from the lowly position he now occupies, and it is at this juncture that he notices the computer teletype that juts from the wall of the capsule like a paunchy abdomen. Here, gentlemen, we pass a pivotal point in Heller's languishing career and the plot advances (in increments, it must be admitted, smaller than the monetary rewards garnered by superfluous wordage) another notch as Heller floats to the keyboard and with the easy fluency and slick effortlessness, fluent easiness and effortless slickness of the accomplished penny-a-worder begins to type. Unfortunately, predictably, Heller has, however, neglected to switch the device from its on-line status and his sturdy, boring prose is fed directly into the machine where it is interpreted as an order to ignite the rockets of the Lunar Excursion Module, an act which promptly takes place, thereby incinerating Heller's two comrades who happen to be standing underneath the Module at the time, converting them to wandering ashes on the callous surface of the Moon.

Later, Heller will perceive this as a bad omen.

#### IV

Not, of course, that Heller's life does not already abound in bad omens, is not a life whose very seams

are strained to the bursting point with more ugly nuances and direly foreshadowed events than a more perceptive audience would find credible. Life for Heller is a continual expectation of disaster, a never-ceasing search, if you will, for the tag-end of meaning that will enable him to skirt the pitfalls of existence. Examine, for the moment, Heller at large, Heller in public.

The hard back of the folding chair presses on Heller's spine like an admonishing hand as he sits in the audience of an open symposium staged by the American Science Fiction Writers, a group which can and must, however shamefacedly, claim Heller as a member, as one of its own. Heller is glancing warily around the room, anxious to avoid those he has commitments to, even more eager to dispose of those who would seek favors of him, when a small, noisy cluster of fans approaches. What is going on here? Heller asks himself, revealing a bad habit many of his fictional characters share. Exactly where in hell do these people get the idea that I am the focus of their bitterness and disgust and petty squabbles? How am I supposed to deal with this? The fans have drawn up close to Heller now, ringing him menacingly, seemingly intent on doing him actual, physical harm and the pulse in Heller's neck is threatening to unknot his tie when the largest of the fans comes to Heller with grim determination in his ungrateful eyes and begins to speak, saying, "We want—" But

Heller, for once, has made up his mind not to take any abuse, verbal or otherwise, and he bursts into a crazed series of imprecations, twirling violently around in a circle to confront each of his tormentors, scattering folding chairs to all sides, screaming and gesturing with earnest frenzy, all the while trying to be fair about the whole matter. Years later, he will note his resemblance now to Captain Caligula in his less sane moments.

The fans are all staring at him with blank incomprehension as he gradually abates his spewing rage, the ongoing panel discussion is completely disrupted, the audience watching Heller guardedly, and Heller marvels at the success of his tactics, wonders if he should from the very first day of his life have adopted just such a strategy, dealt with all intruders so forcefully and with such a clear sense of purpose. The seconds of silence drag on until, finally, the original spokesman for the group, at an obvious loss for what to do, completes his sentence with a tired shrug: "—your autograph."

Heller sighs and takes out his pen.

## V

Heading out to long-dead Mars, Heller passes the orbit of the moon quite early in his slow journey and its pocked face reminds him of the face of his adolescent son, whom he has neglected brutally — until he remembers that he has no son. He makes a resolve to stop reading so many absurdist plays.

## VI

The landing on Mars is bad, very bad, possibly even worse than that, and Heller is somewhat shaken, indisposed to a certain extent, reduced, in fact, to crawling across the cold, abrasive surface of the planet in painful surges, hoping, as he has hoped all his life, for he knows not what. His mind begins, I say, his mind begins to wander, all the thoughts he would rather not face, all the faces he would rather not think of, begin to besiege his attention, to clamor and jostle for a space in his skull and steamy, obscuring gases fog his vision until he believes that he sees a small alien standing near him.

"Another one." This is all the alien says, evincing no reaction other than a muted boredom, a laconic indifference, a fatalistic predisposition. "Another one." "Help." Heller asks, without stopping to question how he and the alien can be communicating, if this is indeed what they are doing. "Help me,

bring me to your city, your people. Help—" This last plea made with tapering forces. Heller is reaching into an outside pocket for the glass beads NASA has supplied him with when the alien speaks again: "There are no others, just you and I, the others all died when the flatulence from our aerosol cans stripped the ozone layer from our atmosphere like a dirty rag. Nothing grew except cancers, civilization crumbled, I am the only one left." The alien spreads his hands in an endearing gesture and Heller realizes how much he likes the little fellow, how wise and beneficent he is, how truly unlike the Earthmen. Heller scrabbles his hand in the dust and the alien takes his meaning, bends down to him in benediction, as if to shrive Heller, and Heller says with his throat on fire, "Tell me, tell me, the meaning, advice—" In contemplation the alien rests a moment, sits on his heels meditatively before he replies, "Never sell your reprint rights."

Heller dies happy.





## The Two Christs

The two Christs faced off, like caged animals preparing a fight for territory. I was sitting on the sofa, which faced the middle of the room, so I got to see everything. The first Christ, a guy from Jersey, he'd been here a while, glared at the newcomer angrily. The second Christ, understandably surprised, stood for a moment openmouthed and vague — then circled the other staring hard. They continued this staring match until one of us yelled, "Come on, Jesus, hit the bastard!"

The Jesus from Jersey made a half-hearted threatening motion, and nurse Ella Clayton thrust her gorgeous tits between the two Christs. "Stop it! Stop it this instant!" She screamed so loud her breasts went jelly-quivering. She

cornered the Jersey Jesus: "Leave him alone!"

Unhappily, J.J. gave in. He shuffled over to the corner of the room we called Gethsemane, a flowerpot next to the television, and meditated.

The second Christ picked me out of the crowd and introduced himself. "I am Jesus of Nazareth, reborn in Chicago." That gave him the initials J.C., an opportune coincidence. "Can you tell me about the other Christ?"

He was good, I had to admit. The original Christ, our man from Jersey, was a bit too aggressive to fit my idea of the part. But this new one was soft-spoken, intelligent, and had that special aura. Maybe I'd got lucky after all that time. "Well,



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# of Ward Seven

by K.W. MacAnn

Jesus," I said, "It's like this. The other one, J.J., came here a long time ago. He's established. He's performed a few miracles; nothing fancy, just cured a few alkie and once he turned a schizoid into an ordinary neurotic. He's not great, but he's okay."

"Yes, but doesn't he lead the faithful astray with his impersonation?"

"Depends on the faithful," I mused. "Hell, most of the Christians don't believe in him, especially the Catholics. The Jews get a bang out of him. There's a Buddhist here, but he's too far gone to care. The atheists are always trying to get a debate up. And the Satanists get really livid."

The new Christ frowned. "Satan-

ists?" He rubbed a thin white finger against his years' growth of beard.

I nodded. "We've got some Satanists. Don't worry. They're really nice people; except they upset the staff when they try to hold their covens — nakedness and fucking and all that. They won't bother you, don't worry."

J.C. looked away for an instant, breathing a sigh. "I was tempted before. Satan's power is as nothing against that of my Heavenly Father."

I patted him on the back, rising from my seat. "Good for you. I'll see you later; right now I've got a date with the foxiest nurse in the ward."

I went away in something of a funk; after all that time I thought I'd

found the real one in the Jersey Jesus, but I'd still been laying low, biding my time until I was sure. And now this new one had come along and it turned out he put on a better show, a damned sight better. I was about ready to bet he was the one.

I saw the two Christs again that evening at dinner. Jersey Jesus tried his daily act, breaking the bread and passing it to his disciples, a handful of Jesus Freaks who'd freaked out. The new Jesus saw the performance and cursed at the poor bastard in gibberish. Actually, it was a dialect of Old Greek, New Testament language. Our old Jesus answered him back in Aramaic and the two had a long bilingual shouting match. Jesus No. 1 maintained he was giving out the mystical body; Jesus No. 2 held that it was sacrilege, since *he* was the real Messiah.

Mary Lane, a nurse I'd screwed a couple of times, slipped over to me with a profoundly sad look on her face. "Nick, can you get them to stop?"

I gave her my best sexist 'you'll pay for this later' look and clenched a piece of rump. "I'll see what I can do."

The thought of being peace-maker for two Christs was a tiny bit funny. Still, Mary had asked nicely. I imitated Ella and dove in between them. "You two call yourselves the Princes of Peace and look at you! You should be ashamed, especially in front of the other patients!"

J.C. was really shocked. "I'm sorry. But I've never been totally able to control my anger, as is seen

in my behavior with the money changers in the Temple. Yet you are right, my friend, anger is an evil that gnaws upon the heart, a hungry beast."

The old Jesus said nothing; he left the lunchroom and was standing in Gethsemane when the new Christ and I passed on our way down the hall.

J.C. showed me his room. It was like all the rest, except that he had several bibles in different languages scattered on the bed. I asked him the obvious question, the one I ask all the Christs, why was he in a mental hospital?

"When I came to Earth the first time," he said, "I was bound to suffer for the sins of men. I took all the sins of mankind upon my soul and died, crucified, to cleanse them. This second coming is no different. I hope to stay my Father's Hand by suffering the newest crucifixion."

If he was talking about the psycho ward, he wasn't far off. Crucifixion was a damned good word for it. But aside from that, he was very convincing, and his little speech gave me a nice opening. "Jesus, does this mean that you're going to replay your Gethsemane scene? Will you take all the sins in the world on your soul?"

Christ looked at me; his eyes were deep and soft, cloudy with kindness. "Everyone's sins," he told me. "It is hard for me. Terribly hard. Yet it must be done if I am to save mankind."

"Take my sins, then, Jesus. Cleanse my soul. I've been searching for the true Christ for a long time. I

believe I've finally found him. Take my sins first."

Christ prepared himself for the act, moving like a man about to wrestle an animal. He fell to his knees, praying, then rose; he appeared regal now, his face glowed, blushing. He was ready to wipe my soul free of sin and take my evil upon himself.

Christ said nothing; he laid his hand upon my head and held it there, muttering with his lips barely moving; we formed a tableau, neither of us able to move. Then his hand slipped away, and he began trembling violently. Christ stumbled to the floor; he gazed at me with hot white eyes. In a while he controlled the shaking and pulled himself to his feet. "You!"

"Of course," I said, "who did you expect?"

He pressed his hands against his skull in imitation of that Munch painting. "God! What have I done?"

Smiling, I explained. "You righted a wrong that has been a stain against both of us for many years. Once I was a Bringer of Light, not the Lord of Darkness. Now I can return to my rightful place at your Father's side. There'll be some changes made, you can believe that!"

He straightened, trying to infuse some backbone into his sin-scarred body. "You tricked me!"

"Hell, you're supposed to know everything. What went wrong? Did your Heavenly Daddy turn off his radar?"

Christ pouted. "On Earth I must live as a man, with a man's strengths and weaknesses. Through my stupidity you made me betray my Father."

I put my arm around his shoulders, friendly-like. "Listen, pal, since you've got the dirtiest buggers of a soul anybody ever saw, why not take it out for a trial run? Screw a few nurses, that's always pleasant. Or I can suggest a few male nurses, if you're so inclined."

Christ pulled away, sickened. "You viper! Dare not tempt the Lord thy God! Get thee behind me, Satan!"

I was waiting for the usual heavenly fireworks, but nothing came. Christ kept blathering bible quotes at me, gesticulating like a lunatic. Suddenly I didn't feel any less sinful. That was when I realized I'd made a terrible mistake. But if J.C. wasn't the one, how had he spotted me?

I left the room in a hurry. The Jersey Jesus was in the hallway, leaning against the wall. We stared at each other for a while until I understood. And just as I did, he smiled at me in a knowing way.

Damn him.

# Books



*Craig Gardner  
Tyler Matthews*

I'm generally quite leery of "theme" anthologies, collections of stories supposedly all dealing with the same subject. As this type of anthology (both reprint and original) has proliferated, the umbrella headings have become increasingly esoteric and bizarre: future corruption and sports in SF are the worst offenders that come to mind immediately. Editors and publishers seem unable to exercise any judgment whatsoever where these collections are concerned — no theme is too arcane, no excuse for a book is too flimsy in their eyes.

On the other hand, one can't look a gift horse in the mouth. If, in an anthology of eight or ten stories, most or all are well-written and entertaining, what difference does it make what title the book goes by? True enough; but the people responsible for the books set themselves up for criticism by insisting on a gimmick to justify the books' existence. And, frequently, it works — there's nothing wrong with hanging together stories about Jupiter, or Jews, or time travel. Such inspirations, unfortunately, are too infrequent.

The most frustrating thing of all is, most readers don't want or need

these handles that are slapped on the anthologies. How many of you pick up a book and exclaim, "Terrific, an anthology about truck farming across the universe!"? You don't — you say, "Hey, a new Carr," (or Silverberg, or Knight, whoever), and buy it. That is what makes series such as *Orbit*, *New Dimensions*, *Universe*, and *Alpha*, and single volumes like *A Science Fiction Argosy* and *Adventures in Time and Space* so popular: the anthologist, rather than trying to pick stories somehow related to a particular theme, says to the reader, "Here are some great stories that I know you're going to enjoy." Period. The reader has, from past experience, learned to trust the editor's judgment, so he buys the book. Period again. There are no misleading titles and no hype. Would that the anthology game ever thus.

All of which brings us to the book in question, *The Aliens* (Thomas Nelson Inc., \$6.95, with a trite and inappropriate cover by James E. Barry), edited by Robert Silverberg. I pick up any anthology assembled by Silverberg, and only rarely am I disappointed. This was one of those occasions.

It's not that any of the seven stories here are bad, or even dull; on the contrary, all are at least good, and a few are excellent. It's just that, considering the editor and the scope of his subject, I expected a lot more than I got.

The title takes in a vast amount of territory, leading one to fairly drool in anticipation. Perhaps, though

(one thinks), the subject is too broad in scope. Will Silverberg limit himself to a certain type of story about aliens? Apparently not; the brief introduction is standard stuff, explaining how humans have never learned to get along with one another, and how confrontations between Earthmen and aliens are really metaphors for the difficulties people of different stripes encounter among themselves. No problem with that — he still leaves himself several decades and a few thousand stories to work with.

But he's promised (or has let the title promise) more than he delivers. To begin with, seven stories (189 pages) is not very much, considering what must have been available to him. And, while the collection as a whole isn't bad, nearly everyone who reads it is going to have an opinion about how it might have been better.

Silverberg leads off with "An Eye for a What?", by Damon Knight, and "Hop-Friend," by Terry Carr. Both stories are outstanding, the highlights of the collection for me. You know that any Damon Knight story is going to be crisp, tight, and well-written, so I won't bother confirming that this is no exception. It's a problem story (how do you punish an alien, when he enjoys what you're doing to him?) that is fast-paced, full of wit, and quite satisfying in its resolution.

"Hop-friend" is a gem: tight, solid, and ultimately moving. It deals with the encroachment of man on the environment of an intelligent

alien species. How Carr can write! Both his story and Knight's make one wish that these two excellent writers would devote as much time to producing their own work as they do to editing others'. Carr, especially, has never received the credit due him as a writer.

I was surprised by the inclusion of Frederic Brown's "Arena." It's admittedly a great story, pivotal and important, but it's known by heart by just about everyone. Ordinarily, it could occupy an honored place in an anthology such as this one, but with only seven stories, I wish Silverberg had given us something a little less familiar.

Every time I read "Look, You Think You've Got Troubles," Carol Carr's first published story, I'm prepared to dislike it. After all, I tell myself, it's only an extended ethnic joke. But, dammit, it's *funny*, and well-written, and it carries you right along to one of the great curtain lines of American literature. Even so, this marks its third reprinting in the last couple of years, and I wonder why we're getting it again.

"Countercharm" is one of James White's "Sector General" stories. It's an enjoyable enough problem story (how do you cope with an oversexed alien crustacean who's sharing your mind?), but it won't stick in your mind longer than the time it takes to read it. The book wouldn't be any weaker without it.

