UNEARTH

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"MAN IN VACUUM"
by Chris Dornan

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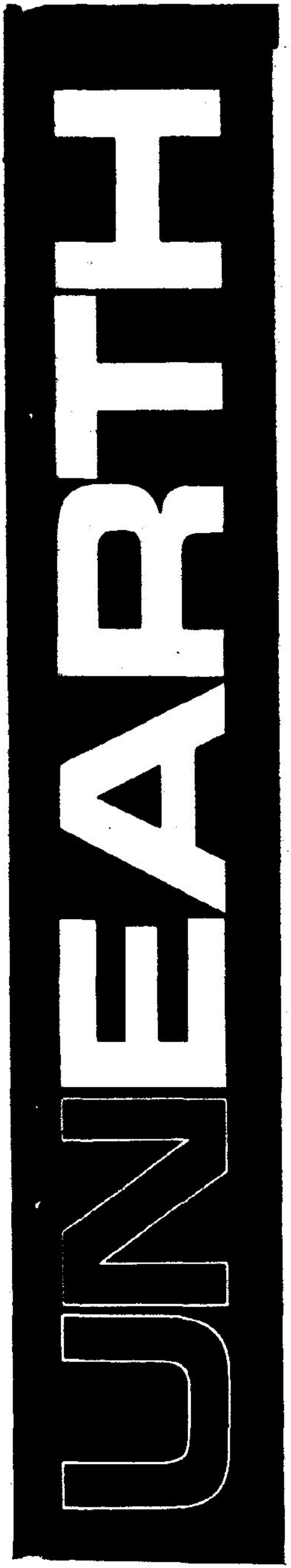

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Unforeseen circumstances delayed the arrival of Harlan Ellison's writing column past press time. It will appear in #3.

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Space collapsing into a bottomless, inescapable gravity well; a puncture in the Universe itself. A black hole, the Bureau official had told him, was no place for an aging author to select for a romantic jaunt. But, for Lee Markham, the hole exerted more than a gravitational attraction. Even now, as the immense power of the hole replaced his original determination with a creeping uncertainty, he felt that old, driving curiosity quell the uneasiness.

Legends are peculiar phenomena. Interest becomes focused on the romance surrounding them; eventually the people and events involved become absorbed by the legends, so that the truth is pushed aside and forgotten. Everyone knew the legend of the Man In Vacuum, but there were not many who knew who the Man was, or how he came to be pinned to the very fabric of the Universe like some oversized collector's specimen.

But Lee Markham knew. The Man's name was Paul Setterfield, and he had been a crewmember of the survey ship "Schwarzchild." During a fly-by of the hole, a computer malfunction had caused one of the ship's drones to collide with the ship, resulting in extensive damage to the fragile sensory navigation unit. Setterfield and another crewman, William Hill, went outside the ship in an attempt to repair the damage. Setterfield's umbilical cord was severed, apparently cut accidentally by his own working laser, and his momentum sent him drifting toward the hole.

At this point, Setterfield must have had some trouble with his handjet, so that by the time he had it working again, he was so close to the hole that its gravitational attraction made it impossible for him to return to the ship. Knowing that the ship's drones had been disconnected from computer control because of the malfunction, and that there was no possibility for a manually-controlled drone rescue at that distance, he used the handjet to propel himself toward the event horizon of the hole, into that region where subjective time slowed down so that, perhaps, he might live long enough for rescue to be effected later. It was this act, the ultimate testimony to the survival reflex, or the ultimate futile gesture, depending on one's point of view, that created the legend of the Man In Vacuum, drifting almost eternally toward a hole in space, like some absurd modern Flying Dutchman.

But rescue never came. With the sensory navigation unit inoperative, the crew of the "Schwarzchild" was unable to tell exactly where Setterfield had been lost, and navigation so close to a black hole was too risky to attempt a costly and haphazard search for a man who was probably already dead.

Until Lee Markham came, although even he did not expect Setterfield to be still alive. There

The dying man had written a mystery
across the face of the universe.
Could Markham read

Man In Vacuum

by Chris Dornan

were always the stories of a man-sized blip on the screens of passing ships, against the backdrop of the hole, and the haunting cries on an unused frequency, but these were for old space hands to mull over in groundside bars late at night. Still, it was impossible to say how far the Man In Vacuum might have drifted towards the event horizon. It was conceivable that his subjective time might have slowed down to such an extent that, after all these years, Paul Setterfield was yet a living legend.

Thus it was that curiosity brought Markham to the hole, in a ship equipped with the latest and most sophisticated sensor drones, to find a man rather than a legend. Plus there was the thrill of coming face to face with the single most powerful force in the Universe, a body with the ability to distort both time and space, a phenomenon which made a mockery of Newtonian physics: a black hole.

But now, as the ship swung around to commence yet another elliptical fly-by, and as the hole itself became visible in its invisibility on the large forward screen, the romance of the venture left him, and he felt, as he did each time he stared into the hole, a cold, gripping fear, and the words of an old miners' song came back to him:

You've never known
The terror of space,
'Til you've sailed
The starless skies.

He shuddered involuntarily. It was so black. And so impersonal. How could he hope to find the body of one man against a background so indifferently powerful? He took his eyes from the screen, and wondered what had passed through the minds of the "Schwarzchild" crew as they watched Setterfield hurtling towards the hole, to be buried alive in the most grandiose of tombs.

The hole engulfed the screen as the ship neared it, lights on the control console going off, indicating that the On-Board Brain had cancelled the fusion drive for the fly-by. Other lights came on to indicate that the sensor drones had been deployed in another search pattern. The ship continued its curving fall toward the hole, and Markham heard echoing in his mind the voice of the official at the Bureau of Navigation Licenses, advising him of the danger and unpredictability of the black hole. But then he thought of the Man In Vacuum, buried in a pressure suit, under the constant pull of the hole, and he knew that someone had to at least look for the man who had so desperately tried to stave off death.

It was then that the board lit up to announce that the drones had located something. This had happened twice before, but on both occasions the find had been a man-sized meteor. Nevertheless, excitement welled within him and he waited, anxiously and impatiently,

for the data from the drones to be fed to the OBB. Green numerals flickered across the screen as the readout began. The object was man-sized, well inside the photon sphere and almost at the event horizon. Markham allowed himself to smile when the images from the drones appeared, forming a hologram. From the screen, clad in an old, bulky pressure suit, Paul Setterfield stared at him, drifting backwards into the hole.