The book's longest piece, and one of its saving graces (anything by this man constitutes a book's saving grace), is "Firewater," a short novel

by William Tenn. Professor Klass (Tenn, in real life) is one of our most gifted writers, and it's a source of constant pain to me that it is so all-fired difficult to find his books. Why, at a time when other publishers are foisting upon us the likes of Ralph Milne Farley, Hugo Gernsback, Homer Eon Flint, et al., does Ballantine not rush into the fray with the rest of its Tenn backlog? It's inconceivable to me that his books have been allowed to stay o. p. for so long.

I have to admit, alas, to being somewhat disappointed by "Firewater." It's inventive and stylish, all right, but it didn't grab me the way Tenn usually grabs me. It's a bit too talky and static, and I found the main character too one-dimensional to be able to carry the brunt of the action. Sigh.... But even a slightly subpar Tenn effort is at least as good as most people's best, and I'm sure everyone who has never read "Firewater" before will enjoy it. Tenn is a joy; may the rest of his *oeuvre* follow *Of Men and Monsters* back into print, and soon.

Silverberg wraps up the book with his own "Sundance." Any editor can be excused for including one of his own stories when it's as good as this one. Complex and disturbing, it's the most ambitious story in the book, and probably the best.

That's it — a very readable and entertaining collection, but one which is ultimately disappointing, because it could have been so much more. Each of you will undoubtedly be miffed by the exclusion of certain

stories; I couldn't understand why there was nothing by Tiptree. Everything considered, you might want to spend a couple of hours in a public library to read *The Aliens*, but it's not worth adding to your own collection (unless you're a Tenn completist).

One final thought — it's likely that this collection, like earlier Silverberg anthologies for Thomas Nelson, is aimed at "younger readers." Even if this is the case, it still doesn't excuse the book's weaknesses. Any curious and intelligent person over eleven is going to take something good away from a good book, no matter how much of a challenge he or she finds the contents. Like anyone else, kids deserve the best the publisher and editor or author can give them, and this particular collection is very definitely not the best. Gear your books to us older folks, powers that be, and let our young friends get what they can from them. Their tastes are a lot more sophisticated than you think.

—Tyler Matthews



*Deus Irae* by Philip K. Dick and Roger Zelazny. Doubleday, 1976, 182 pages.

At the end of the first chapter of the Dick-Zelazny collaboration, *Deus Irae*, the primary protagonist,

Tibor McMasters, an armless, legless "inc" (incomplete) who may or may not be the greatest artist of his time, is sent on a pilgrimage to find the still-living god of his sect, the Sons of Wrath. To do this he must travel 1,000 miles across post-holocaust America to reach Los Angeles. This, I said to myself, is a Dick character being sent on a Zelazny quest.

The book at times recalls pieces of the two authors' earlier works. The setting is very similar to Dick's *Dr. Bloodmoney*, another novel of life after the bomb (which also featured an armless, legless man as a major character). The principal characters of *Deus Irae* interact with creatures both greater and smaller than they in a manner which recalls portions of *Ubik* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* And most of the post-holocaust world resembles a slightly twisted version of Zelazny's *This Immortal* or *Damnation Alley*.

My earlier characterization-quest remark is, I'm sure, an oversimplification. According to a Ted White column that appeared in *ALGOL*, Dick began the novel in 1965, eventually selling it to Doubleday on the basis of the first few chapters and an essay on the structure and philosophy of the rest. Dick, however, found it impossible to finish the book, and eventually offered to collaborate on it with Zelazny, who began to add to it in 1970.

The product of this extended genesis seems to owe more to Dick than to Zelazny. The first five chapters are pretty pure, vintage Dick, and I doubt they vary all that much from





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those originally sold to Doubleday. Zelazny's major contribution seems to begin in Chapter 6, with the rat-catcher and his love of napalm, but the book maintains a primarily Dickian tone in its plot and character interrelationships. Zelazny (probably) contributes some fine descriptive prose, and the two mesh with rather interesting results, as when Tibor meets the worm:

A huge worm had begun to uncurl and move towards him. It thrust the bushes aside; it dragged itself on its own oily slime and as it came towards him it began to scream, high-pitched, strident. Not knowing what to do (Tibor) sat frozen, waiting. The rivulets of slime splashed over tarnished grey and brown and green leaves, withering both them and their branches. Dead fruit fell from rotting trees; there arose a cloud of dry soil particles as the worm snorted and swung its way toward him. "Hi there!" the worm shrieked. It had almost reached him. "I can kill you!" the worm declared, tossing spit and dust and slime in his direction. "Get away and leave me! I guard something very precious, something you want but cannot have. Do you understand? Do you hear me?"

In this passage, the worm seems embodied with menace provided by Zelazny, counterpointed by the whimsical neurosis of his speech, an

obvious Dick characteristic. The overall effect is to produce a world that is unknown and silly at the same time. Strangely enough, it works, and even reminded me on occasion of some of Robert Sheckley's more recent writing.

The Search for God is the theme of the book, a topic that has occupied both writers in the past. Early in the book one of the major characters, Pete Sears, who is a member of the dying Christian sect (the Sons of Wrath being much more popular) has a drug induced vision. He speaks with a clay pot who calls itself Ho On, who states "That which is benign will identify itself. That which won't is not," and then predicts the second coming of St. Sophia.

Sears tells of his vision to Dr. Abernathy, the Christian priest, who fathoms its significance. Ho On, he tells Sears, is Greek, a name for God, meaning The Essence of Essence, the Most Holy. He adds that St. Sophia was a building that existed before the holocaust, signifying "The Wisdom of God."

This passage is a central one to the book, and *Deus Irae* goes on to explore exactly what makes a god. Later in the book, Tibor meets the God of Wrath (or *Deus Irae*) in three manifestations, one a great fiery face, another a bluejay. Tibor himself is given a dog, and comes to take a protective, godlike attitude towards it. At one point, the dog joins him when he feels lost and abandoned, and he thinks:

If I make it through the night, he thought... *if I make it it'll be because of you.*

"I'll reward you someday," he promised the dog, who stirred at the empathic tone of his voice. "I will save your life. If you save mine, if I am alive when help comes - I promise! If I am still living when you yourself are in danger, you will hear a roaring and a rushing, and a rolling, and the brush will churn! Leaves and dust will fly up, and you will know I am on my way, from wherever I am, to aid you! The thunder and violent rolling of my salvation of you will terrify anyone. I will protect you, cherish you, exactly as you are getting me through this night tonight. That is my sacred solemn promise before God himself."

The dog thumped his tail.

It is this strange ascension into godhood that allows Tibor to deal with the Deus Irae, which in turn allows the wisdom of God to return to the earth, as seen in a vision granted Pete Sears' superior, Dr. Abernathy.

Altogether an interesting conception and a well written book, *Deus Irae* is perhaps not up to the best books written by either Dick or Zelazny, but it is a unique collaboration, and well worth reading. Recommended.

—Craig Gardner

The *Continuum* series, edited by Roger Elwood, Berkley-Putnam, 4 volumes, each featuring stories by Philip Jose Farmer, Poul Anderson, Chad Oliver, Thomas N. Scortia, Anne MacCaffrey, Gene Wolfe, Edgar Pangborn, and a revolving authorship with Dean R. Koontz, Gail Kimberly, George Zebrowski and Pamela Sargent, and Barry N. Malzberg.

When asked to help inaugurate UNEARTH's book review column, I volunteered to write an overview of Roger Elwood's *Continuum* series. In a way, I wish I hadn't.

Not that it's all that unpleasant a task. Anything but. In reviewing the four books before I began this column, I confirmed my first impression: Out of a total of 32 stories in 4 anthologies, there isn't a badly written one in the bunch.

But something else happened when I glanced over the stories for a second time. When I had read the stories originally, I did so in the order that they were printed in each book; the Farmer story, followed by the Anderson story, then the Oliver story, etc. In rereading them, I considered each series individually, as a separate whole, and was struck by aspects of changing style and character development that were not apparent in reading these stories as facets of the four different collections. I found the stories moving in enough different directions, with the resulting complexities, to serve me in writing a review probably four

times as long as is possible in my allotted space (or time, heaven knows). There are just too many aspects of the story-series that I would like to cover in depth. In short, I have too much to write about.

I should have this problem all the time. (However, it did give me a snappy introduction to the review.)

Let's skim the surface some, anyway:

The four *Continuums* carry eight stories each, ranging from Chad Oliver's interstellar traders, to Gene Wolfe's increasingly fantastic stylistic experiments. The series proceed toward a number of surprisingly diverse goals with a remarkable degree of success. (Thus once again demonstrating the all-encompassing possibilities inherent in speculative fiction!) Oh, there are little problems here and there. For example, the Farmer stories are really not completely independent of one another, as Elwood's introductions imply of all the series. Rather, they struck me more as episodes in a cliff-hanger serial, so compelling that I had to force myself to read the other stories in each collection before I went to the next Farmer story. (This is a problem?)

Other difficulties arose in the Scortia series, "The Armageddon Tapes," in which the background became so complex that the last story's impact was seriously weakened by the amount of what-has-gone-before explanation necessary. And in McCaffrey's "Killishandra" series, I swear that the story in

*Continuum 3* occurs chronologically before the story in *Continuum 2*, and thus damages the character development. (I assume that there must have been some mixup in the proper order at the publishers. The stories, incidentally, are both excellent.)

The Killishandra series is one of two in the collection that deals with the developing life of a character on a world other than Earth. Killishandra is a crystal singer, whose voice and perfect pitch allow her to cut crystals needed for the machines of the future, an occupation that brings her great wealth while slowly driving her mad. From her recruitment to crystal singing as a rebellious youth to her proud demise after being deceived, Killishandra comes across as that rarity in sf, a strong woman, fighting until the end against a hostile environment. Very well done.

Poul Anderson also follows the life of one person on an alien world. His protagonist is Dan Coffin, one of the first born to a new colony on a world where most of the humans are restricted to life on a high plateau due to the unbearable air pressure of the lowlands. Coffin, however, is born with a physique compatible with his home-world, and we watch him explore and settle it, coming into manhood, finding love, seeing his first-born and planning for the future of the colony along the way.

The Anderson stories, while all written with the professionalism that the author is known for, show one inherent difficulty with the series format. The first two stories deal



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with taming the wilderness. In the latter stories in the series, however, the wilderness is settled, and the protagonist looks towards the future. Problems begin to come from the outside. Politics and philosophy take over where the prime motivation was once survival, and the stories lose much of their immediacy. Unfortunately, the optimistic conclusions of Anderson don't hold up as well as the darker (yet, in their way, equally positive) conclusions of McCaffrey's series, just because McCaffrey's protagonist faces an ultimately impossible (and thus more dynamic in terms of conflict) task.

Gene Wolfe, on the other hand, chooses to develop style rather than character in his four stories. He begins with a fairly straightforward speculative fiction premise: A procedure exists to separate people from their corporeal reality. They become NINs (not-in-nature), creatures who eventually fade away rather than die. What happens to Wolfe's characters when they do leave his primary fictitious reality seems to extend to the limits of the written word, the settings for each ensuing story venturing farther and farther, like great concentric circles, enlarging upon yet containing the source.

The first story, told in the third person, tells of a father who loses his daughter to NINdom. The second story, told in the first person, has the father following his daughter out of reality, only to discover a Greater Evil existing there. The third story

takes the form of a psychiatric journal, with the father, daughter and one other NIN inhabiting the form of a young girl (giving her a split personality) somewhere in the past, during the days when electroshock therapy was introduced. The fourth story is, at least in the beginning, a standard fairy tale, with a king and a prince and a castle and a dungeon, along with the three NINs pursuing the Great Evil. Wolfe somehow manages to tie all these threads together (somewhat loosely, I'll admit) while throwing in a few comments about literature today versus that of the past.

This variety in the nature of the eight different series is what makes the *Continuum* books as good as they are. With this concept, Elwood has allowed the authors to use the conceptual brevity and punch of a short story form and amplify it by a factor of four. What results in each case are series of four separate moments of character, incident, setting and-or style, which combine to make something more complex than is possible in the short story without having the weight of a novel. You have, instead, a series of continuums. The word is well chosen.

Thus Farmer shows us four flashes of a man turning into a nightmare. Anderson writes about four stages in a man's life, demonstrating the development of both his character and the society around him. Scortia takes his four stories to build the foundations of a truly epic encounter between a repressive society, a revolutionary movement and

a threat from outer space. Pangborn gives us four glimpses of life in the post-holocaust society already seen in his novels such as *Dary*. Primarily encounters between youth and old age, they show us that humanity is a constant, no matter what the circumstances (and no one does this as well as Pangborn). And so on and so on.

One series, the last one in each book, does not fit this mold. It takes a basic idea, a world ruled by robots in which man is a dim legend, and allows five different authors to give their interpretations in the four stories (one is a collaboration). The first three, by Dean R. Koontz, Gail Kimberly, and George Zebrowski and Pamela Sargent, are all well-written, in relatively similar styles, episodes in the rediscovery that Man Does Exist! The last story of the four, by Barry N. Malzberg, is at first a rather shocking contrast to the other three. Written in a the typical Malzberg apocalyptic style, it concerns a robot assigned to kill men, although the men he kills may be figments of his imagination, culminating in what may or may not be the collapse of the robot civilization. The story therefore succeeds in taking the theme of the earlier stories one step beyond, managing to neatly finish it off at the same time.

Much of the *Continuum* series left me wanting more. In Chad Oliver's stories of a group of interstellar traders, evidence of an alien intervention in certain primitive civilizations

is found, but the "continuum" ends only with an eventual confrontation with those aliens hinted at. The Scortia series only completes preparations for the climactic battle with the threat from the stars. Both left me eagerly anticipating *Continuum* 5, if such a book should ever come to pass.

Quite simply, *Continuum* is the best thing that the prodigious Mr. Elwood has ever produced. It's a good idea, well executed. I hope someday he can put together a second set of *Continuums*, either using all new concepts or even continuing some of the series begun in the first set. And, if you haven't already read the series, by all means do so. There's something in the *Continuum* series for all science fiction tastes.

While I'm writing rave book reviews, let me recommend Ben Bova's *Notes to a Science Fiction Writer* (Scribners, 1976, \$6.95). It's a good book for all beginning writers (among whose ranks I list myself) serious about writing well. Bova takes story telling component by component (plot, conflict, character, etc.), illustrating each of his major points with one of his own stories, and then reiterating how he used the elements he had discussed to make that story work. I found, quite simply, that many of his points helped to make clear exactly why parts of my own stories did or didn't work. A must buy for all serious beginning writers.

—Craig Gardner

# Film

Craig Gardner

## I. "Logan's Wrong"

What's wrong with *Logan's Run*?

To narrow our scope of inquiry, perhaps we should look first at what's right with it. Don't worry. It won't take long.

Well, Michael York is Michael York, and, even though he isn't called upon to act much, he makes a good stolid presence at the film's center. Jenny Agutter, the Love Interest, is required to be pert and pretty throughout, which she does admirably. And Roscoe Lee Brown as "Box" (a robot (?) who oversees the ice caves) and Peter Ustinov (as an old man living in the crumbling capitol building of what was once Washington, D.C.) turn in creditable character performances.

The sets, of course, are magnificent, and the special effects are generally well done. The plot itself, about a man running from certain death, has some guaranteed suspense elements going for it.

Why, then, is *Logan's Run* such a rotten movie?

A short film lesson:

A movie, to be satisfying, must



create its own reality. This is true not only of science fiction films, but of films in general. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, for example, is as successful as it is because it creates a hip, humorous vision of the western as its "reality." This vision, while bearing scant resemblance to the real American West, is logically consistent and thus believable to the audience.

This logical consistency, this backdrop on which a film relies, is nowhere more important than in a science fiction film. Audiences need characters, events and emotions to identify with. A film set in the future must relate these audience perceptions of present-day reality to this future in order that the film might be fully understood and enjoyed.

A good example of this process can be found in *A Boy and his Dog*, a less pretentious and more successful science fiction film, in which the joking, comradely relationship between the two lead characters (which would not seem out of place coming from the mouths of Paul Newman and Robert Redford) gives the audience both something to identify with and characters through which to perceive the world of that film's "future."

The screenplay and direction of *Logan's Run* conspire, especially in the earlier portions of the film, to give the audience the most vacuous future society possible. In the world of *Logan's Run*, everyone lives for pleasure. They seem to have no other thoughts in their minds. We

see no real competition, no love or hatred (beyond a vague buddy relationship between York and fellow enforcement officer — or "Sandman" — Richard Jordan), no sense of purpose; in short, none of the dynamics that make a society work.

In place of a true society, we are shown crowds of giggling, cheering men and women bent on self-gratification (primarily sexual; there seems to be no art or other forms of self-expression).

After being led into this vacuum, we are then expected to be horrified when some of these future masses are destroyed in a ritual called "Carousel," and to identify with Logan, a public enforcement officer who decides to escape from the enclosed city in which he lives for a variety of reasons, some of them rather muddled.

But the people destroyed by "Carousel" have no real identity, even as part of a society, because no real society has been created. Logan and his Love Interest step out of this non-society as non-persons, with no depth beyond the physical, whose only true motivation is to run from death ordered by a "society" in which their lives held no meaning, towards a goal that they know nothing about. It is very difficult to care about these people.

This fundamental emptiness undermines much of the rest of *Logan's Run*. Scenes that in another context might have worked quite well, such as when York and Agutter discuss the possibility of actually, physically producing chil-

dren, or their first view, as they emerge from the ice caves to the world outside the city, of a bloated, orange sun rising on the horizon, become awkward and even laughable. (In contrast, the same shot of an enlarged sun at the conclusion of *THX-1138*, an s-f film in which the characters seem to be real human beings with real drives, is downright inspirational.)

To top this all off, *Logan's Run* compounds its fundamental problems by taking a very adolescent view of sex and violence in its story telling. Mangled bodies (including that of Farrah Fawcett-Majors, the Living Barbie Doll) are shown in closeups and left on the screen long enough to count every bruise and scar. The film's equally mature attitude towards sex can most clearly be illustrated by an incident in the ice cave sequence. Michael York and Jenny Agutter, after almost being drowned in their escape from the city, find themselves in an immense cavern of ice. They discover a pile of furs and decide to strip off their clothing before it freezes on their bodies. Jenny Agutter strips completely naked, allowing the camera to get an excellent shot of her breasts. Michael York, however, removes only his shirt (his pants stay on) before huddling in the furs.

There are moments in *Logan's Run*, miscellaneous pieces of the future world, that show glimpses of what the movie could have been. In a world run by a soft-spoken female voiced computer, the escape route out of the city is controlled by

another mechanism, this one with a male voice. Why? Peter Ustinov mentions that he used to fish in the Potomac, but that all the fish have died. Again, why? These and numerous other odds and ends are never explained. Instead, we are shown a parade of marvels from the world of the future, bright and colorful on the outside, but really inflated with so much hot air.

Why does this happen? Alas, we get the same, sad answer as always. Even though the film was supposedly based on an sf novel (which I haven't read and so cannot comment on the adaptation), the film itself was made by people with no real concept of science fiction, or how to convey science fiction or speculative ideas successfully. And with producers, writers and directors with a real knowledge of the dramatic needs of the speculative film form few and very far between, we seem doomed to more of the same.

## II. "The Man Who Fell to 2001"

Most of the so-called science fiction films being produced by Hollywood today are thinly disguised escapist-adventure-suspense epics. Films like *Futureworld*, *Rollerball* and *Logan's Run* place their action in a future where Something Has Gone Wrong, a future far enough removed from the audience so that they can get involved without feeling personally threatened (thus using opposite means to achieve the same

goals as gothic horror thrillers, such as Hammer Films' "Dracula" series, set in the past). One recent film, however, attempts to rise above the crowd and say Something Serious: Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

The film begins with a shot of blue sky. Something is falling in the distance. We see smoke and flame (perhaps a burst of retrorockets?). Suddenly, our point of view changes. We are inside the falling object, traveling above the earth's surface with tremendous speed.

This second shot, of land and ocean passing beneath so rapidly as to be barely recognizable, is rapidly becoming the cliché of recent sf films. Offhand, I can think of three other instances where similar shots were used: *Planet of the Apes*, *Silent Running*, and that great pillar of science fiction cinema, the last film that really attempted to say Something Serious, *2001*.

However, *2001*, and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* have more in common than fast-motion aerial photography. In fact, *Man Who Fell* seems to exist as a direct descendant of, as well as a comment upon, the earlier film.

Roeg is considered an eclectic director, someone who makes bizarrely personal films that sometimes seem beyond the understanding of anyone but Roeg himself. Yet, either through conscious design or accident, Roeg has structured *Man Who Fell*, both thematically and technically, so that it takes elements of *2001* and attempts to lead them to

the opposite extremes of those conclusions made by the earlier film.

Roeg really breaks no new ground in *Man Who Fell*, choosing rather to follow somewhat slavishly in *2001*'s footsteps. Both use magnificent photography, have a tendency to be obscure, and are ultimately distancing. One of the most easily isolated similarities between the two films is their distinctive, ironic use of music. We all remember *2001*'s spacecrafts sailing between planets to waltz accompaniment. In one sequence of *Man Who Fell*, Roeg shows us a striking picture of the alien's family, a group of pale, silver-suited humanoids, wandering across an arid expanse to the accompaniment of the Kingston Trio singing "Try to Remember the Kind of September."

For a key to the thematic relationship between films, let us return to the famous aerial tracking shot mentioned earlier in this discourse, and its relative placement in each movie. We have already mentioned that good old aerial is the second shot in *Man*. In *2001*, on the other hand, it comes at the very end of the film, as Keir Dullea begins the "trip" that will lead him to his rebirth.

Another example of the two films' thematic polarity can be seen in the use of sensory stimulation on the primary characters in each. In *2001*, mankind's encounters with the monoliths bring them closer and closer to the Truth, from primitive man and his discovery of the weapon to Keir Dullea and the previously mentioned trip, each encounter further heightening man-

kind's sense, leading him closer and closer towards his goal. In *Man*, on the other hand, the primary character turns to the outside stimulation of television, watching dozens of screens at the same time, hoping to forget, through tv's inanities, about his life before he fell to Earth, depressing his senses, getting farther and farther from his goal (which may or may not — the film isn't too clear on this point — be to bring water to his desert homeworld).

This opposition, in the first case of placement, in the second, of motivation, sums up the difference between the two films. In *2001*, man leaves the commonplace (Earth) to travel into and eventually be changed by the unknown. In *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, the "man"

comes from the unknown, only to travel into and be destroyed by the commonplace. *2001* is the optimist, *Man* the pessimist, yet in their oddly opposite way, they are saying the same thing.

*The Man Who Fell to Earth* has many strong points. The photography, as I said before, is superb. Roeg started his career as a cameraman, and it shows in the magnificent composition of every shot. The actors, particularly Rip Torn and Candy Clark, give good performances, and David Bowie, as the visitor from outer space, exudes a proper mixture of charisma and strangeness. Overall, an interesting film, worth seeing, whatever its relationship to earlier monuments of science fiction cinema.

## ILLUSTRATORS

Greg Harper

Steve Gilder

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*Was one day of freedom too much to ask?*

# Skate Boat

*by Danny Williams*

(Piano)

SKATE BOAT SKATE BOAT  
Tap Tap Tap Taaaappp---Tap!  
SKATE BOAT Tap Tap Tap  
SKATE BOAT Tap Tap. Tap!  
SKATE BOAT SKATE BOAT.  
TAP A TAP A TAP A TAP.

Watching it, I am awed by just how spectacular the whole scene is. Forty Skate Boats streaming through the ocean, slicing through the water without making a wave or a ripple.

The sun hits the prisms on the bow of each Skate Boat and suddenly the women who are tap dancing on each boat are bathed in showers of colored lights.

Close-up to a beautiful blonde on the front boat. She breaks into a slow jazzy tap dance (yes, mama) as a trombone replaces the honky-tonk piano.

Have I seen this before on home holo? I check my program.

SKATE BOAT (2031). One of the best of the early musical holos of the thirties. Clint Render and Nonie Bowers star in this delightful tale of

"boatin' 'n' lovin'." Clint plays Carl Tempest, a gutsy brawling Quaalude smuggler from Miami who teams up with Toni Lester, a tough little chick who split the massage farms of New Jersey so she could start living the Skate Boating Life.

Songs include "Dropping Acid (On a Skate Boat With You)," "Moaning Mona," and the hit title song (recently revived by June Morrow). One hour, forty-five minutes.

"No more telling lies to strange moneyed men.

I'll never get paid to give head again.

SKATE BOAT SKATE BOAT.  
TAP A TAP A TAP A TAP."

I lean back to savor the beauty of the holographic dancers who are floating up to the ceiling of the theater. Nonie Bowers is leading the way. As I focus on her, my heart begins to beat faster. I breathe more heavily, and I twist in my seat.

For a brief second I lose control.

Everything in my mind goes black and I feel it clawing to get out, finally escaping. The air rushes through

my mind: images of women dancing water shooting people watching all the many things I've never seen *It's out* must stop — control, *control*, CONTROL.

My vision returns and I look up, knowing what I will see. The hundred or so people who have been watching the holo with me lie crumpled on the floor. No injuries, no signs of violence, no apparent cause. Just dead.

TAP A TAP A TAP A TAP.  
SKATE BOAT.

When I was younger and all of this was still pretty new to me, I would've run screaming out of the theater. Now, it's just another hundred souls I can chalk up to my "friend" (Demon? Lover?). I stay to watch the rest of the song. What a great production number.

*Just another hundred.*

I am being callous, but dammit! Haven't I earned the right to be? Can I torture myself for every incident, every death?

The years I've spent holding it down seem like a blur to me. It's always been there, prodding, fighting, stroking, never giving me peace except when I sleep. Then it rests until I wake up again.

When I was seven — curious about It, childishly ignoring It's dangers — I could cause nosebleeds if I let It go. Later the injuries grew more serious until, as I reached puberty, I could kill.

The first time deaths occurred, I was lying on my bed masturbating. I began to pump slowly, and then really got into the rhythm — the

constant beat which seemed to be caused by an arm other than mine.

The air rushed: screaming screaming pulling out into the void oh let it go man let it go *my God no* the room shaking what have I done It's out of control *control* CONTROL.

When I was capable of moving again, I staggered through the rooms of the house. My parents and my little sister were dead. The autopsy report: no known cause.

Years later, It still grows stronger. Now It threatens my Control even when I'm careful. Even when I avoid, as I have been so careful all these years to avoid, sex and anything else that might give It the opportunity to escape.

TAP A TAP A TAP A TAP.

I leave the theater and head down toward the wharf. I decide it would be fun to pilot a Skate Boat for a while.

People are sluicing and shooting through the streets high on drugs or sex or themselves or all three. Two body boys flex their muscles in my face, enticing me to come to their sweathouse. "Come on Stud, how about a little workout, huh? You look like you could use a run in the showers. How 'bout it?"

As if in a dream, I accept their proposition. We crawl into the shower, the water so hot my skin seems to peel off as the steam swirls around my face. They massage and pull at my arms and legs, slicking me down.

"You think we're worth more than fifty bucks, Stud?"

"Yeah, man, you gonna give us a

tip?"

"Don't worry about it. You might be dead in a minute anyway."

They look at me and then at each other and then they laugh. Their bodies drop to the floor just as they get me off. My reward for their services.

I run out of the showers, throwing on my clothes, and convince myself it was all just a fantasy.

As I get nearer the ocean, I hear drug barkers shouting the joys of their wares from seedy storefronts.

"This is the legendary 'Killer-Shit'. One puff and your brain will be so...."

"Shoot this stuff and you'll never have to worry about getting it up with your old...."

Drugs make me lose Control, so I don't get wasted every night like most people. Meditation is no good, either. I tried it once. My teacher was gone within a minute.

"C'mon bud. Buy some Tardian Drops. Makes any dream wish hope come true for you. Just a cool twenty for a night to remember."

I buy, and take, five drops. Why am I doing all this? I know what it will lead to and yet I don't seem to care. I want to hype myself up on everything everyone else uses. I want to do it all in one night. I want to live just a couple of hour beyond the

control of that one word: Consequences.

When I reach the water I can find only one broken-down Skate Boat concession. That's the way fads are. One day people are climbing all over each other to get a ride and the next they're saying, "Remember Skate Boats?"

I pay the greasy dude behind the counter his fifty bucks and climb into the Skate Boat. It takes me three tries to get it started but once I do, everything falls into place. As I come on to the Tardian Drops I skim the water, shooting across the ocean at a hundred twenty per.

The fog of the dope fills my head and for the first time I feel it leave me in a pleasant way. No wrenching screaming mindstorms — It just slides out.

I look at the bow of my boat and see Nonie Bowers, as Toni Lester, dancing in the colors and singing at the top of her lungs:

"SKATE BOAT SKATE BOAT  
SKATE BOAT  
TAP A TAP A TAP A TAP."

I know It has left me for good, and I know what It is doing to the world, but for just a moment I am Carl Tempest. The day is all light and pretty and I have it easy.

Before I go back to face the death, I'll live the Skate Boating Life.

To our readers: We hope you will fill out and return the following survey. It is printed on a removable piece of the magazine, so it is easily removable, and will not disturb any story or pictures. Please be sure to include a subscription order form on the back page of the survey. (Hint, hint.)

# Reader Survey



Once a year, we will ask you to fill out a questionnaire designed to help us better know our readers. In return for helping us in this way, you may take a 25-cent discount on the price of an UNEARTH T-shirt, or on a subscription. (If you take advantage of this offer, please include your completed survey form with your order.)

Our thanks to LOCUS and ALGOL, to whose own surveys this one is entirely indebted.

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Profession \_\_\_\_\_

If student, year in school \_\_\_\_\_

Annual Income \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you been reading SF regularly? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of new books bought per year (do not include book club editions)

Hardcover \_\_\_\_\_

Paperback \_\_\_\_\_

Number of used books bought per year \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever taken a course in SF? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever taught a course in SF? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

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AMAZING \_\_\_\_\_

FANTASIC \_\_\_\_\_

ANALOG \_\_\_\_\_

GALAXY \_\_\_\_\_

F & SF \_\_\_\_\_

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Subscription \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

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Convention \_\_\_\_\_

Which feature(s) in this issue did you like most? (Check all that apply.)

Fiction \_\_\_\_\_ Writing column \_\_\_\_\_

Science column \_\_\_\_\_ Film reviews \_\_\_\_\_

Book reviews \_\_\_\_\_

What feature(s) did you like least?

Fiction \_\_\_\_\_ Writing column \_\_\_\_\_

Science column \_\_\_\_\_ Film reviews \_\_\_\_\_

Book reviews \_\_\_\_\_

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

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# Science

## Hal Clement



### Science for Fiction #1

#### *Using the Code*

There are lots of reasons why a science fiction magazine should publish science articles. Back in the 30's, the articles were often a better excuse for buying the mag than the stories were. This is, one can hope, no longer the case; but with science fiction being what it is, at least the article can be expected to provide ideas for the next generation of stories.

I realize that some people consider science to be superfluous to modern science fiction. I admit that some very good and entertaining and even thought-provoking stories have been written and called science fiction (in spite of my opinion) while managing to keep the physical, biological, and even the social sciences very far in the background. I have to admit that it is possible to write a science fiction story of sorts without knowing much about science, just as it is possible to eat a dish of ice cream with the bare hands. The fact that I would regard both jobs as pretty sloppy doesn't mean that everyone else has to. However, in this column I propose

to supply spoons for would-be science-fiction writers.

One field which has shown enormous advance in the last couple of decades, and hence provides broad fields for science fiction, is the branch of biochemistry dealing with the genetic code. I am not going to tell you all about DNA and RNA — if that stuff isn't in your local library, complain — but I am going to do a little predicting about their uses in my scientifically conservative fashion. If you think any of it is too cautious, ignore it and cut loose — it will be your pen name, not mine, on the story.