But there was something peculiar about the image. The position of the arms was. . .odd. "Magnification," he commanded. Odd, yes. "Again," he said, focusing the image on the left side of Setterfield's suit at the rib area.

The realization that the Man In Vacuum was very, very dead and that, all those years, he had never been alive, came with the impact of a blow. Paul Setterfield had died alone in space, yes, but not in the manner commonly believed. There, plainly visible in his left side, was a singed and gaping hole. That he might have accidentally cut his own life-line was conceivable, however unlikely, but men did not shoot themselves with their own lasers. In fact, his laser was not in his hand. It dangled, unused, from his tool belt, forcing Markham to accept the fact that the Man In Vacuum had been murdered.

That explained why Setterfield had not communicated with the crew as the hole pulled him away from the ship. Legend had it that he turned off his suit radio in order to spare his crewmates his cries of despair, but Lee Markham knew otherwise. Even if the laser had not been immediately fatal, the weapon had cut through both his side and the radio atached to his tool belt.

But had the wound been immediately fatal? The log of the "Schwarzchild" reported Setterfield propelling himself towards the event horizon, thus creating the legend. Markham examined the body again. With a start, he noticed that Setterfield did not have his handjet! Perhaps, upon being shot with a working laser, he had dropped it. But how, then, had he pushed himself towards the hole?

Markham requested another angle and the image changed. He allowed the image to rotate once more. The left hand, he saw, was at the level of the hole in his side, as if he had been trying to cover it. A useless gesture, Markham thought. The laser must have gone straight through his body; the injury was obviously fatal, although apparently not immediately so.

The right hand was at the air hose from his tanks to his suit. And the hose, Markham realized, had been cut! The section attached to the pressure suit floated free, while the remainder, connected to the air tanks, was held by Setterfield's right hand in a pair of pincers. For some reason Paul Setterfield had cut his own air hose.

Then it occurred to him how Setterfield had propelled himself towards the event horizon of the hole. The only possible explanation was that Setterfield, knowing that he was dying, had consciously and deliberately cut the hose in order to use the escaping air from the tanks to push himself towards the hole.

Perhaps, knowing he was doomed, he wanted to see the inside of a black hole. Preposterous, Markham told himself. Cutting the hose was, based on the position of the arms, his last act. Then was it an act intended to give himself the most magnificent of eternal resting places? No; the hole would have claimed the body eventually in any event.

Lights came on, interrupting Markham's thoughts, and the ship hummed as the fusion drive reengaged. Markham punched in a new course to take him away from the hole. The body of the Man In Vacuum had been found at the event horizon and could never be recovered, which was perhaps just as well. The legend could never persist without the body pinned to the hole.

Markham watched the screens as the drones returned to the ship and the hole receded. He realized that he would probably never know why Setterfield was murdered, or who had killed him. Although he had a copy of the "Schwarzchild" log, it was impossible to tell from it what tensions existed among the crew of four. And without knowing possible motives, he felt incapable of even attempting to deduce the identity of the murderer.

It was unsettling, and he tried to put the matter out of his mind. Nevertheless, it returned to bother him, and eventually he requested a readout of the "Schwarzchild" log from the On-Board Brain.

During the repair operations, he noted, only two men had been outside: Setterfield and Hill. The other two, Calvin Cutter and Samuel Washington, were, at the time, inside the ship, manually controlling the ship's remaining two drones because of the computer malfunction.

Then Hill must have killed Setterfield! He was the only one in a position to do so. The "Schwarzchild" was a large ship, and it was conceivable that both Hill and Setterfield could have been out of the fields of view of both drones for any length of time. He checked the log and found that there had been numerous occasions when the drones were working on the opposite side of the ship from Hill and Setterfield. Of course, Hill stated in the log that when Setterfield was lost he was on the other side of the craft, but he must have been lying. Hill shot Setterfield, Markham decided, then severed his umbilical cord, leaving the hole to swallow the evidence.

And yet, to shoot Setterfield, Hill must have been within sight of his target. He then had to sever the cord, and Setterfield had not died immediately. Why, Markham

asked himself, had Setterfield's last act not been to draw his own laser and fire on the man who had shot him? Why had he, instead, spent his last moments cutting his own air hose? Possibly because Hill was, indeed, on the other side of the ship and was not the murderer.

Markham checked the log once more. Of course! Both drones, being robots used for working outside the ship, were equipped with working lasers. If Setterfield had been shot by a drone, there would have been no point in firing back.

Markham returned to the log. Washington had been operating the Number 1 drone from the bridge, while Cutter controlled Number 2 from auxiliary control. It was possible that one of them had shot Setterfield, using a drone, while Hill and the other drone were out of sight. If so, Setterfield would have known the identity of his killer, since each drone had its number painted on its side. But, of course, the log insisted that both drones were nowhere near Setterfield when the "accident" occurred.

Markham lapsed into depression. Why did just one of them have to be lying? Perhaps they all decided to kill him. Or perhaps two of them committed the crime, doing it in this way to conceal the murder from the other crewmember. And why had Setterfield cut his own air hose? He was already a dead man; what could he have hoped to gain by it?

He decided to attack the problem from another angle. What *had* Setterfield gained by shooting himself into the hole? Markham failed to suppress a bitter chuckle. A hell of a reputation, that's what Setterfield had gained. Christ, he was a legend. He was the Man In Vacuum.

But then Markham realized that that may have been exactly what Setterfield had intended. Had he been deliberately trying to announce, in some way, that his death had not been an accident? Was the act, Markham wondered, a clue to the identity of the murderer?

It was a nice thought, but if the act had been a message, it was incomprehensible to Lee Markham. Try as he might, he could not imagine a link between Setterfield's surrendering himself to the hole, and the identity of the guilty crewmember.

Frustrated, he skimmed the log once again, searching for any type of clue. With furrowed brow, he halted at a strange entry made by Setterfield. He allowed the readout to continue, and noted that it appeared on several occasions. Throughout the log, Setterfield had made repeated reference to a "Hillbilly," but Markham was at a loss to deduce its meaning. A nickname? Of course, it was so obvious Markham marvelled at his own stupidity. William Hill; Bill Hill; Hillbilly.

So, Setterfield played word games. Was that it? Was the clue some type of word association? Black hole, he realized, had the same initials as

Bill Hill. Ridiculous.

But was it possible, Markham wondered, that Setterfield had meant to draw attention, not to himself, but to the hole? With sudden inspiration, Markham punched another readout from the log. Yes, there had been a black aboard the "Schwarzchild": Sam Washington. Was that what Setterfield had been trying mutely to announce? Was he, as his oxygen streamed from the hole in his side and from his severed air hose, screaming, "The black man did it!"?

Pretty flimsy, Markham was forced to admit. But it was all he had. And with his radio destroyed, and the cold of space leaking into his suit, it may have been all that Paul Setterfield had had.

Markham touched the console, requesting one last view of the Man In Vacuum's tomb as he left it for home. As the OBB placed the image on the screen, he gazed into the darkness of the hole and thought once more about William Hill, Calvin Cutter, and Samuel Washington, and about the horrible thing that had happened to Setterfield at the hands of one of them.

Then, quite suddenly, Setterfield reached out to him across the barrier of all those years, and spoke. And, as it dawned on him, Markham wondered what life must have been like for the murderer, waiting constantly for someone to notice, to realize what Setterfield had done, what he was trying to say.

And he imagined Setterfield, his life ebbing away, reaching into history to another, altogether different, black hole, to point his finger in one last, desperate play on words. It was the black hole, he realized. The Black Hole of Cal Cutter.

Markham waved belated congratulations at the Man In Vacuum and turned the ship to head for home.

There are some things the spaceship pilot's manual doesn't deal with, such as how to handle galactic ghosts and Harpo Marx.

Doin' That Tachyon, Doin' That Tachyon, Doin' That Tachyon Rag

by Timothy Robert Sullivan

What Harry saw when he woke up would have made him wet his pants, had he been wearing any. In spite of his fear and discomfort, however, he did not move; instead, he counted his breaths as he had learned in zen training. He was confident that, if he could successfully clear his mind, the vision would turn out to be nothing more than the hangover from a bad dream.

One, inhale — two, exhale — three, inhale — four, exhale — all the way to ten and then back to one, inhale — two, exhale — don't try to ignore it, Harry thought — three, inhale — just focus on the counting and the mind will remain clear — four, exhale — even if these things are milling all around the cabin — five, inhale — Christ, how could he *not* think about it?

They were touching him! Jesus God, they were touching him, examining him like a grapefruit, their wispy appendages playing softly over his skin like summer grass. Harry bit his fingers to avoid screaming, felt the cushion of his beard against his palm and the sharp pain of his own teeth sinking into his flesh; he knew this was no dream.

Count! One, inhale — two, exhale — basic Rinzai and Soto zazen meditation technique — don't allow it to overwhelm you, Harry told himself, there's a rational explanation. . . Losing count, he started from the beginning again; one, inhale — two, exhale —

The Program hadn't counted on anyone boarding the ship while it traveled close to the speed of light; he had been given no instructions on how to deal with such a contingency. How could these beings have penetrated so swift a barrier, he wondered; how could they move

from their own ship to the *Lollipop* without even disturbing his slumber?

"What are you?" he asked, his words echoing. "How did you get aboard?"

The beings transmogrified into graceful but still insubstantial forms; incorporeal, unreal. Harry felt his mind going under. He never should have joined the program, he carped internally. He should have stayed on Earth. . . but someone had to tend the ship while the others were in deep freeze.

"Angels," Harry said, recalling the myths he had been taught as a boy. "You could be angels."

The beings to which he attached mystical significance again changed shape. Their new forms were equally mysterious. His mind was beginning to feel the strain of the voyage, Harry reasoned. . . that's all it was, just the strain. These hallucinations would soon go away.

But they didn't.

In fact, they stayed so long that Harry started talking to them. As time passed, these one-sided conversations occurred more and more frequently. Harry had decided it didn't matter whether the peculiar beings existed or not. Of course, no one else had ever seen such things, as far as he knew. . . unless the Program had kept it a secret — perhaps they thought the star-voyagers who saw the things were mad, he hypothesized. With nothing to do for months at a time but check a few gauges and dials now and then, why, anyone could go around the bend.

"Anyone," Harry said aloud.

* * *

Studying the visitors as they circled about him, appendages linked, Harry compared them to children playing ring-around-the-rosy. No, that wasn't quite right — though childlike, they were as tall as human adults. Since there were three of them, he named them Groucho, Chico, and Harpo.

"Maybe you come from the tachyon part of the Universe," Harry said to the mute Harpo (at least he thought it was Harpo — he could never be sure, for the beings were in a constant state of flux), "and you've found a way to cross over into our part, the tardyon Universe. Of course, it would seem to you that things were the other way around, according to theory. You'd think you're tardyon and I'm tachyon. . .but since the ship is traveling near the speed of light, I'm not sure if that makes sense."

As if in reply, Harpo touched him lightly on his bare shoulder (Harry had stopped wearing clothes, since he was the only conscious human aboard) but said nothing, as always.

"It stands to reason," Harry continued to muse, "that you must have a ship of some kind, or you wouldn't be able to catch up with the *Lollipop*. You couldn't just be floating around in space trying to

hitch a ride, now, could you? Or could you? You are pretty ghostly, come to think of it. Maybe you are capable of something like that."

Silence.

"Where are your brothers?" Harry asked, not having seen the other two aliens for quite some time. "Where are Groucho and Chico?"

Silence.

Harry decided to pass some time by searching the ship for the missing aliens. Past endless data banks he went, under the opaque cryonic shell, around the gleaming, silver tachyon filter — even through the pristine mess, a most unlikely hideout for such unearthly beings. As far as he could determine, they were no longer aboard.

But where, Harry wondered, could they have gone?

"Maybe they do live out in space," he hypothesized. "Maybe they just hang around out there in the dark sucking up subatomic particles to keep them going. Coming inside the ship might be like swimming underwater to them: something they can do for a while, but not indefinitely."

When he returned to his little cabin, however, Harpo was still there, apparently unperturbed by the ship's environment. "Scratch that theory," Harry muttered.

The strange being caressed him like a soft breeze as he entered the cabin.

"Your buddies are gone," Harry said.