Remember, we have not yet seen a DNA molecule in detail; the best electron microphotos show them as barely visible threads. The X-ray diffraction techniques used by Watson and Crick gave the endlessly repeated "unit cell" structure of crystallized DNA; it did not and, as far as we can see at the moment, cannot let us go along the thread monomer by monomer and tell which base follows which. What we know about the base order has been learned by slow, laborious, indirect methods.

This means that we are some little distance from designing, on the molecular scale, a cell which can develop into a human being or even a typhoid germ. We are at about the point now, as I interpret the published literature, where we can sneak a substitute base into the DNA chain of a virus and see what difference it makes to the critter's ability to reproduce its proper body structure. Even the sneaking in is a hit-or-

miss job; after trying it, we have to wait until the creature produces a few million descendants — if it can still reproduce — so we can get enough material for the lengthy and complex analysis job needed to prove where our disturbing factor actually hit.

Nevertheless, I am optimistic enough to believe, we will eventually reduce the business to regular engineering procedure. We will be able to construct a complete cell blueprint on a long-chain molecule, and grow such things as plants which produce steaks and pork chops without having to be eaten and reconstructed by cows or pigs; plants which can concentrate and excrete in pure, usable form copper and other useful substances from their ultimate dilution in sea water; and, of course, nasty disease bugs, things which produce carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide gases (I don't mean just another brand of cigarette) and the old standby of the mad-scientist yarn, the organism which oxidizes the chloride ions in the ocean to the chlorine. No one has ever yet invented anything which couldn't be misused socially (including motherhood), and I don't foresee anyone's doing so in the future.

In spite of this, parenthetically, I strongly disapprove of the philosophy which would block scientific research because of the bad things it might turn up. The box score so far, in spite of wars and automobiles, has been to save more lives than it has cost — or are you one of those people who think the population

explosion is a political propaganda phrase?

To return to the biochemistry, there are possibilities for useful results, and good stories, long before we get to the point where we can grow cells from scratch. Even starting with already living cells, we should be able to use the generally accepted fact that each cell of an organism contains the DNA plans for the entire creature (this may not be true of non-nucleated cells like the red blood *erythrocytes*). Some clues have already been found to the processes which cause one particular bit of protoplasm to use only the muscle-cell part of the plans while another becomes part of a nerve or a bit of kidney tissue. The research, naturally, has been largely done by the cancer people, whose focus of interest is probably caused by a failure of just these processes.

If we do solve this apparently rather restricted problem, it should be possible to take a tissue specimen from an ill or damaged person and grow him a new heart or kidney or leg or whatever he needs from his own cells. This should avoid the rejection problem which has been the headache of the organ transplanters so far, as well as forestall the social situation in the Larry Niven novels where the organleggers would get you if you didn't watch out. It would, I suppose, also raise the possibility of a carefully conditioned clone's taking your place in the office after you have been secretly neutralized, and diverting your assets to some unscrupulous Big

Business or leftwingers or whatever you happen to disapprove of. You're writing the story — take the good or bad side as your taste may dictate. Personally, I still think it's possible to write a fairly realistic story with the good guys winning.

In the interests of realism — I am turned off by science fiction or any other kind of stories in which a crescent moon rises in the east at sunset, or George Washington fixes a flat — please remember that biological engineering of the sort I have been suggesting demands a very technological background. Growing new life cells to design, or even building a heart from a drop of the patient's blood, will not be a matter of boiling up to a witches brew of tongue of dog and eye of newt, even if those articles do contain all the necessary ingredients, as they probably do. Practicing this sort of engineering without a complex backup technology would be less believable than having a Cro-Magnon flint-chipper build a modern pocket computer. Living cells are far more complex and better miniaturized than our present integrated circuit chips — and the latter have to be made from material purified to better than one part per billion.

No thousand-word article could supply all the information needed for a realistic story; it can only suggest ideas. Even this can be done better at book length; if you are inclined to pursue the biological-physiological track, I recommend Ronald Glasser's *The Body is the*

*Hero* (Random House, 1976, \$8.95)

I'd like to pursue this line a little farther next time, in a specific direction: granted we master the technology, what would we have to be

careful about, physically and socially, in designing a man able to breathe underwater? (See Norman L. Knight's *Crisis in Utopia*, if you can get hold of the July and August, 1940, issues of *Astounding Stories*).

*(Ed. Note to outraged Clement fans: Do not send us venomous letters, demanding to know why we limited Hal to a mere thousand words. We had intended to run a much longer piece, but there was a mixup in assignments from different magazines, and the result was a column considerably shorter than we had commissioned.*

*We'll make it up to you in our next issue, though, with a triple helping of Clement. In addition to a lengthier "Science for Fiction" article, we'll be featuring Hal's "Proof" as our First Sale. The latter will be accompanied, of course, by an introduction written especially for UNEARTH by Hal.*

—J O-L)



# Writing

John M. Landsberg

**"AND SO, TENTATIVELY, BUT WITH AN INNER CONFIDENCE BORN OF THEIR NEWLY ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE OF THE SECRETS OF GOOD WRITING, THEY TOOK THEIR PENS IN HAND..."**

I'm sitting on a bus, and the guy next to me starts talking. The preliminaries are over quickly: the weather is ho-hum, and he's not really interested in the proliferation of McDonald's burger mills all along the route (a subject near and dear to my loathing). But then — his eyes begin to flash and his breath comes in quick wheezing gasps. I recognize the signs of approaching revelation. It's... it's... SF! Ah, an SF fan. Yes, indeed, say I during one of his occasional pauses for breath, I too am a fan.

"No kidding!" he says with glee. "Well, let me tell you about this great idea I have for this terrific story. It's about this guy, see, and he goes off on an expedition to other planets, you know. And, anyway, he's a religious kinda guy, but he's also kinda doubtful, and they get to this planet that's been burned out by an exploding star, and whaddaya think they figure out that star was?"

"The Star of Bethlehem?" I yawn, beginning to squirm in my seat.

"Yorp, gug, yock," he says, losing not a shred of composure.

Let me know when you've read "The Star," by Arthur C. Clarke." I reply.

So, all right, it never happened. But it does illustrate one of the first rules that must be followed by any writer, namely: *READ*. Read voraciously and insatiably. Read everything you can get your hands on. Why? One reason is stated above — so that you'll know what's been done before. But, more importantly, read to learn how to write. Hemingway will teach you brevity and conciseness. Sartre will show you how to express philosophy in your writing. Read Swift to learn how to sharpen the cutting edge of satire. Read Balzac to see how a master portrays the full range of human emotions and experience. Read Harold Robbins to learn how to be downright stinking awful, so that you can avoid it.

As a beginning writer, your work is bound to reflect what you've read, both in style and theme. It's only after you've been writing for a while that you'll find your own voice. Since your reading is going to influ-



ence your writing so strongly, try to keep it on an elevated level. Do not, for example, put *The Love Machine* on your reading list.

You may have noticed that I haven't mentioned any science fiction writers yet. Obviously, to write in a genre, you've got to know it thoroughly. It's worth knowing this particular genre because some of the best writers currently working are tilling its fields today. Yet I made it a point to cite non-SF writers first because too many SF fans, myself included, get themselves locked into reading nothing but SF, which is just plain wrong-headed. A good SF writer has to be a good *writer*, and you can't be that unless you've read a lot of everything, not just SF. Of course, you can write SF even if you read nothing outside the field, but what you write is never going to be much better than strictly formula.

So read, and pay attention to what you read. That may sound silly, but an example will serve to show that it is not. A certain person of my acquaintance seems to have read every SF book ever published, but when I try to discuss any of them with him, his response is invariably, "huh?" He is not in any way stupid; he just doesn't pay any attention to what he reads. Needless to say, his writing is enough to make a grown editor cry. It's the sort of prose that suffers in comparison with the *Boy Scout Handbook*.

Now that you're paying attention to what you read, what should you be reading? The number of good science fiction writers is too great to allow me to list them all here.

Anyway, since I can't list all the good SF writers, let me just mention a couple whose work, in addition to being excellent and marvelously entertaining, is of particular educational value to anyone who wants to learn to write well. Please keep in mind, as I name these writers, that it pains me to have to leave so many names off the list, and I hope no one feels slighted.

For strength, skill, and dexterity in plotting, few writers can match Jack Williamson. (I might also mention Robert Heinlein, Clifford Simak, Alfred Bester, etc., etc., but I don't have room.) For poetic, evocative language, read Bradbury. For warmth, sensitivity, and general all-around magnificent writing, read Sturgeon. For style, read Knight, Delany, Spinrad, Zelazny, Disch, Tiptree, Le Guin, and Wilhelm. For characterization, read Budrys, Bester, Silverberg, and Wilhelm. For intensity, power, and emotion, read Ellison.

And then there is a writer who is familiar enough to fans, but who seems to be much overlooked and underpurchased in the bookstores — Philip K. Dick. It has recently become a crusade of mine that Dick has never achieved the recognition he deserves. His writing is dynamic and original, his characterizations are brilliantly realized, his ideas are fresh and exciting, his perception of reality is mind-opening, his pace and plotting sweep the reader along like a tidal wave.

From any of the authors I've named, a new writer (in fact, *any* writer) can learn worlds about any

of the above-mentioned aspects of the craft, and more. So, for the sake of convenience to a writer who doesn't want to go out and read about five hundred books before he or she writes another word, let me narrow it down: read Robert Silverberg (his post-1966 writing), Harlan Ellison, Philip K. Dick, Kate Wilhelm, Theodore Sturgeon, and James Tiptree, Jr. (I won't recommend specific titles, because it's best to read as much as you can, and you may love one book and loathe another by the same author.)

What about books about writing? There are many good ones, but I imagine that few of you are interested in reading endless essays on James Joyce's preferred method for crossing his t's. Fortunately, science fiction writers are a resourceful lot, and have produced a number of collections that offer tasty fiction-and-commentary sandwiches. If you can get hold of the following, do. The ones I know well enough to recommend are: *People Machines*, a collection of Jack Williamson's stories, with essays by the author. *Clarion I, II, and III*, and *Those Who Can*, all edited by Robin Scott Wilson. *The Mirror of Infinity*, edited by Robert Silverberg. *Modern Science Fiction*, edited by Norman Spinrad.

And for the love of God, Montresor, don't read just prose fiction, either! Of course, you just might want to limit yourself to the mental breadth and well-roundedness of a lobster, but I can't believe that's true of anyone who likes SF. Therefore, I reiterate: open up that gray glop

inside your skull, and let it soak up the universe. In terms of written material, that means drama, poetry, philosophy, natural sciences, personal memoirs, daily papers, declarations of international brotherhood, and, yes, even *The Love Machine*, if it strikes your fancy. This is especially important for someone who wants to write SF — since SF is constantly exploring the nature of the human experience, you want to get as much of that under your belt as possible. To that end, don't spend all your time inside a book. Get out and live a little.

And now let us all sing in unison the next rule for a beginning writer. I'm sure you'll recognize this old refrain... If you want to learn to write, *write!* Well, by God, or by whatever you hold supreme, it's true. You must practice, practice, and practice some more. Count the day wasted that you don't wear out at least one typewriter.

One of the terrors that holds some writers back is the fear that not everything they write is going to be good. Ho! I say, and Ha! Do you think that everything Theodore Sturgeon (for instance) writes is good? Now, now... I don't mean everything published. I mean everything *written*. I could bet my red flannel underwear, with little fear of going cold this New England winter, that even so accomplished and brilliant a writer as Sturgeon still fills his wastebasket every time he sits down to write. Perhaps he fills it a little (okay, a lot) less quickly than I do, but he still fills it.

*Ergo*, beginning writer, be prepared to write garbage, mountain upon mountain of it. *You can't produce a masterpiece every time.* Don't even try. You've got to get practice in basic story mechanics, no matter if the story as a whole is a dog. You've also got to exorcise all the clichés and maudlin slop and pap and other nasties from your system. Then you can get down to the real stuff, the stuff you feel, care about and know in your heart. To write well, you've got to write yourself onto the paper. You've got to give; you've got to let all your personal demons run screaming onto the page. I'm talking about sincerity, the kind of sincerity that you don't have to think about, the kind that just *is*. This is what makes a good writer.

Now, back off for a second. I don't mean you should write only autobiography, or make all your characters shadows of people you know. I mean you should write out of a desire, or a need, to tell a story. It may be one you adore, or one you detest, but it must be a story that comes from your belief that you have something to share. There is no way to put this simply. If you don't see what I mean, go out and read any of Sturgeon or Le Guin's stories or novels, and look for the love and depth of feeling that comes straight from their souls. See if you can't see the unforced sincerity there.

And if you don't believe that you can achieve that sort of quality by working out all the garbage, then take a look at this. Not only can you

do that, but you might even be able to sell stories while you're doing it. For many years, Silverberg cranked out hundreds of stories with little concern for quality. He was a hack. But he sure as hell got loads of writing experience, and not only that, he sold what he wrote. Then, in the mid-'60's, he matured into one of the finest writers you will ever read (and read him you should). Even his early work is instructive because, in spite of its hackish nature, it is competent, and it shows a writer learning his craft. In addition, it provides a contrast with his later work. (See the April, 1974 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, the special Silverberg issue, for more discussion.) The development of Robert Silverberg should give heart to any beginning writer. You *can* start bad and then become good. So if you want to be a writer, get going, and don't be afraid to write trash — you can learn a lot from it, and you can always throw it away before anyone sees it.

There's an awful lot more advice that one could give a beginning writer, but I'm going to defer to someone much better qualified than I. From now on, each issue of UNEARTH will feature an article about writing (and whatever else strikes his mercurial fancy) by the man who may be the most exciting writer in the field today — Harlan Ellison, now a contributing editor of this magazine. Watch for it, and tell all your friends — Ellison is on the loose in UNEARTH.

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## Harlan Ellison

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*Here is where it all started — "Glowworm," the first story sold by Harlan Ellison.*

## INTRODUCTION

I wrote it on a kitchen table in Lester and Evelyn del Rey's dining room in Red Bank, New Jersey, in April of 1955. It was the first story of the many I'd written since I was ten years old that actually sold. I received something slightly less than a penny-and-a-half per word for its 3000 word length: forty dollars. It was my first professional sale and I was twenty-one years old.

There was an English professor named Shedd at Ohio State University in 1954. He told me I had no talent, could not write, ought to forget ever trying to make a living from the craft of writing, and that even if I did manage to eke out some sort of low-level existence from dogged persistence at it, I would never write anything of consequence, would never make a name for myself, and would sink into the dust of oblivion justifiably forgotten by lovers of properly-constructed literature.

I told him to go fuck himself.

I was thrown out of Ohio State University in January of 1955, went home to Cleveland to marshal my thoughts and consider my options. I spent three months publishing what turned out to be the final issue of my science fiction fanzine, *Dimensions*, and then packed what little I could carry and sprinted for New York.

In the Fifties, New York was mecca for writers. There was a vitality, a gauche wildness about New York City that called all tyro writers. James Thurber had come out of Ohio, as had Ruth McKenney and Milton Caniff and Earl Wilson and Herbert Gold. It was a terrific place to come from: the very apotheosis of America, the mythic boondock from which the pepsinogen Ellison would emerge, surfeited with talent, festooned with all the proper mid-American credentials, shuckin' and jivin', ready to sweep the fallen banner of contemporary epopee from the dust where Faulkner and Steinbeck and Nathanael West and Ford Madox Ford had dropped it in their rush toward posterity and the grave.

I arrived in New York and had nowhere to live.

Lester and Evelyn took me in for a while. And in their dining room I wrote "Glowworm." I needed a scientific rationale for an impossible plot-line. Lester suggested anaerobic bacteria, a microorganism able to live without the presence of free oxygen. It was one of the few times I was ever anything even remotely resembling a "science fiction" writer. I was a fantasist and didn't know it.