It continued to work its digits around his upper extremities. Perhaps, Harry considered, this was a means of communication? A tactile language of some sort? Yes, that was it, a language.

He reached out impulsively and touched the part that most resembled a head.

Nothing happened.

"Well, it doesn't really matter," Harry rationalized. "I suppose you'll be leaving soon, anyway."

Harry, however, had assessed the situation incorrectly.

* * *

Harry dreamed that the alien was clowning and playing the harp, as its namesake had once done. Harry knew of the original Harpo by means of an ancient, flat, colorless tape playing on the durable nursery educator. At six years of age, Harry had watched Harpo and his two fellow lunatics defy authority the way every child would like to.

Growing older, he became familiar with all the Marx Brothers material preserved on tape. He was able to quote passages and sing all the words to the songs, but it was the silent Harpo he always loved best.

It would be wonderful, Harry's dream-self declared, if this being he had playfully named Harpo actually was Harpo Mark. It was, after all, possible that one passed on into another existence after one died, wasn't it? In the dream, Harpo was in Harry's cabin on the *Lollipop*, attired in a patched, baggy costume

and an outlandish red frightwig, playing his harp.

Hearing the tinkle of musical notes, Harry smiled — until he realized he was no longer asleep. For a moment he didn't dare look, but at last resigned himself to the unavoidable. He opened his eyes.

Next to his bunk sat a little man with curly red hair, playing a harp. Harry recognized the tune: Mendelssohn's "Spring Song." The harpist smiled at him ludicrously, eyes bulging like poached eggs.

"It can't be," Harry said, his voice calm. He rolled over on his bunk so that he faced the wall. After a few seconds (in which he failed to count to ten, zazen fashion) he chuckled and turned back to the apparition.

"I get it," he said, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "You're trying to please me. I got an idea across to you after all, huh?" Harry was awed by his own power. His desire to have Harpo with him in the flesh had been the catalyst for creature's transformation. God-like, Harry had created Harpo.

Now that it was done, though, he wished he had given it another name, the name of someone who could talk, preferably.

"Oh well," he said. "At least you'll be funny. Besides, we wouldn't have much to talk about, anyway. . .at least, not until we found some common reference point." He shrugged.

"But come to think of it," Harry reconsidered, shaking an index finger, "if you can change yourself into Harpo, maybe you can do Groucho, too. . .or Chico. . .or anybody else I can dream up."

As if in reply, Harpo withdrew a bicycle horn from inside his voluminous crazy-quilt coat, and honked it in a most undignified manner.

* * *

Several hours elapsed, during which Harry passed from a state of mild euphoria into a brown study. From there it was all downhill: frustration leading to agonizing despair. He had tried again and again to make the being understand he wanted it to change into someone he could communicate with, but to no avail.

Indeed, when he illustratively stuck out his tongue at one point, Harpo had nearly snipped its end off with a pair of outsized scissors. The implications of this action frightened Harry, who was naked, as usual. He considered putting on a pair of pants until the offending scissors vanished into thin air. They weren't real, he reassured himself, they couldn't hurt him. He hoped.

Of course, the original Harpo Mark could speak, but, never having heard him, Harry had no idea what the comedian sounded like. Maybe he talked like Groucho, he ventured. I'll touch the alien again, he decided, and simultaneously think of Groucho's voice.

He stepped behind Harpo, who was laboring manfully over a

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Gershwin piece. Putting his palms forward and placing them lightly behind the harpist's comically immense ears, Harry imagined Groucho saying. "I've really enjoyed talking to you, but now it's time to play 'You Betcha Life.'"

Yes, the later Groucho would be much easier to contend with than the earlier, more nihilistic, version of the films. Harry squeezed shut his eyes and concentrated on the humorist's arch tones as if his life depended on it. An image of Chico appeared fleetingly in his mind's eye, but he redoubled his effort to think only of Groucho.

After a few moments of zazen-like intensity, he removed his hands and backed slowly out of the cabin. He would go and get something to eat, thought a smug Harry. He was confident that when he returned Harpo would be waiting to converse with him, employing Groucho's inimitably pungent wit. The best of both worlds.

* * *

The new incarnation was like Harpo, and yet it was not. It sometimes had a moustache and quipped extemporaneously — brilliant one-liners, hilarious in spite of the situation — while taking on the barest trace of an Italian accent — Chico. All three Marx Brothers in one package. On the whole it was nightmarish. *At least,* Harry thought ambivalently, *it can talk.*

"How did you get aboard this ship?" he demanded.

"You call this a ship?" the apparition countered, chomping an enormous cigar. "I once had a goil with a hold this size. Her father never got a hold of me, unfortunately for me, so she married a pickle salesman. They lived happily ever after . . .come to think of it, she didn't have a bad after, either."

"Where did you come from?" Harry asked exasperatedly.

"Well, boss," it said, "Mr. Hack-in-a-bush, he say I come strictly from a-hunger. But where I come-a from, there's-a no such-a thing as a free lunch. Right, boss?"

The phantasmagorical form once again grew a moustache. "And speaking of hunger," came the riposte, "you'll be all right as long as you stay away from the sheriff's daughter (she's such a wonderful cook), because there's nothing woise than an irate sheriff. . . reminds me of that old favorite (breaking into song): 'When Irate Eyes Are Smiling. . . .'"

Harry sought refuge in another part of the ship.

* * *

"It has to be a clearly drawn personality," Harry said. "If I give him a confused mental image he'll give me an equally confused personality." He eyed the implausible figure as it capered about, mutating randomly as it danced.

"Who can I get it to be?" he asked himself, and that gave him an idea. "Why not? I'll get it to look and

talk like me. It should be a snap with me standing right in front of the thing."

He approached the being.

"So you call yourself a star-voyager," it deadpanned. "Well, I like my cigar as much as you like this ship, but I take it out now and then. . . .and speaking of going out, why don't you—"

"Please," Harry said. "I'm going to try to communicate with you again." He put his hands to the shifting planes of its faces.

"Me," he stated. "Me."

This time he didn't have to wait. "Me," his own voice repeated. "Me." In front of him was a mirror image, perfect to the last detail: dark beard, deep-set eyes, hollow cheeks, thinning hair.

"Can you understand what I'm saying?" Harry asked it.

"Yes," the doppleganger said, as if in a trance.

"Where do you come from?" he inquired, believing he was getting somewhere at last.

"Why," it said, raising its eyebrows, "I come from Passaic, New Jersey. You ought to know that."

"No," Harry argued. "No. *I* come from Passaic. Not you."

"But I am you," it told him.

"Oh, *no* you're not."

"Oh, *yes* I am," it insisted.

* * *

Harry dived into the pool. After a few laps, some meditation, he decided. It would help him think things out. As he swam the length of the pool, he wondered if the alien was playing with him, if it understood his loneliness. Perhaps it would cooperate if it realized how severe his mental condition was, how much he had deteriorated. He had to make it understand.

Climbing out of the water, he briskly toweled himself dry. Then he faced the wall and sat down, twisting his limbs into the lotus position. He swung his torso from side to side until he found his center of gravity. Now he was prepared to meditate.

Harry was glad zazen had been included in the training schedule. It had probably given him the fortitude to make it this far, he reflected. The alien was driving him out of his mind.

One, inhale — two, exhale — three, inhale — how could he talk to this creature? — four, exhale — perhaps if he brought it back to its original, wispy embodiment — five, inhale — he sure wasn't getting anywhere talking to it as long as it insisted it was him — six, exhale — but how did he know the ethereal incarnation he had first seen was the real alien? — seven, inhale — no, he had to go beyond that — eight, exhale — yes, that was it; he would demand the alien's original, true self — nine. . . .

Harry leaped to his feet, forgetting the meditation, and ran to the passageway in search of the alien.

He found the odd being, as usual, in his cabin. It was intent upon a

rendition of 'The Flight of the Bumblebee,' transposed for the harp. The frowning Harpo could not master the intricacies of the piece, try as it might.

"Harpo," Harry said. "It's time to — hey! Wait a minute! You're not supposed to be Harpo anymore, you're supposed to be me!"

A queasy Harry watched the alien elongate, losing pounds of flesh in the process; he saw a curly, dark beard fill in; he stared into his own, non-committal eyes.

"So you've got a new trick, have you?" he shouted. "You led me to believe you were stuck in whatever form I suggested. You wanted me to believe I had some power over you, didn't you? Well, goddamn it, I refuse to be trifled with anymore. Do you hear me?"

Incredibly, the face he was screaming into now resembled the face of his ex-wife, Alicia. Harry hadn't seen her since the divorce, a year before he left Earth, but here she was.

"Don't use that tone of voice with me, you bastard!" Alicia shrieked. "Just who the hell do you think you are, anyway? I could have married guys with money, class, and what did I get? Harry Bloom, galactic explorer." Her voice dripped with sarcasm.

"More like galactic meter reader," Harry responded, self-effacingly. "But never mind that. I'm almost glad to see you. . .even if you aren't real."

While Alicia disdainfully stared him down, her green eyes blazing, Harry wondered where the harp had gone. It amazed him that the alien could produce such props out of nowhere.

"You're pretty fucking powerful," he said, marvelling.

"You better believe I am, toots." His wife's shrillness persisted. "If you cross me up again, I'll screw you to the goddamn wall."

"Are you playing, or are you serious?" Harry asked, frowning. "You're so much like Alicia. Are you just imitating her, or are you actually threatening me?"

The compact female figure remained silent, radiating frigid contempt, arms crossed, while one foot tapped an unsettling cadence. Harry had to look around the little cabin to remind himself he was not back on Earth, engaged in a typical donnybrook with his one-time spouse. Uncanny.

"I came here to persuade you to change back to the way you were when you came aboard. . .that is, when I first saw you," said a visibly flustered Harry. "No. Beyond that point, actually. I want to — to get to know you as you really are, you see —"

"It's goddamn well about time!" Alicia screamed, cutting short his words. "Ten years of marriage and now you want to get to know me as I really am," she said, hurling a plate of spaghetti in his direction. As he ducked, Harry wondered if he would have felt it, had it collided

with his head.

"If you keep this up much longer," he said, I'm going to start believing you *are* my ex-wife."

Alicia broke down and sobbed, tears rolling down her cheeks in big drops. "You never cared about me," she moaned. "All you ever cared about was the Galactic Program." She drew out the last syllable until it became a piercing wail.

At times like these, Harry recalled, he had never known what to say to Alicia. If he tried to touch her, or even go near her, she would fly into another rage. This time, however, things were different.

"But you're not really her," he said. "You're either a dream or some alien life-form — one of those two things and nothing more. You're not Alicia."

The feminine form stopped its sniffling and began to change. It quivered and fuzzed around the edges; it shrank and was squat; it did a soft shoe. A toad wearing a vest was tap dancing in Harry's cabin.

"Which is it, Harry?" the toad croaked. "Dream or reality — take your pick."

"I'll tell you what," Harry replied, removing a heavy clay sculpture from a shelf. "I'll smash you with this statuette a few times and we'll see whether it leaves fairy dust or guts."

"Now, let's not be hasty," the toad said, looking a bit uneasy.

"Listen." Harry smiled malevolently. "I'll beat you to a slimy pulp if you don't tell me what I want to know."

"Just what is it you want to know?" the toad asked innocently.

"I want to know what you are," Harry said. "I want to see. your true self."

"This is it."

"I don't believe you," Harry said, hefting the statue threateningly.

"Honestly, Harry," the toad said, cringing. "This is my natural form."

"You're not bullshitting me?" Harry asked, lowering the blunt *objet d'art* a trifle.

"Right. This is the body I was born with." It ran its webbed fingers demonstratively down its sides.

"How do you change your shape?"

"Easy. Where I come from there are quite a few intelligent species, not just one as on your planet. My ancestors developed what you might call cellular elasticity so we could compete with some of the larger, more violent races on the planet."

"Makes sense," Harry grunted.

"Yeah," the toad agreed. "And, as we grew more intelligent, you see, we gained more control over this natural camouflage — added subtlety, nuances — until we brought it to the present state of the art."

"I guess I can buy that," Harry said. "But how did you make things appear and disappear? Like the harp?"

"Suggestion." It shrugged. "I can pretty much tell what you expect

to see."

"Because you can read my thoughts?"

"Indeed," the toad said, swelling with pride. "Well, actually I decipher the energy you send out from the association centers in your cerebral cortex. It's a recent development, as these things go. In fact," it said confidentially, "our evolutionary theorists believe it's the final stage, but that remains to be seen.