It took me two days to write the story. I went into the city and tried to sell it. John Campbell at *As-tounding* (now *Analog*) rejected it. Horace Gold at *Galaxy* rejected it. James Quinn at *If* rejected it. Anthony Boucher at *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* rejected it. Half a dozen other editors at the

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lesser sf magazines flourishing during that period rejected it. I put the story aside.

I went to stay with Algis Budrys, a successful sf writer, on West 23rd Street. He had recently married and I was a clot in his marital bloodstream. I went uptown and took a \$10 a week room at 611 West 114th Street, across Broadway from Columbia University, in the same old building where Robert Silverberg was living. He was selling regularly, and I envied him more than I can say.

I went down to Brooklyn and joined a kid gang. I commuted back and forth between the identity of Phil "Cheech" Beldone and Harlan Ellison. Ten weeks later someone mentioned that one of the *Confidential*-type magazines, *Lowdown*, might want to publish an account of my time in the Red Hook gang. I went to see the editor of *Lowdown*. He said write it up. I wrote "I Ran with a Kid Gang!" and they bought it. Twenty-five bucks. They took my picture to accompany the article. I thought it was my first professional sale. I was wrong.

The magazine was published in August of 1955 with the headline TODAY, YOUNG HOODS! TOMORROW — WHAT? Not one word of what I had written was in the piece. They ran my picture, and the art director had airbrushed a scar on my left cheek. I was still an unpublished writer.

Larry Shaw was, at that time, editing a new magazine for Royal Publications called *Infinity*. It was a

science fiction magazine that featured a department called "Fanfare." Reprints of fanzine articles. He wanted to use a piece by Dean Grennell I had published in *Dimensions*. He asked me if I cared to submit a story. I pulled out "Glowworm" and sent it to him.

About two weeks later he called (there was a pay phone on the wall outside my room at 611 West 114th) and said, "How would you like some dinner?"

I was awfully hungry.

Larry took me to a Chinese restaurant, and over egg foo yung he told me he was buying "Glowworm." Forty dollars. He handed me a check. I damned near fainted.

It was published in the February 1956 issue of *Infinity*, which hit the newsstands on December 27th, 1955 — but by that time I'd had two or three stories already appear in sf or detective magazines. But it was my first real sale. That first year, 1955, the first year of writing as a full-time professional, pursuing a craft Dr. Shedd had said I was not cut out for, I sold four stories. The next year, 1956, I sold 100 stories. I have not worked at any other profession since that time.

It has been twenty-one years, and I've written thirty-one books, almost nine hundred magazine stories, columns and articles, and I'm listed in *Who's Who in America*.

I like to think I've come a distance from "Glowworm," which the late and very wonderful critic James Blish once called "the single worst

story ever published in the field of science fiction." I'm not ashamed of "Glowworm," for all its dreadful syntax and sophomoric style. How can one be ashamed of the first-born?

And though he's never responded, until a year or so ago I sent every single published story to Dr. Shedd at Ohio State. One should never say fuck you unless one is prepared to back it up.

Now, twenty years after its first

appearance, "Glowworm" is back in print again. This is only the second time it has been published, but seeing it set in type again brings back that night in December of 1955...the warm smells of the Chinese restaurant...the impish grin of dear Larry Shaw...his bulldog pipe clenched in his teeth...as he handed me a forty dollar check that was to change my life from that day to this. There is a God. For each of us. Mine was named Larry.

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# GLOWWORM

When the sun sank behind the blasted horizon, its glare blotted out by the twisted wreckage rising obscenely against the hills, Seligman continued to glow.

He shone with a steady off-green aura that surrounded his body, radiated from the tips of his hair, crawled from his skin, and lit his unwavering way in the darkest of nights.

Though Seligman had never been a melodramatic man, he had more than once rolled the phrase through his mind, letting it fall from his lips: "I'm a freak."

The green glow had been with him

for two years, and he was at least accustomed to it. It was useful in many ways. Scavenging food without the help of a flashlight could be arduous. Seligman never had that trouble.

Bombed-out groceries and shattered store windows revealed their contents eagerly to his luminous searching.

It had even helped him find the ship.

After his cross-continent search for anyone else left alive, and his return in failure, he had been passing through the outskirts of Newark. Night had seemed to come even

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"Glowworm" by Harlan Ellison.  
Appeared originally in *Infinity*  
magazine for February 1956; copy-

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sooner on the days following the final bombs. It was as though some god despaired of the sight the Earth presented and shrouded it from sight.

The rubble of Newark was cast low across the land, and the crumble-towered heap that was New York still rose on the horizon.

His glow slid out from him and across the checkered blacktop that had been a spaceport. He had taken this route in hopes there might be a port copter or gas-buggy left unhurt, with fuel somehow intact. No such miracle had occurred, however, and he was turning to find the highway into New York when his glow reflected back from something a distance away. It was a momentary gleam but it caught his eye. Then he saw the tapered hull of it rising dark against the darker black of the night. It was a spaceship, of course.

Curiosity had sent Seligman hurrying toward it. How had one ship escaped the debacle? Was there a possibility he could liberate parts from it to make a copter or landcar function?

Even the pocked and cratered surface of the blast area could not dim his enthusiasm. His eyes fastened on the ship as unconsciously thoughts even he would have marveled at rose in his mind.

It was one of the latest model ships; a *Smith* class cruiser with conning bubble set far back on the tapered nose, and the small, ugly depressions behind which the Bergsil cannons rested on movable tracks.

There were a number of places on the hull where repairs had obviously

been in progress when the attack came, for yawning rectangles revealing naked girdering could be seen. But miraculously, the ship was intact. The drive chambers had not been split, so the tanks of reactor fuel had not exploded. The hull still shone tin-foil bright, so the flight deck had not shorted out and caught fire. It appeared, from outside, to be in perfect shape. A windfall of rare caliber.

He circled it several times, in something close to awe. Awe at the strength of this piece of machinery to have withstood everything two frenzied nations at war might throw at it, and still point proudly at the stars for which it was built to conquer.

Two years had not dimmed in the slightest his recollection of that first glimpse of the ship. As he threaded carelessly through the debris he remembered his reflection shining back at him from the beryllium skin of the cruiser.

He looked out across the deserted remains that had once been the outskirts of Newark, and in the distance, by the light of a gun-metalled moon, he saw that same ship. The two years of intensive reading and pattering with the few remaining scraps that had been spaceships caught on the ground had shown him the fantastic improbability of it all. Every other ship was a total unsalvageable wreck. Parts of ships had been flung half a mile and driven through plastic walls. Only that one cruiser, lost in its height among the flattened remnants of its

kind.

It had been months after he had found the ship, he recalled, before the idea had come to him.

There was no real reason why it should not have occurred immediately, but it hadn't. It had come to him...

He paused in his moonlit hurrying and tried to bring the scene back into sharper focus. Yes, it had been when he had gone into the computer room of the ship. When he had first seen the ship, he had tried to liberate parts for use in a copter, but the parts were all heavy-poured-molded and none of them would have fit a small vehicle. So he had abandoned the ship. What good was it?

The weeks following, he remembered, had been singularly annoying. More than just the emptiness of sole ownership of a whole world, these weeks had disturbed him with a thought just beneath the level of recognition.

Then he had found himself drawn back inexplicably to the ship. He had climbed the makeshift ladder to the control deck and looked around again as he had weeks before. Nothing. It was still layered with dust, the huge rectangular viewport streaked by rain and dirt, a manual of some sort still turned over like a tiny tent on the arm of the pilot's couch.

Then he had noticed the door to the computer room. He had over-looked it the first time in his eagerness to get to the drive compartment belowdecks.

The door had been ajar, and he had kicked at it, sending it open,

noiselessly.

The man was slumped over the puncher, a decaying finger still tip-flattened against a tabular button. How he had died. Seligman had had no idea. Shock? Asphyxiation? No, it couldn't have been that, he looked perfectly normal, no blueness or contortion of the face.

Seligman had leaned over, cautiously, to see what he had been coding out. It was a destination verification:

USSS 7725, ETD 0500 7-22  
EARTHPORT ETA 0930 11-5  
PROXIMA II. Unfortunately, for the computerman, his time of departure had been unavoidably cancelled.

Seligman had caught just a glimpse of the dead man's face before he had left the room. It had seemed totally unconcerned. Somehow that bothered him. Why wasn't he worried? Why didn't he care if the ship got to Proxima II? It had been the most wonderful achievement of his race when the first ship had made it. Were they so bored, then, that such a thing was commonplace?

Then he would have to remind them that it was still a remarkable thing.

He had left the ship then, but he was to return many times. Just as tonight he stalked glowing under the moon, across the dead land, toward the rocket field where the ship waited. Now he knew why he had gone back that night two years before. It was clear and in a way, inescapable.

If only he were not so — so...

His mind faltered at describing

himself. If only he had not been *changed* this way.

Which was not entirely true. There was no longer anyone he might have termed "normal" for his comparison. Not only were there no more men, there was no more life of any kind. The silence was broken only by the searching wind, picking its way cautiously between the slow-rusting girders of a dead past.

Even as he said, "Freak!" his mind washed the word with two waves, almost as one: vindictiveness and a resignation inextricably bound in self-pity, hopelessness and hatred.

"*They* were at fault!" he screamed at the tortured piles of masonry in his path.

Across the viewer of his mind, thoughts twisted nimbly, knowing the route, having traversed it often before.

Man had reached for the stars, finding them within his reach were he willing to give up his ancestral home.

Those who had wanted space more than one planet had gone, out past the Edge, into the wilderness of no return, it would take years to get There, and the Journey Back was an unthinkable one. Time had set its seal upon them: Go, if you must, but don't look behind you.

So they had gone, leaving Earth to the madmen. They had left the steam of Venus, the grit-wind of Mars, the ice of Pluto, the sun-bake of Mercury. There had been no Earthmen left in the system of Sol. Except, of course, on Earth.

And *they* had been too busy throwing things at each other to worry about the stars.

The men who knew no other answer stayed and fought. They were the ones who fathered the Atilas, the Genghis Khans, the Hitlers. They were the ones who pushed the buttons and launched the missiles that chased each other across the skies, fell like downed birds, exploded, blasted, cratered, chewed-out and carved-out the face of the planet. They were also the little men who had failed to resist, even as they had failed to look up at the night sky.

They were the ones who had destroyed the Earth.

Now no one was left. No man. Just Seligman. And he glowed.

"*They* were at fault!" he screamed again, the sound a lost thing in the night.

His mind carried him back through the years to the days near the end of what had to be the Last War, because there would be no one left to fight another. He was carried back again to the sterile white rooms where the searching instruments, the prying needles, the clucking scientists, all labored over him and his group.

They were to be a last-ditch throwaway. They were the indestructible men: a new breed of soldier, able to live through the searing heat of the bombs; to walk unaffected through the purgatory hail of radiation, to assault where ordinary men would have collapsed long before.

Seligman picked his way over the

rubble, his aura casting the faintest phosphorescence over the ruptured metal and plastic trailings. He paused momentarily, eyeing the blasted remnants of a fence, to which clung a sign, held to the twined metal by one rusting bolt:

**NEWARK SPACEPORT  
ENTRANCE BY  
AUTHORIZATION ONLY.**

Shards of metal scrap moved under his bare feet, their razored edges rasping against the flesh, yet causing no break in the skin. Another product of the sterile white rooms and the strangely-hued fluids injected into his body?

Twenty-three young men, routine volunteers, as fit as the era of war could produce, had been moved to the solitary block building in Salt Lake City. It was a cubed structure with no windows and only one door, guarded night and day. If nothing else, they had security. No one knew the intensive experimentation going on inside those steel-enforced concrete walls, even the men upon whose bodies the experiments were being performed.

It was because of those experiments performed on him that Seligman was here now, alone. Because of the myopic little men with their foreign accents and their clippings of skin from his buttocks and shoulders, the bacteriologists and the endocrine specialists, the epidermis men and the blood-stream inspectors — because of all of them — he was here now, when no one else had lived.

Seligman rubbed his forehead at

the base of the hairline. *Why* had he lived? Was it some strain of rare origin running through his body that had allowed him to stand the effects of the bombs? Was it a combination of the experiments performed on him — and only in a certain way on him, for none of the other twenty-two had lived — *and* the radiation? He gave up, for the millionth time. Had he been a student of the ills of man he might have ventured a guess, but it was too far afield for a common foot-soldier.

All that counted was that when he had awakened, pinned thighs, chest and arms under the masonry of a building in Salt Lake City, he was alive and could see. He could see, that is, till the tears clouded the vision of his own sick green glow.

It was life. But at times like this, with the flickering light of his passage marked on the ash-littered remains of his culture, he wondered if it was worth the agony.

He never really approached madness, for the shock of realizing he was totally and finally alone without a voice or a face or a touch in all the world, overrode the smaller shock of his transformation.

He lived, and to Seligman's blunt manner he was that fabled, joked-about Last Man On Earth. But it wasn't a joke now.

Nor had the months after the final dust of extinction settled across the planet been a joke. Those months had labored past as he searched the country, taking what little food was left, sealed from radiation — through why radiation should both-

er him he could not imagine; habit more than anything — and disease, racing from one end of the continent in search of but one other human to share his torment.

But of course there had been no one. He was cut off like a withered arm from the body that was his race.

Not only was he alone, and with the double terror of an aura that never dimmed, sending the word, "Freak!" pounding through his mind, but there were other changes, equally terrifying. It had been in Philadelphia, while grubbing inside a broken store window that he had discovered another symptom of his change.

The jagged glass pane had ripped the shirt through to his skin — but had not damaged him. The flesh showed white momentarily, and then even that faded. Seligman experimented cautiously, then recklessly, and found that the radiations, or his treatments, or both, and indeed changed him. He was completely impervious to harm of a minor sort: fire in small amounts did not bother him, sharp edges could no more rip his flesh than they could a piece of treated steel, work produced no callouses; he was, in a limited sense of the word, invulnerable.

The indestructible man had been created too late. Too late to bring satisfaction to the myopic butchers who had puttered unceasingly about his body. Perhaps had they managed to survive they might still not comprehend what had occurred. It was too much like the product of a wild coincidence.

But that had not lessened his agony. Loneliness can be a powerful thing, more consuming than hatred, more demanding than mother love, more driving than ambition. It could, in fact drive a man to the stars.

Perhaps it had been a communal yearning within his glowing breast; perhaps a sense of the dramatic or a last vestige of that unconscious debt all men owe to their kind; perhaps it was simply an urge to talk to someone. Seligman summed it up without soul-searching in the philosophy, "I can't be any worse off than I am now, so why not?"

It didn't matter really. Whatever the reason, he knew by the time his search was over that he must seek men out, wherever in the stars they might be, and tell them. He must be a messenger of death to his kin beyond the Earth. They would mourn little, he knew, but still he had to tell them.

He would have to go after them and say, "Your fathers are gone. Your home is no more. They played the last hand of that most dangerous of games, and lost. The Earth is dead."

He smiled a tight, grim smile as he thought. At least I won't have to carry a lantern to them; they'll see me coming by my own glow. Glow little glowworm, glimmer, glimmer...

Seligman threaded his way through the tortured wreckage and crumpled metalwork of what had been a towering structure of shining-planed

glass and steel and plastic. Even though he knew he was alone, Seligman turned and looked back over his shoulder, sensing he was being watched. He had had that feeling many times, and he knew it for what it was. It was Death, standing spraddle-legged over the face of the land, casting shadow and eternal silence upon it. The only light came from the lone man stalking toward the rocket standing sentry like a pillar of January ice in the center of the blast area.

His fingers twitched as he thought of the two years work that had gone into erecting that shaft of beryllium. Innumerable painstaking trips to and from the junk heaps of that field, pirating pieces from other ships, liberating cases of parts from bombed-out storage sheds, relentlessly forcing himself on, even when exhaustion cried its claim. Now the rocket was finished.

Seligman had not been a scientist or a mechanic. But determination, tests on rocket motors, and the miracle of an only partially-destroyed ship with its drive still intact had provided him with a means to leave this place of death.