"Anyway, knowing a being's most intimate thoughts and desires makes manipulation easy."

"Not so easy this time," Harry said arrogantly, placing the statuette back on the shelf. "You've never dealt with humans before, have you? I'll bet you never imagined —" As he turned around his words were cut short by the sight of a monstrous saurian head lolling hideously in the cramped room.

"Never imagined what?" the monster roared interrogatively.

"Jesus H. Christ!" Harry exclaimed.

The monster licked its chops, jaws slavering.

"Hold on," Harry reasoned aloud. "There's nothing but a head. "It's got to be suggestion again — a fake."

"Are you willing to bet on that?" the dinosaur asked him in a voice that rumbled through teeth as big as Harry's fists.

"Indeed," said the intrepid Harry. "Yes, indeed I am." He approached the scaly head.

"You *are*?"

"Disappointed, huh?"

"You just aren't any fun, Harry," the monster sighed, returning itself to the ephemeral shapelessness it inhabited when it first boarded the *Lollipop*. "You're a lousy audience."

"Well?" demanded Harry.

"All right, you win," said the alien. "Touch me."

Harry touched it.

There was a surge — a force — of pure organic energy; a pulsing lifeform, elusive, but no less real than Harry's more material body. It was beautiful; exquisite.

"My God," Harry gasped.

The alien continued to perform its life functions between his palms.

"So this is the real you," Harry said distantly, his mind experiencing the teeming planet of the alien's birth.

"That form you just appeared in, the one you come on board with," Harry asked. "What was it?"

"That intriguingly spectral form belongs to a race from a planet orbiting an immense sun. I was with a shipful of them just before discovering the *Lollipop*."

"Why did you stay like that?" Harry wondered aloud. "Why didn't you change into something familiar to reassure me?"

"It's not my job."

"Job?"

"Yes. You know — what I do? Work? Employment? Job?"

"Do you mean to tell me," said

an astounded Harry, "that your job is to board any ship traveling through the Milky Way and fuck people's heads up like this?"

"Milky Way?"

"Yeah. You know." It was Harry's turn to be sarcastic. "The Galaxy," he said.

"This Galaxy?"

"Right."

"Then this *is* the wrong one! I can tell by the image of it in your mind — the wrong galaxy."

"Holy shit! You mean you come from another galaxy!"

"You can't possibly be from a member world," the alien moaned.

"Member? Member of what?"

"The Group," it said distractedly. "I guess the others were right."

"Group? Others? What in the name of Christ are you talking about?"

"The others — they said there was something wrong — they told me you weren't from a Group World. No wonder you were so hostile. You didn't know what I was doing."

"I still don't see. . . ." Harry trailed off.

"I noticed this ship was a bit primitive. But I never imagined —"

"Will you please tell me what you're talking about?" Harry demanded vociferously, tearing at his hair.

"Only if you promise not to get angry. You've got quite a temper, you know."

"Anything," Harry ranted. "Just tell me what's going on."

"Well, it seems we wandered off limits. The others suspected it, but I harumphed and stayed, like a good entertainer. Little did I know."

"Did you say entertainer?"

"Right."

Harry's jaw sagged.

"Well." the alien said. "I've got to get going. "Only members of the Group can have free entertainment."

"Entertainment!" Harry beat his brow. "You call this entertainment?"

"Why sure, Harry. And I'm pretty good at it, if I do say so myself. What d-d-do you think of uh-*the*-uh, uh-*the*-uh, uh-this one?" it said, turning into a pig with four-fingered cartoon hands, and wearing a bow tie and jacket.

"Jesus God!" Harry bellowed. "Here I am sitting around meditating to keep from going berserk and all the time you were just trying to entertain me?"

"Uh-*the*-uh, uh-*the*-uh, uh-that's right," said the pig, beginning to fade from sight.

"But how did you get aboard? You never told me."

D-d-d-d-disassembled atoms c-c-c-carried on t-t-t-tach-t-tachyon particles."

Harry gaped.

"R-r-r-r-r-race you out of the g-g-g-galaxy on a t-t-t-t-tach-tach-t-t-t-faster than light particle," the porcine vision said merrily, now barely visible.

"Wait!" Harry shouted in spite

of himself. "Don't go! I've enjoyed your company. It *has* been fun. Honest. Don't leave me alone again. Please."

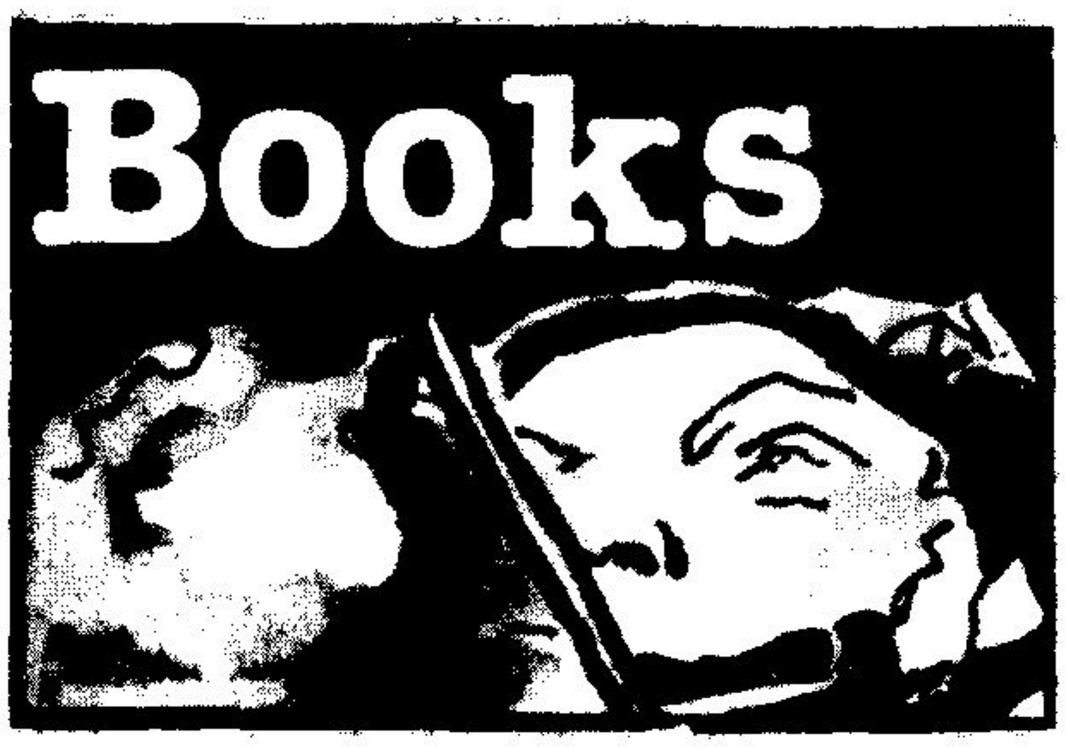
"Y-y-y-you're an interesting b-b-b-b-bio-biolog-b-b-b-b- — an interesting life-form y-y-y-youself, H-H-Harry," it stammered. "B-b-but I've r-r-really g-g-got to g-g-go. S-s-sorry."

"Don't you have anything else to say?" Harry pleaded desperately. There would be no other companionship until Epsilon Eridani. Perhaps, if he could convince the alien of the importance of this first inter-galactic meeting, it would stay. He must try.

"Don't you," he implored, "have anything to add?"

"Sure," the grinning pig said, just before it winked out.

"Uh-*the*-uh, uh-*the*-uh, uh-that's all, folks."



Terence M. Green
Tyler Matthews

A Scanner Darkly by Philip K. Dick (Doubleday, Jan. 1977, $6.95, 220 pp.)

The new Philip Dick book is out.

We have a new novel by one of the most fascinating writers that the field has produced — by a writer who has won the Hugo Award for Best Novel (1963) and the John W. Campbell Award for Best Novel (1975); the new novel by the man who has captured the minds and attention of the academic world — having donated his manuscripts and papers to the Special Collections Library, California State University, Fullerton — and who has shared with Ursula K. LeGuin the distinction of having an entire issue of an academic journal filled with scholarly observations regarding his fiction ("Science Fiction Studies" March 1975); by the man who has had at least one entire book devoted to his writing (*Philip K. Dick: Electric*

Shepherd, ed. by Bruce Gillespie, Norstrilia Press, Melbourne), one chapbook (*Philip K. Dick and the Umbrella of Light*, by Angus Taylor, TK Graphics, Baltimore), and sundry other analyses and appreciations in both the professional and fan press. (I myself have even humbly tried to convey a parallax view on Dick, adopting a somewhat Dickian persona for the task, in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW 17...)

He fascinates as he perplexes as he frustrates.

If the book at hand were to appear from the pen of an unknown writer, we would all be reasonably impressed with the display of technical skill and the depth of feeling conveyed throughout the book; it would be free to stand on its own, and we would await further from this writer. But from the pen of Philip Dick, it must, of necessity, stand (ultimately) amidst his works, and invite comparison. It will also, inevitably, stand in light of what we know and what Dick has told us of his own personal experiences. In this particular book there is even an "Author's Note," an epilogue, which attests to this fact.

A bit of simplistic plot summary first —

The novel concerns the drug subculture as it exists in a future USA. The place is — as always with Dick — California (this *is* the world for Dick); the time is summer, 1994. But you can be sure that what appears to be a future vision is really about what Dick believes is *now* — or, in this case, the mid and late 60's.

The protagonist is an undercover narcotics agent, Fred, who uses as his alter-ego the name Bob Arctor. To maintain his cover, Arctor must take dope, and in so doing eventually destroys himself by becoming an addict and suffering permanent brain damage; he becomes, as Dick notes near the book's end, a vegetable among vegetables, working on a farm. The paranoid twist that is so characteristic of Dick's work emerges at the end when we discover that the farm on which he is employed is covertly growing the dope which addicted him.

What Dick has here is probably the ultimate SF book about drugs. And it is Dick's avowed intention to illustrate the absolutely destructive nature of drug addiction; yet it is just this intention that distinguishes this book's treatment of drugs from the treatment Dick has previously given to the subject in his other books. Dick wants us to be frightened and appalled at the physical and mental damage that can result from prolonged drug use and addiction, and this intention becomes overtly didactic in this book. As a result of this too-overtly preachy and didactic approach to his topic, the vision is not as frightening as it might have been.

Let me try to explain this another way.

Dick's previous literary use of drugs *was* often quite frightening

because he made it sound appealing or irrelevantly casual or harmless in his future societies; the characters often were not aware of how easily they were deluded — and we were uncertain as well, thus adding to our apprehension. But in this book he shows and tells us that drug abuse is absolutely destructive — something I believe I *already* know. Thus, the vision is not as frightening as many of his previous ones (the casual way that people pop pills in *Our Friends From Frolix 8*, for instance, *is* quite frightening because it is presented without comment, and at times *humorously.*)

Dick assumes we need drug education. Well, I concede that many obviously do need such education. But I would counter that those who are most in need of such education are not, I believe, to be found among the readers of his books. Surely they are, for the great part, a completely different audience. The readers of his fiction look for something else altogether.

There is nothing in the world of the novel *except* drugs, dopers and narks. This does not ring true to me as a reader, nor does it comply with my personal experience of reality. It is *Dick's* reality we are exploring here, a very real subculture, very limited in scope, and not to be taken as metaphor (as were his previous visions).

This book is Dick's *personal* catharsis regarding his involvement in the drug scene. The subculture obviously became the world for *him.* Ultimately, I am not convinced it relates to the rest of us.

Now — does all this add up to a condemnation of the novel?

The answer is "no."

The book is an organic and well-structured whole. Its plotting lacks the suspense that has previously operated so well in many of his books, but at the same time it is deliberately and subtly convoluted in the best Dickian tradition. There are the zany characters — crazies among the best of them. There are the ever-refreshing touches of the absurd — such as Jim Barris making a silencer for his pistol that is eventually louder than the original noise — or receiving secret federal funds via a Dr. Pepper machine. And there are some absolutely first-rate bits of writing — such as the episode in chapter 7 wherein the authorities begin to determine that Fred is commencing his schizophrenic state via the tape that they have procured of a round-robin discussion about a 10 speed bicycle.