He climbed the hull-ladder into the open inspection hatch, finding his way easily, even without a torch. His fingers began running over the complicated leads of the drive-components, checking and re-checking what he already knew was sound and foolproof — or as foolproof as an amateur could make them.

Now that it was ready, and all that remained were these routine

check-tests and loading the food for the journey, he found himself more terrified of leaving than of remaining alone till he died — and when that might be with his new stamina he had no idea.

How would they receive a man as transformed as he? Would they not instinctively fear, mistrust, despise him? Am I stalling? The question suddenly formed in his mind, causing his sure inspection to falter. Had he been purposely putting the take-off date further and further ahead? Using the checks and other tasks as further attempts to stall? His head began to ache with the turmoil of his thoughts.

Then he shook himself in disgust. The tests were necessary, covered in any one of the texts lying about the floor of the drive chamber.

His hands shook, but that same impetus which had carried him for two years forced him to complete the checkups. Just as dawn oozed up over the outline of the tatters that had been New York, he finished his work on the ship.

Without pause, sensing he must race, not with time, but with the doubts raging inside him, he climbed back down the ladder and began loading food boxes. They were stacked neatly to one side of a hand-powered lift he had restored. The hard rubber containers of concentrates and the bulbs of carefully-sought-out liquids made an imposing and somewhat perplexing sight.

Food is the main problem, he told himself. If I should get past a point of no return and find my food giving

out, my chances would be nil. I'll have to wait till I can find more stores of food. He estimated the time needed for the search and realized it might be months, perhaps even another year till he had accrued enough from the wasted stores within any conceivable distance.

In fact, finding a meal in the city, after he had carted box after box of edibles out to the rocket, had become an increasingly more difficult job. Further, he suddenly realized he had not eaten since the day before.

The day before?

He had been so engrossed in the final touches of the ship he had completely neglected to eat. Well, it had happened before, even before the blast. With an effort he began to grope back, trying to remember the last time he *had* eaten. Then it became quite clear to him. It leaped out and dissolved away all the delays he had been contriving. *He had not eaten in three weeks.*

Seligman had known it, of course. But it had been buried so deeply that he only half-feared it. He had tried to deny the truth, for when that last seemingly insurmountable problem was removed, there was nothing but his own inadequacies to prevent his leaving.

Now it came out, full-bloom. The treatments and radiation had done more than make him merely impervious to mild perils. He no longer needed to eat! He boggled at the concept for a moment, shaken by the realization that he had not rec-

ognized the fact before.

He had heard of anaerobic bacteria or yeasts that could derive their energy from other sources, without the normal oxidation of foods. Bringing the impossible to relatively homely terms made it easier for him to accept. Maybe it was even possible to absorb energy directly. At least he felt no slightest tinge of hunger, even after three weeks of back-breaking work without eating.

Probably he would have to take along a certain amount of proteins to replenish the body tissue he expended. But as for the bulky boxes of edibles dotting the space around the ship, most were no longer a necessity.

Now that he had faced up to the idea that he had been delaying through fear of the trip itself, and that there was nothing left to stop his leaving almost immediately, Seligman again found himself caught up in the old drive.

He was suddenly intent on getting the ship into the air and beyond.

Dusk mingled with the blotching of the sun before Seligman was ready. It had not been stalling this time, however. The sorting and packing of needed proteins took time. But now he was ready. There was nothing to keep him on Earth.

He took one last look around. It seemed the thing to do. Sentimentalism was not one of Seligman's more outstanding traits, but he did it in preparation for anyone who might ask him, "What did it look

like — at the end?" It was with a tinge of regret that he brought the fact to mind; he had never really *looked* at his sterile world in the two years he had been preparing to leave it. One became accustomed to living in a pile of rubble, and after a bit it no longer offered even the feel of an environment.

He climbed the ladder into the ship, carefully closing and dogging the port behind him. The chair was ready, webbing flattened back against the deep rubber pile of its seat and backrest. He slid into it and swung the control box down on its ball-swivel to a position before his face.

He drew the top webbing across himself and snapped its triple-lock clamps into place. Seligman sat in the ship he had not even bothered to name, fingers groping for the actuator button on the arm of the chair, glowing all the while, weirdly, in the half-light of the cabin.

So this was to be the last picture he might carry with him to the heavens: a bitter epitaph for a race mis-spent. No warning; it was too late for such puny action. All was dead and ghosted on the face of the Earth. No blade of grass dared rise; no small life murmured in its burrows and caves, in the oddly dusty skies, or for all he knew, to the very bottom of the Cayman Trench. There was only silence. The silence of a graveyard.

He pushed the button.

The ship began to rise, waveringly. There was a total lack of the grandeur he remembered when the

others had left. The ship sputtered and coughed brokenly as it climbed on its imperfect drive. Tremors shook the cabin and Seligman could feel something wrong, vibrating through the chair and floor into his body.

Its flames were not so bright or steady as those other take-offs, but it continued to rise and gather speed. The hull began to glow as the rocket lifted higher into the dust-filled sky.

Acceleration pressed down on Seligman, though not as much as he had expected. It was merely uncomfortable, not punishing. Then he remembered that he was not of the same make as those who had preceded him.

His ship continued to pull itself up out of the Earth's atmosphere. The hull orange'd, then turned cherry, then straw-yellow, as the coolers within its skin fought to counteract the blasting fury.

Again and again Seligman could feel the *wrongness* of the climb. Something was going to give!

As the bulkheads to his right began to strain and buckle, he knew what it was. The ship had not been built or re-welded by trained experts, working in teams with the latest equipment. He had been one lone determined man, with only book experience to back him. Now the errors he had unconsciously made were about to tell.

The ship passed beyond the atmosphere, and Seligman stared in horror as the plates cracked and shattered outwards. He tried to scream as the air shrieked outwards,



but sound was already impossible. He felt his breath sucked from his lungs.

Then he fainted.

When the ship passed the moon, Seligman still sat, his body held in place by the now-constricted webbing, facing the gaping squares and sundered metal that had been the cabin wall.

Abruptly, the engines cut off. As though it were a signal, Seligman's eyes crinkled at the corners, fluttered, and opened wide.

He stared at the wall, his reviving brain grasping the final truth. The last vestige of humanity had been clawed from him. He no longer needed air to live.

His throat constricted, his belly knotted, and the blood that should theoretically be boiling pounded thickly in his throat. His last kinship with those he was searching was gone. If he had been a freak before, what was he *now*? A horror?

The turmoil fought itself out in him as the ship sped onward and he faced what he had become, and what he must do.

He was more than a messenger,

now. He was a shining symbol at the end of all humanity on Earth, a symbol of the evil their kind had done. The men out there would never treasure him, welcome him, or build proud legends around him. But they could never deny him. He was a messenger from the grave.

They would see him in the airless cabin, even before he landed. They would never be able to live with him, but they would have to listen to him, and to believe.

Seligman sat in the crash-chair in the cabin that was dark except for the eerie glow that was part of him. He sat there, lonely and eternally alone. And slowly a grim smile grew on his lips.

The bitter purpose that had been forced on him was finally clear. For two years, he had fought to find escape from the death and loneliness of ruined Earth. Now that was impossible. One Seligman was enough.

Alone? He hadn't known the meaning of the word before! It would be his job to make sure that he was alone — alone among his people.

Until the end of time.



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*Flash! First contact has already been made! We just weren't told...*

# ***The Night the Arcturians Landed***

*by Chris Dornan*

Now don't mistake me. I really don't expect you to believe a word I say. It's just that you feel you have to talk about it when you think you've flubbed the future of the entire human race.

I guess I ought to backtrack a bit. You see, being in advertising, I occasionally get a little tired of people in general, and I have a small place in northeastern Ontario for just such occasions. It's a comfortable, secluded cottage set on the crest of a hill so that one can stand outside and gaze all around without seeing a single other habitation. Which is just what I was doing a few nights ago, when I happened to notice a light in the sky which appeared to be growing larger. Prolonged observation told me that it was in fact moving toward me, and I watched it, intrigued, until it took the shape of an incredibly weird and unmistakably alien spaceship that proceeded to scream over the house and land in the woods below.

I react strangely when under pressure. Another man might have

called the police. Another might have run off, hysterically, into the night. I went inside and made myself a sandwich. That done, I sat myself in front of the television, and I remember watching Mary Tyler Moore while assuring myself that I had not seen a flying saucer, and that there were no little green men in my backyard.

I was still somewhat shaken when, about half an hour later, there was a knock at the door. I got up, half-eaten sandwich in hand, to see who on earth it could be. There, standing on the other side of my screen door looking in, were two short, squat, green things that looked like a couple of beer barrels on tripods. My lightning quick deductive processes told me that these were extra-terrestrials, if I'd ever seen one. Not that I'd ever seen one. Fighting to retain what remained of my composure, I said, "Orson Welles, I presume?"

They seemed unperturbed, and the one on the right opened the slit in its "head" and spoke, making vis-

ible the churning greenish-yellow viscous fluid inside.

"Good evening," it said in perfect English, without a trace of accent.

"Yeeech," I said, temporarily overcome by revulsion, and unable to take my eyes off the glop inside its mouth.

"We were just passing by," it continued, "and we thought we'd drop in."

"Jesus Christ," I thought, "Aliens with a sense of humor." But then I realized that if this wasn't the Mercury Theatre, then I had suddenly become an ambassador for my planet, representing the human race before the little green beer barrels. So I straightened up, wiped the mustard from the corners of my mouth and said, "Would you care to come in?"

They accepted graciously, following into the living room. Needless to say, they made me extremely nervous. It's not every day I get visitors who wear their alligator luggage.

"Sorry the place is such a mess," I apologized. "Please sit down."

And then I kicked myself mentally. With that massively powerful tail comprising the third leg of the tripod, they couldn't possibly use any of the chairs. I felt as if I'd just told my best friend, Morris Goldstein, to help himself to the bacon. But, once again, they weren't bothered in the least, as they sat back neatly on their tails.

"Can I get you anything?" I asked. "A cold beer? A glass of ammonia?"

"No, thank you," barrel number one said. "Please sit down."

I did so.

"I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name," I ventured.

"I'm afraid you would find it unpronounceable," it said politely.

"Unpronounceable."

It waved a limb in the direction of the other beer barrel. "My wife."

"Lovely girl," I said, smiling in her direction.

"Her name, unfortunately, is equally unpronounceable."

"Equally unpronounceable."

There was an uncomfortable pause. "You've come a long way?" I asked.

"Not just now," the wife said. I was going to have difficulty thinking of her as a she. "We have a station on Titan," it explained.

"Oh, a station? You're not from around here, then?"

"No, were from a planet in the Arcturian system."

"I see," I said, trying to remember how far away Arcturus was. "I like to travel myself. You're here on vacation?"

"No, we're here as members of the Diplomatic Arm of the Sentient Federation," the husband explained.

"Diplomats? That would account for your remarkable command of the English language."

"Yes," he said, not without a trace of pride. "I speak eight of your major languages. How many do you speak?"

"Two," I lied. I failed French in the twelfth grade. "Listen, would you mind if I took your photograph?" I asked, in an attempt to

extricate myself from what was proving to be an embarrassing situation.

"Ah, the quest for credibility. I quite understand," he said. "Please do." I went into the bedroom and came back with my camera. The Unpronounceables were facing me when I returned, their limbs wrapped about one another. "Cheeeese," they said in unison, widening their slits.

"Look," I said, as the flash went off, "I don't mean to be rude, but just what are you doing here in my living room?"

"Ah, oh, of course, forgive me," the husband said, detaching himself from his wife. "We have come to enlist your assistance."

"Me?" I exclaimed, understandably startled. "You came to see me specifically? You want help from me?"

"That's correct," he answered. "The Federation has decided to make itself known to your planet."

"But don't tell anyone just yet," the wife said. "It's going to be a surprise."

"You're not kidding," I admitted. The evening had certainly taken an interesting turn. Three quarters of an hour ago I had been preparing myself for an uneventful night in front of the television. Now I had a flying saucer parked behind my house, and two pieces of unbelievable anatomy in my living room telling me that they were about to spring themselves on an unsuspecting world, with my help.

"I gotta get a beer," I said. I returned from the kitchen drinking from the bottle, but not forgetting my duties as a host I asked, "Sure you wouldn't like some?"

"What is that?" The husband said, apparently peering at the label. "Carlsberg? No thanks," he declined.

The beer fortified me just enough so that I thought I could manage to speak without babbling. "You know, up until now I didn't believe in flying saucers," I confessed. "But now that I think of it, you've been careful to keep a low profile, haven't you? Why the sudden change in policy?"

At that, they embarked on an account of the Sentient Federation, a union of five separate intelligent races capable of interstellar travel. Their policy towards emerging civilizations was one of observation and non-interference, until these civilizations could offer something of value to the Federation, at which time they were invited to join the alliance, thereby benefiting from a common pool of knowledge and the prosperity brought on by increased trade. The Denebians, for example, offered reliable telepathy in return for admission to the Federation. The Mirans contributed a perfected teleportation mechanism.

It sounded to me that we were a little out of our league, but they assured me that the human race had developed something of such monumental significance that admission to the Federation was being offered

to us despite our primitive technology and social immaturity. At this I had the impression that we were being insulted, and I moved to defend our honor. "Now hold on there..." I began.

"Even now," he interrupted, "the gift of Homo sapiens is sweeping the galaxy."

"Go on," I said. "Surely you jest."

"That's it!" he cried, and slapped two upper limbs together so that they sounded like dead fish, which they didn't look at all unlike.

"What's it?" I asked, hating to be slow on the uptake.

"Man is the animal who laughs," he confided as if it were information of grave importance. "You have given the Federation a sense of humor, a truly unique philosophical perspective. You have given us joyous prosperity."

"Come again?" I said.

"Until we encountered Homo sapiens we had no sense of humor. In all of known space its development is unique to this planet. You have supplied us with an insight which makes possible a far greater appreciation of our Universe."

"It was nothing," I said modestly. It was nice to be appreciated, but I had visions of Mankind — Jester of the Spaceways. Somehow it didn't carry with it the respect to which we've become accustomed. "I still don't see why you need help from me," I prodded.

It was the wife who answered. "The human race is not exactly pre-

pared for the realization that we exist," she said. "Should we abruptly appear over major population center, there might well be panic. We do not wish our intentions to be misinterpreted through fear. Neither do we wish to be responsible for mass hysteria. We thought that perhaps you, being an advertising man, might be able to devise some means to ease the shock our sudden appearance might otherwise create."

In the back of my mind the voice of Rod Serling intoned, *There are many doors into the Twilight Zone...* "You want me to sell you to the public?" I asked, incredulous. I had no idea I had such far-reaching references.

"If you would, we would be most grateful," the husband confirmed.

Hell, I don't have to tell you how I jumped at the chance. I mean, how many of you have ever been employed by someone who just stepped off the boat from Titan?

And so I set my brain into motion. I agreed that the sudden appearance of flying saucers might well cause panic, and yet I felt that that would be the best way to announce their existence to the world, if some way could be found to prevent the accompanying hysteria. I thought of somehow appealing to the human appreciation of the humorous, which would not only put the world at ease, but which would also be remarkably fitting, considering the nature of our impending admission into the Federation.

But from there, my usual burst of

inspiration just didn't come. I was, in short, dry. Barren. Speechless. Creatively speaking, I had rigor mortis. I paced before the Unpronounceables, knowing that they had come millions of miles to seek my creativity and that I was failing, not only them, but the entire human race in the bargain. And failing miserably. It got so bad that I began to plead with a God, in whom I hadn't believed fifteen minutes before, for the merest smidgeon of a germ of an idea. And to make matters incalculably worse, the husband would glance from time to time at a device implanted in his forearm that could only have been a watch.

This seemingly interminable silence continued for what must have been three-quarters of an hour, until I began clutching at straws. "Listen," I said, "how about this: you fly a massive, extremely impressive-looking starship in over New York. It hovers above the United Nations buildings long enough for the world's cameras to be trained on it, and once the suspense builds to unbearable proportions, a deep, rumbling voice announces, 'And now, the moment you've all been waiting for ...'"

The Unpronounceables exchanged glances and remained silent.

"No, huh?"

"A little flat," the wife explained.

"Well, what if we did a TV campaign? Picture an on-the-street interview: 'What do you say to a little green beer barrel on a tripod?' or,

"How do you say hello in Arcturian?"

The wife shifted her weight to another leg and began examining the beams in the ceiling. "Uh..." said the husband, and then he coughed. At least, I think it was a cough.

Just then, there was a knock at the door, and I answered it to find yet another beer barrel standing outside. "It's for you," I informed the Unpronounceables.

The husband and the beer barrel outside exchanged noises which sounded disturbingly like my dishwasher. When they had concluded their conversation, the husband turned to me and said, "We have to go now. His meter's running."

"This is no time for levity," I said.

"You're telling me," he said.

"Wait," I pleaded. "Take me to your leader?" I was desperate. "Oh, hell, this is ridiculous. You've got to give me at least a week to come up with something."


The husband sounded disappointed. "I'm sorry," he said, "we just don't do things that way. But you must, at least, allow us to pay you for your time. We don't have any of your currency, but perhaps...." He produced an internationally recognized credit card.

"No charge," I announced in the true spirit of interplanetary cooperation, and instinctively offered my hand to the husband.

Motionless, the little green beer barrel examined my outstretched arm. "Shake hands?" he asked, dubious.

"We can't," the wife confessed. "We're allergic."

And with a minimum of goodbyes and promises to write, they departed, leaving me to feel like a complete fool. Not surprisingly, I had a troubled sleep that night, and I was awakened at about four in the morning by a nightmare in which I was doing the Tonight Show from the top of Mount Everest, and the entire universe was not laughing at me.



In the morning, I was unable to shake the feeling that the Unpronounceables were stringing me along. Suppose the final decision on admitting us the the Federation had not been made. Suppose we had to pass a test of our intelligence. And suppose I failed it for us?

Anyway, I'm tired of kicking myself. There's just one thing that worries me now. If my boss at the ac agency ever finds out...





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by Ben Bova

Illustrated

by John Schoenherr

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# OP POR TUNITY

*How does the saying go?*

*"A wife is a wonderful thing.*

*Who wouldn't want to own one?..."*

*by Daniel C. Smith*

Zeke Perkins finished his morning chores, put on his best flannel shirt and leather britches, and drove his buckboard into town to buy a wife.

He hitched the horses to one of Opportunity's new street lights, unconsciously distrusting the wagon's brakes — the effect of too many westerns he'd seen as a boy. Yesterday's rain had left the street a mud-flat, but where the shuttlecraft's landing field had touched earth the ground had parched and cracked. He stamped loose mud from his boots before hauling himself up through the shuttle's bay doors.

The bay seethed. Men from all around Opportunity waited impatiently to see the prospective brides. Zeke blinked in the dim light and found his way to the end of a line. Presently a stout man extended a manicured hand to him and said between flashing white teeth, "Good day, sir. Peter Flannegan at your service. What can I do for you, Mr...?"

"Perkins. Zeke Perkins."

"Mr. Perkins," Flannegan leaned

back in his chair to look him over. He saw a tall, solid man in his late twenties. Coarse, wavy black hair hung heavily over wide-set grey eyes. His forehead and neck were tanned a rich mahogany brown, but his chin and cheeks were pale, as though a thick beard had been removed recently. He looked like an easy mark.

Zeke squirmed in his chair. "Umm, life ain't easy out here. A man needs him a woman. Keep his mind right, you know? I mean to get me one."

"I understand exactly how you feel," Flannegan said gravely. "We've a fine selection of young ladies to choose from every single one eager to find a hard working man like yourself. Would you like to look them over, maybe talk to a couple before the bids begin?"

Zeke's pulse pounded at the suggestion. "Yah, I'd like that."

"Excellent. That'll be twenty dollars."

"Twenty dollars?" he grunted. "Just to see them?"



"Oh, no, Mr. Perkins," Flannegan chortled briefly. "To talk to them. A few words can save you years of trouble, believe me. And too, that twenty dollars separates the men who just came to look at the women from the serious buyers." He frowned. "You wouldn't want your time wasted on a bunch of lookers, would you?"

"Reckon not," Zeke said hastily. He pulled a twenty from his pocket and placed it in Flannegan's outstretched palm.

"Fine. This is your gate pass," Flannegan stood up. "Now if you'll step through that hatch over there you'll meet your future bride. Good luck to you, Mr. Perkins."

Zeke mumbled his thanks as he retreated, but Flannegan was already absorbed in the next man in line. He fumbled through the crowd towards the rear of the bay.

Bright sunlight dazzled his eyes. Squinting, he made out a row of tables along the hull, a ragged line of men stretching from each. Behind the tables sat thirty-one women of varying size and beauty. A second shuttlecraft had grounded a hundred meters away. Fences, stretched between them, held back clumps of onlookers.

A sleepy eyed man with a rifle resting across his lap glanced up at Zeke and said, "Got a pass, Mister?" The man took Zeke's offered pass and returned a program. "Go on in. Five minutes per lady. We got to keep the lines moving."

Zeke found he could judge a woman's handsomeness by the

length of the line attached to her table. "The best wives is the ones a man can depend on," he muttered to himself while examining a particularly short line, "and that's got nothin' to do with looks."

He decided they were all beautiful, especially when there were no other women on Opportunity for comparison. The landing had come as a surprise. Women had been expected with the third wave, still two years away.

A redhead with even features caught his eye. Zeke stepped into line. At five minute intervals a man would rise from the chair, the next would sit down, and Zeke would bump ahead one place. His stomach twitched uncertainly as the line grew shorter. What would he say? What could he ask? Hell, he hadn't talked to a woman for four years.

The man in front of him stood up and left. Zeke stood rooted in place while his tanned forehead struggled to match his colorless cheeks.

"Hurry up, fella, you're holdin' up the line," complained a voice behind him.

Zeke flinched, thumped into the chair, and erupted, "Name's Zeke Perkins, ma'am!"

She licked her lips and replied, "Pleased to meet you, Zeke."

His eyes found a stencilled card that read, #7 — Rebecca Stone. He swallowed and said, "I'm a farmer, ma'am. I come in with the first wave and got me a nice homestead south of here. 500 hectares. Good land. I built me a farmhouse and a barn and cleared some fields. It's a good life,

most ways, thought it do get kinda lonesome at times." One of his fingernails was especially grimy. He hid it under his palm. "Anyhow, what I want to ask you ma'am, is, uh, would you like to be a farmer's wife?"

Rebecca wiped her nose with a forefinger. "I might like that, if my man was good to me."

"Don't you worry about that, lady," broke in the next man in line. "If anybody ain't good to you, you say the word and we'll beat hell out of him." Zeke turned burgundy under an assault of guffaws. Rebecca put her hand in front of her mouth.

After a moment he gathered courage enough to look up. "I'd be good to you, ma'am." He stood up abruptly. "Well, I can't think of nothin' else to say, so... thank you, ma'am."

"Becky," She smiled. "Call me Becky."

His throat lumped.

"Well, look who's talkin' to our girl. If it ain't Perky."

Zeke scowled. The voice belonged to Bert Henderson.

"Better forget about this one, Perky. We got her all staked out." That would be Bert's brother, George.

The three of them had arrived in the colonization battalion that comprised the first wave. Zeke and the Hendersons had been assigned to the soil reformation team. At first, he'd considered himself lucky to have fellow North Americans nearby, but in a task force that included Europeans, Chinese, Arabs, Af-

ricans, Jews, Hindus, and even an Australian aborigine, Bert and George had zeroed in on Zeke as the odd man out, usually referring to him as the Hick, and toning that down to Perky on the occasions they felt friendly. Zeke couldn't outtalk them. He settled for ignoring them.

He looked back at Rebecca. "Thanks for your time, ma'am, uh, Becky," — and angled past the brothers out into the crowd. There were other interesting women. He joined another line, but his eyes and thoughts drifted back to #7. She seemed a fine woman.

He was only two men from the front when Flannegan shouted from the hatch, "That's all, gents. The auction will start in 15 minutes. I'd advise you to take advantage of the seats we've set up. Take your time and choose the women you want to bid on, and remember, no man knows true happiness until he's been married." He gathered up the women and took them inside.

Zeke clenched his fists. It wasn't fair. He'd only got to talk to one. He took a seat on a bench near the rear and studied the program. On page 4 he found:

Lot 7. Rebecca Elizabeth

Stone. Red hair, brown eyes, 167 cent., 56 kilos. Yes friends, this is a good one. "Becky" was born and raised in the American Old West, and she has that fiery, pioneer blood of her ancestors. She's an excellent cook (her specialty is fried chicken) and she can turn a piece of rawhide into a silk

nightgown. Loves children and wants to raise a large family. Her one desire is to please a man. Could that man be you?

Well, her voice was nice, and she'd smiled at him, a warm, gentle smile. Even got personal with him. Looked right at him and told him to call her Becky. She must have liked him to do that. Hadn't known her five minutes and already he was on a first name basis.

A fine woman. The kind a man could depend on.

Those damn Hendersons had called her "their girl." What were two of them going to do with one woman?

By God, he wouldn't let it happen.

The benches were packed; nearly all of Opportunity's 2,000 men had turned out for the event, although only a small percentage was seriously contending. Flannegan mounted a makeshift platform and coolly surveyed the mob. "Men! The time has come to take a wife!" When the cheers and whistles abated he continued, "This will be a spot bid sale. There are a couple of men passing out slips of paper and pencils. Now, as each woman comes up, figure out what you'd like to bid on her, then print your name at the top of the slip with your bid directly below — like this." He held up a sign. "We'll be passing a box down each row. When it comes to you, stick in your bid and pass it on. Does everybody understand?"

No one spoke up.

"Good. We'll sort the bids up

here. The highest bidder takes the lovely prize home with him. If you think your bid was higher you're welcome to come up and go through the bids, but the highest bid is the final bid. We take no second offers."

He produced a handkerchief and dabbed at his forehead. "Now then, I've grown to know all of these ladies in the past few months, and there isn't one I wouldn't be proud to call my own. These women want husbands, gentlemen. Not the kind content to stay on Earth, but the kind with the guts and strength to take a raw world and make it theirs." He pointed a finger at the crowd. "The kind sitting here today. So, I know what they want. The question now is what do *you* want?"

He paused to glare at the crowd. "Don't be afraid to speak up, gents. The ladies are waiting for your answer. They've come a long way, and right now a lot of them are wondering if maybe they wouldn't have done better for themselves back home. I'll ask you straight out, gentlemen, do you want these ladies to stay or not?"

A man leaning against the fence cupped his hands and hollered, "Hell yes!"

The crowd broke into chuckles. Flannegan pounced on it. "What was that again? I didn't catch it."

Several replied, "Hell yes."

Flannegan cupped his hand to his ear. "I can't hear you, gents."

He pumped his fist to lead the crowd, "Hell yes!"

"These ladies can't hear you!"

"HELL YES!"

"You want them? Then bring on the first bride!"

The crowd roared its enthusiasm.

The auction began with what Flannegan considered his best performer, a rounded, exuberant girl in her early twenties. She grinned at the whistles and shouts.

"Gentlemen, allow me to present Alice Malinda Johnson. Say hello to the boys, Alice."

She giggled and waved.

"Alice was born and raised in the Australian outback. Her mother, a gentle soul, took care that she learned the proper woman's skills from the time she was a child. She's been educated enough to read and write Standard and knows enough arithmetic to make a home budget work. Not only that, she was the oldest child. She knows all about babies and wants to raise a mess of them herself. Who's the man here today that will give Alice those children?"

"Alice, show these gentlemen your wares."

Mouth stretched in a taut smile, she reached behind her back and unclasped the hook that held her dress in place. It fell to her ankles, revealing a modest two piece bathing suit.

The crowd drooled.

"Now I ask you, friends," Flannegan said in hushed tones, "is there anything more beautiful than the sight of a woman? Picture yourself toiling through a long day knowing that this is your reward. Tired, fatigued to your bones, you step through the door and there's Alice

to comfort and console you. Makes it all worthwhile, doesn't it? Gives a meaning to your labors.

"I ask you gentlemen to bid. And remember, any price is a small price to pay for love and happiness."

The crowd buzzed as men muttered to themselves and calculated in their heads. Zeke applied pencil to paper and scrawled out a figure. Then he shook his head, crumpled the slip in his fist and tossed it to the ground.

The bids were collected and closed. Tension thrummed through the crowd as they were sorted, but the silence was absolute as Flannegan remounted the stage. "Gents, we have a winner. His name is Jacques Leblanc for a bid of 23,431 dollars!"

"C'est moi! C'est moi!" A short, bearded man waved his arms wildly and jumped up and down on his bench.

Flannegan shouted over the cheers, "Come on down here, Mr. Leblanc, and collect your new partner in life!" Leblanc raced for the stage. Flannegan took his hand and joined it to Alice's. In a carrying voice he said, "I won't keep you two happy people waiting, so if you'll step inside you can start your new life together."

He turned to the crowd. "There goes a man who'll be happy to the end of his days. Which one of you gentlemen will be next?"

Lots 2, 3, and 4 were timed to heighten interest while prolonging suspense. The first was nearly in the same league as Alice, the second barely the right side of homely, and



the third almost pretty. They brought bids of \$23,339, \$19,563, and \$25,566 respectively.

Then Flannegan released his first bombshell. True, on Earth she would win no prizes, but on Opportunity she went for \$31,235.

Zeke took it all in with childlike delight, but when the next girl took the stage he realized that Rebecca was the next in line. He divorced himself from the festivities and analyzed the situation. If the bidding ran true to form, Rebecca should go for around 24,000. To play safe he would bid 26. Of course, this would depend on who he was up against, which reminded him of the Hendersons.

Where were they, anyway? From his seat in the rear, Zeke could see nearly all of the two hundred or so men that had the money to take a shot at matrimony. He searched the benches carefully, but couldn't find the two louts anywhere. And if they weren't in front of him...

Casually, he glanced behind him. Off to the right and about 2 meters back the brothers stood among the spectators, their attention focused on the stage.

Zeke put his eyes front and thought about it. Objectively, he was the man to beat for Rebecca's lot. While not wealthy, he was considerably removed from destitution, and no one was likely to outbid him. The Hendersons were sly enough to realize this, too, and would naturally be interested in his bid.

The bids for lot 6 were being collected. Zeke wrote down a figure,

put his name on top — and palmed the slip as he handed the box down the row.

After the winner had been announced and led away, Rebecca took the stage. Her coaches had warned her that the walk from the bay door to the podium would do more to set the tone of her sale than Flannegan's hawking or the interviews. It would be the first time the men would see her move, and their attitudes would be shaped by the way she carried herself. If she walked briskly, with her head held high and shoulders thrown back, they would think she was businesslike and perhaps a touch on the aggressive side. If she shuffled along with her eyes on her feet they would think her timid, and perhaps not too bright.

With Rebecca it had been decided to present an independent woman who was realistic about her situation. She walked somewhat slowly, about 40 beats to the minute, and allowed her arms to swing freely from her sides. At the podium she turned to face the crowd, brushed her bangs from her forehead and tossed her hair to clear it from her shoulders. She studied the crowd methodically, her eyes widened slightly, lips parted just enough to show her teeth.

"Gentlemen! Allow me to present Rebecca Elizabeth Stone. Becky comes from the American Old West and grew up on a farm herself. You won't have to teach this one which end of a cow to milk. She majored in home economics in school, and as soon as she graduated found a job as

a nurse's aide in a real hospital.

"Yes, friends, here we have a highly intelligent, hardworking girl, and to go with those brains..." On cue, Rebecca slipped off her dress.

The audience was more immune to the shock by this time. Only a few spectators gathered enough wit to whistle.

"A perfect complement of beauty and brains, and a sincere, warm personality to match. Who will it be this time? Which one of you will be the proud husband of Rebecca Stone? This much I'm sure of, he'll be a man to envy.

"The bidding is open."

Zeke stuck the pencil in his mouth and absently nibbled the eraser. He contemplated for a moment, put the paper on his knee, and making token efforts to hide it, printed his name and \$24,896. The box found its way into his lap. He stuck in two slips of paper, the second carefully concealed, and folded his arms to wait.

"Are there any more bids?" Flannegan queried. "Very well, the bidding is closed."

"Hey Perky, whatcha bid?"

"Yah, Perky."

Bert and George smirked in his direction.

"None of your business."

"Aw, now Perky," sneered Bert, "what kind of attitude is that? The bids are all in."

"Yah, Perky, come on."

Zeke said coldly, "You'll know soon enough."

"Is that so?" Bert barked a laugh and gouged George with his elbow. "Is that so?"

"Yah, Perky, you think you're gonna win?"

Zeke glared but said nothing.

"You wanna know what we bid, Perky?" Bert offered casually. "We bid 24,897." Bert and George exploded into hysterics, twisting in circles and punching each other's shoulders. Zeke growled and bounced to his feet, face livid with anger, fists clenched. They danced away, pointing their fingers and gulping. "Look at the Hick! Look at the Hick!" Men around the spot watched with cautious interest.

Bert controlled himself and said arrogantly, "You wanna make somethin' of it, Perky?"

Zeke remained motionless.

"Gentlemen! May I have your attention please?"

The Hendersons divided their attention between Zeke and the platform, expectant half-smiles pasted on their faces.

"We have a winner. His name is Zeke Perkins for a bid of 26,752 dollars. Come on down here, Mr. Perkins!"

Zeke stepped out from his seat and strolled over to the astonished Hendersons. His eyes narrowed. "You bastards got a lot to learn about gettin' a woman." He pivoted and sauntered away.

George roared helplessly, igniting a chain reaction of chuckles. Bert's lips quivered. "Lemme see that bid!"

He pounded to the stage trailing George behind him. "He didn't make that bid," accused Bert. "He only bid 24,000."

Flannegan's nostrils twitched at

the scent of a profit. He could ask for another round from both of them, or better, a vocal auction. They were sure to bid against each other until they ran out of money.

But no, no, there were two on the one side and they'd likely win. Two might be too much for Rebecca to handle later. "I'm sorry, gentlemen. High bid takes. A man can easily change his mind after he's put in a bid. We have to stick to rules for everybody."

"Ya, but hell. He cheated me. I would've bid more if I'd known..."

"I'm sorry, sir. High bid takes. Now, there are still plenty of women to choose from and I'm sure there are others who will serve you just as well." Flannegan gave the signal to his guard, who made himself and the rifle conspicuously present.

Bert and George took the hint, but before Bert turned away he shot at Zeke, "I'll get you for this someday, Hick."

Zeke returned a toothy grin.

"Now, Mr. Perkins, if you and Becky will step inside we'll have you processed in no time."

But before Zeke could be processed he had to come up with the money. He left Rebecca in the hands of a clerk and trotted down to the colony's bank, a computer housed in a prefabricated building. The bank compared his retinal and fingerprint patterns, decided Zeke was Zeke, and insisted that he give a written request for a twenty-six thousand dollar withdrawal. Reading and writing were skills that had decreased in value in recent years,

and Zeke had never completely mastered the art. After a lengthy struggle he managed to print, "Give me my money, \$26,752. Zeke Perkins."

The bank recorded the order. It was already short of cash from previous withdrawals, and Zeke was forced to wait while it minted the amount in crisp new currency, legal for all debts public and private on 47 worlds. Zeke pocketed the money and left.

There remained an obstacle course of clerks to run, each quite polite, each lacking a facility for speed. A long time later, the last clerk looked up from the last form and said, "Well, that takes care of it, folks. Allow me to be the first to congratulate you."

Zeke solemnly shook the clerk's hand and stood up to leave. Rebecca remained seated. "You mean that's all?"

The clerk nodded.

"Yes, but isn't there some sort of ceremony?"

The clerk leaned forward, "We feel that's a matter we have no right to press on our clients. But if it will make you feel better, we can arrange for one." He raised his eyebrows.

Zeke sat down. "Uh, Becky, you want a ceremony?"

She looked at her hands and said in a small voice, "Well, my mother always did want me to have a wedding."

Zeke, while not enthused at the prospect, wasn't about to start off on the wrong foot. "What kind of ceremony?"

The clerk fetched a folder from a drawer. A few minutes later Zeke found he'd purchased the number 5 wedding, Protestant, with the genuine peach blossom flower arrangement and the number 4 photo album. The bill, including the customary 200 dollar tip for the minister, came to 1100 dollars.

By the time Zeke returned from his second trip to the bank the auction was nearly over. The office, which before had been a study in the finer points of inefficiency, bustled in vibrant activity. Zeke barely had time to wonder who had built a fire under the clerks before he was whisked away by a man in traditional robes.

Someone must have built a fire under the minister as well. The ceremony lasted 2 minutes and 34 seconds.

The good reverend escorted the newlyweds to the door amid a rapid fire patter of the do's and don'ts of married life. An attendant handed Zeke a suitcase. The minister slapped him on the back, squeezed Rebecca's hand, and pushed them through the door.

Zeke blinked in the sunlight like a freshly-hatched chick. After a few moments to pull himself together he led a crooked path to the wagon, avoiding the worst of the mud, and helped Rebecca climb aboard. A flip of the reins sent them plodding down the south road.

Zeke wiped his chin on his shirt and sneaked a peek at Rebecca. By God, he had a woman. It felt good. He reflected that a man didn't need

much — room to move in, land to shape, and a good woman. Most especially a woman.

Rebecca sat as far from her husband as the plank seat would allow and appeared absorbed with the scenery: flat prairie dotted by trees. Sunlight and a warm eastern breeze teased her hair and piled it in soft, changing swirls.

Damn fine profile. Nice tits, too. And she didn't look at all fragile. Yah, he could have done worse. Zeke cleared his throat. "Nice day, ain't it?"

Rebecca summed up the sky and horizon with one sweep of her eyes and drew her mouth into a tight line.

"Yah, weren't like this yesterday. I got caught out in a field and like to have drowned."

"Course, it was my own fault. I seen it comin' and should have headed on in."

She returned her eyes to the prairie.

"You get much rain where you come from?"

"No."

Well now, she acted a bit shy. But then, he guessed that was normal considering her position. He tried to think of an approach that would put her at ease. "I sure was surprised when I heard you women were in town."

She fidgeted in her seat and avoided his eyes, but finally replied, "Really? Why?"

"Well, we didn't expect none for another couple of years." He chuckled. "Yah, it really threw me. Best thing that ever happened out here."

"Oh."

On the other hand, maybe she was the quiet type, the kind that needed prodding before they opened up. Zeke sucked at his teeth until he came up with a compliment. "You know, it takes a lot of gumption to come all the way out here. I respect that in a woman."

Rebecca raised one eyebrow and asked, "What do you mean by that?"

"Well, just whippin' yourself out here and all, not knowin' what kind of man you'd likely wind up with. That takes spirit. You don't find that in many women."

Her eyes tightened slightly in the corners. "Why should it take any more spirit for a woman?"

Zeke chuckled and shrugged. "Beats me. As far as I'm concerned, there ain't no reason why women shouldn't come in with the second wave. Most of the real dangers is taken care of by then."

Rebecca studied her fingernails. "Why not the first wave?"

"Well, now, that's different," he replied in the manner of the ones-who-have-been-there-and-know. "I mean, our casualty rate wasn't too high, only seven percent, but with women along... Well, you know what I mean."

She nodded slowly. "Yes, I think so. You think the rate would have been higher, the battalion's efficiency would have been reduced, the men would have been distracted from their objectives, and the women would have been absorbed in the things women do, chattering, having

babies, playing courtship games — the sort of things out of place on a frontier." She ticked off the reasons in the same level tone of voice, not looking at Zeke until she had finished.

Zeke swallowed.

"Isn't that what you meant?"

He knotted his eyebrows.

Rebecca folded her hands and, forcing the words as if reluctant to explain herself, said, "I once tried to get into a colonization battalion. I'm familiar with all the arguments. How long will it be before we reach the farm?"

"About half an hour."

Zeke told himself that Rebecca wasn't in the mood for conversation and turned his attention to the horses.

The farm was an unlikely mixture of the old and new. A house and barn nestled next to a tired meandering creek. The buildings were constructed from rough wooden slabs and caulked with clay, but the roofs were topped by a layer of solar cells.

Zeke reined in the horses at the front door and said, "We're home, Becky." He grabbed the suitcase and led the way across the threshold.

Rebecca stopped inside the doorway and critically examined the interior. There were three rooms; a living room, kitchen, and bedroom, none with privacy doors and all easily visible from the front door. The walls and ceilings were the unrelied backside of the exterior.

Zeke carried the suitcase into the bedroom and set it on the floor beside the bed. The bed was the only

piece of furniture that approximated modern living. Its frame was constructed from solid wooden poles, but the mattress was half a meter of sponge plastic. Three blankets were folded neatly at the foot.

He shuffled back to the living-room. Rebecca's eyes darted towards him; he dropped his own to the dirt floor. The house looked shabby now that there was a woman to see it. There was sweat in each slab of timber, each stone hefted from the creek bed, but a woman wouldn't be interested in that sort of thing. She would only see the bare lights dangling from their cords. "I know it ain't nufuh," he mumbled. "I ain't never had the time to fix it up proper, what with developin' land on commission and workin' my own." He bit his lower lip.

"It's about what I expected. Maybe even a little better."

Zeke kept his eyes fixed on the floor. "Uh, hey. Well, I only got an hour of daylight left and I got to tend to my chores." He edged past her to the doorway. "You make yourself comfortable and I'll be back quick as I can."

Dusk had fallen before the chores were finished. Zeke wiped his hands on an old rag and leaned against the barn door where he could peer at the house.

He couldn't have made too good an impression. Lord knows she hadn't said a friendly thing since he paid for her. She could at least give him a chance to get to know her. Whether she liked it or not she was going to have to live with him.

He flexed his fingers. But maybe he was being hasty. Maybe she just wasn't used to him yet. It must be quite a shock to step off a ship and wind up married to a man you'd never seen before. He'd have to give her time to get adjusted.

Zeke gritted his teeth and strolled slowly towards the house. He paused at the threshold to take several deep breaths, wiped his palms on his britches, and padded quietly into the living room. Rebecca stood beside the bed with her back towards him, fishing in her open suitcase. He cleared his throat and framed himself in the doorway. "Well, I'm back."

She turned, a small grey pistol gripped tightly in her fingers. The gun puffed. Zeke felt a sharp slap against his midsection. He staggered backwards in surprise, his hand pressed to the metal dart that protruded from his belly.

Lord, he was shot! His lips drew back in an idiot's grin. A deadening sensation radiated swiftly from the wound to his legs and chest. It sapped his strength. He was weak ... weak, and God help him, his knees were giving way and he was tumbling to the floor.

Rebecca stalked cautiously out of the bedroom and examined his face. White showed all around the irises of Zeke's eyes. She knelt and said distinctly, "You'll be all right soon, Mr. Perkins. It's only a drug." She smoothed his hair with her long fingers. "You'll be all right."

She dragged him to the foot of the bed and looped his arms through the

frame. A pair of cold handcuffs snapped about his wrists.

Zeke's eyelids refused to close and give him dark relief, and tears began collecting in the corners. A woman's voice filtered through the high ringing whine in his ears. "This is Rebecca. I'm ready for retrieval. No complications."

A man's voice, too large for life, responded, "All right, Rebecca. We have your position and should have a shuttle to you in about twenty minutes. See you back at the ship." Zeke dimly recognized the voice as Flannegan's.

A suitcase snapped shut. Footsteps receded into the living room and the chair creaked with sudden weight. Zeke's skin began to tingle. The drug released its hold, first in his eyes, then in his muscles. He breathed deeply through his nostrils and let strength seep into his arms and legs.

He couldn't let her get away, not after all this time, not when he'd come so close. The bedframe was held together with nails. If he could bring his feet around to the post he might be able to kick it free. Quietly he worked his way into position.

Good, she couldn't see him. He put his boots against the post and grabbed the frame with his hands. His lungs filled. He heaved.

It wouldn't give! It wouldn't give! A strained hiss escaped his throat. Rebecca appeared in the doorway holding the gun. "Don't try it, Mr. Perkins. I would really prefer not to shoot you again, but I will if I have to."

"What are you tryin' to do to me?" he croaked.

She licked her lips. "There'll be a shuttle to pick me up in a few minutes. After I'm gone you should be able to free yourself, and I've left the key to the handcuffs on the living room floor."

Zeke's eyes engaged hers. She met his stare placidly. He dropped the back of his head into the dirt. The corners of his mouth quivered. "But why?"

She didn't answer.

"It ain't fair," he said low in his throat. "You come out of nowhere and you raise a man's hopes and you make him think he's got a chance to be happy, and have kids, and a woman he can hold..." his voice cracked. "Why?"

Rebecca swallowed and answered, "I'm sorry, Zeke. I'm not that kind of woman."

His chest pumped up and down. "You bitch! You whore! You miserable, stinkin', slut." He sobbed and kicked frantically at the bedpost.

"That's enough!" Her fingers whitened around the pistol grip. Zeke slumped and panted in short, dry gasps.

Rebecca forced her fingers to relax. "You guys never quit, do you? You buy me off the block one minute and cull me a slut the next." She tossed her head. "You remind me of the last recruiter I saw. I asked him why my application had been turned down and he said that a woman could be anything she wanted to be — *on Earth*, but on a frontier a woman's place was in the home."

Outside, a shuttlecraft circled the house. "It won't work, Zeke. You can't turn back the clock any time it suits you. I'm free and I intend to stay free."

She turned to gather her suitcase. Zeke struggled into a sitting position. "Becky, wait! Please!" She started for the front door. "I'll make

it right by you, Becky. Please don't go. I can do it your way."

Rebecca stopped in the doorway, a grey shape framed against the night. "No you can't, Zeke. It's part of your nature. You just...can't."

The shape left the door and revealed early stars.



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# UNEARTHED

## Our Contributors

**PAUL DI FILIPPO** has announced that he is leaving science fiction for greener pastures. He has vowed that "Falling Expectations" is the last SF story he will ever write.

**CHRIS DORNAN**, a native of Scotland, is a third-year journalism student at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. His writing reflects experiences gleaned from a succession of summer jobs as a construction surveyor, an assembly line worker in an escalator plant, and as a laboratory technician for a food processor.

**MIRIAM GREENWALD** has been involved with art and SF for most of her life. She has been teaching art for eight years, and has exhibited her paintings in both solo and group shows. She lives with her family in a suburb of Philadelphia.

**GREG HARPER** has a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Murray State University, in his home state of Kentucky. He currently lives in Radcliff, next door to his birthplace, Pine Grove.

**K.W. MACANN** is a student at the Chicago Circle Campus of the University of Illinois. He is tempo-

rarily unmarried, and lives in Riverdale with his familiar, a black cat named Sebastian.

**TYLER MATTHEWS** is a freelance writer who is currently staying in Boston. During his brief stay here, he has been fired from one job, and has quit two others.

**DANIEL C. SMITH** is a college student (math major), private pilot, Air Force veteran, electronics technician, and computer programmer. He hopes to become an actuary ("a fortune teller with a flare for computers") after graduation. He is married and lives in Park City, Illinois.

**DEBRA THRALL** is presently working for the state of Connecticut as a clerk in a mental hospital. She is single, and describes herself as a feminist and armchair radical. She feels that "Thanatos Coming" says more about her than any further details she could add.

**DANNY WILLIAMS** is a Financial Counselor at a Bay Area hospital. Fantasy, SF, horror, and comic books have been a part of his life as long as he can remember. He lives in Oakland.