There are metaphors and parallels and thing that could be interpreted as symbols throughout the book, all of which add to the appreciation and enjoyment of the novel and the writing. The ever-present Dick themes are here too: multiplicity as confusion as evil; man's inability to determine what is real or "true"; man's entrapment in his own machinations.

Within its own limited scope, the

book is excellent. It is merely the self-limitations of the scope and the slightly too-serious approach to the subject matter that hold the book back from being more.

Dick's power lies in his wit and in his use of the accoutrements and paraphernalia of the traditional SF story in a new and surprising (and often absurd) way. Suspense and mystery have their place in his fiction too. In this book there is too little of the aforementioned items.

I am reminded of two other books when I contemplate *A Scanner Darkly*. It recalls Dick's non-SF novel *Confessions of a Crap Artist* — a fascinating yet not terribly powerful book; and Disch's *Camp Concentration* — for its single-minded, dogged (yet well-done and limited) pursuit of a single idea to its bitter end. (Is it a coincidence that Dick is on record as an admirer of Disch's book?)

Dick is still one of the field's important talents. Don't let me deter you from reading this book. On the contrary — do read it. Read it as yet another changing stage in the career of a major talent.

I don't think it is as successful a novel as *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*, the last entry of Dick's into the field; but it does show a progression — one that commenced with that book — toward darker, more sombre visions.

Philip Dick has stated in a recent interview (*SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW* 19) that *A Scanner Darkly* is his masterpiece — the only one he feels he will ever write. I invite you to compare it with *The Man in the High Castle*, the 1963 Award winner, the one that *I* still consider to be his masterpiece. I submit that it will emerge wanting in comparison. The canvas is much smaller here in 1977.

Terence M. Green

Who's Who in Science Fiction by Brian Ash. Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc., 1976. 220 pp.

It's a pleasure for a reviewer to come across a book of exceptional quality, whether it be good or bad. It gives him a chance to perform a real service for the reader, in the form of an endorsement or a warning.

In this case, I'm delighted to inform you that you can save $8.95 easily and painlessly, merely by not picking up on the exquisitely dreadful book identified above.

It's a genuine turkey.

That's a shame, too, because *Who's Who* could have been a valuable addition to a field where there is a dearth of biographical/bibliographical books. A comprehensive, encylopedia-style listing of SF writers, authors, and editors, priced so that everyone could afford it, would have been most welcome. Had it been at all carefully and lovingly prepared, the

book's price alone would have guaranteed that it would fill a large gap in the SF reference shelf. (Good books of this kind *are* available, but they're quite expensive.)

Unfortunately, however, Ash's *opus* is sprinkled with so many inaccuracies, omissions, typos, and misleading statements, that it can't be considered a reliable source of information. Let's consider excerpts from several of the entries in *Who's Who*, and you'll see what I mean.

Samuel R. Delany is described as "a negro." A good start, that. At the end of the sketch, Ash says, "To date, Delany has written few short stories, but has at least one collection: *Driftglass.*" Well, how many collections of stories *has* Delany published? "At least one"? Ash is supposed to find this sort of thing out, not guess and hedge about it.

Harlan Ellison. *The Last Dangerous Visions* most definitely did *not* appear in 1976, as Ash states.

Damon Knight. In a list of important anthologies edited by Knight, *A Science Fiction Argosy* — certainly one of his major ones — is omitted.

Ash blithely claims that Ursula K. Le Guin's "contributions to the sf field have all been made during the last ten years." They go back at least to 1962, maybe even further back. If I had to name the exact date, you can be damn sure I'd check it. Where did Ash get this kind of misinformation? Didn't he bother to verify his facts?

He says that Barry Malzberg is "a recent arrival," which is accurate enough, I guess, but he makes no mention of the work Malzberg did as K. M. O'Donnell.

Alexei Panshin. Ash states that there are two Anthony Villiers novels; there are three that I know of. Not a monumental error, perhaps, but an error, nonetheless.

In his list of Edgar Pangborn's books, he omits *Davy*. The list is hardly exhaustive — he only mentions a couple of novels. Still, it seems strange that he would not mention one of Pangborn's two most important books.

Rod Serling is still among the living, according to *Who's Who*. (He died in the autumn of 1975; Pangborn, who died early last year, is given a proper burial.) Beyond that, the book gives no indication at all that he ever did anything other than *The Twilight Zone*.

Ash summarizes Robert Silverberg's Nebula-winner, "Good News from the Vatican," by saying it "ends with a robot becoming Pope." Of Norman Spinrad's novel, *Bug Jack Barron*, he says that it "tells of an organization which preserves humans in liquid helium against the day when physical immortality might be achieved." Well, yeah, technically he's right in

(cont. on pg. 36)

Nocturne

Life clings to each of us in different ways.
Some are chained to the present,
Some are shrouded by the past,
And then there are others. . .

by David Frieze

A tiny section of the universe surrounded by twilight and ornamented with darkening brown trees — a smooth hill of grass dropping to the edge of a stream. Softly she pressed her way through the foliage, looking back once to say, "Andrew? Are you still there?"

"I'm here," came a hoarse voice, and two shrubs were edged apart to make room for a diminutive Caliban. "Wait up for me."

"Hurry up," she replied, padding through the gentle grass towards the stream. "We don't have much time."

Humpbacked Andrew's mismade legs kicked each other in their attempt to run, and with a lot of huffing and puffing he collapsed himself on the streambank. "Beat you," he panted as she drew near.

"You're very quick," she said, laying the picnic basket in a crook formed by two treeroots and removing, with all the grace with which she did anything, the violet shawl from her shoulders. "I'd never beat you in a race."

Andrew gave a snarled laugh and lumbered into a sitting position. "Women can't run like men anyway. Women can't do nothing like men."

"Can *you* remember tomorrow?" she said with her teasing smile.

Andrew stuck out his tongue. "Most women can't do that neither. And I'll bet some men can too!"

"All right, Andrew," she said, as if capitulating, and leaned back into the hollow of a tree. A soft splash; they turned to look. A frog had jumped into the stream, shattering tiny fragments of twilight.

"What food did you bring?" Andrew asked.

"Not yet. Not until he comes."

"Well I just want to know what *kind*."

"Some oranges and bananas, a loaf of bread, some cheese, and a bottle of German wine, the kind you like."

Andrew's sable eyes widened: "Oh — oh let me just have a glass! Just a glass!"

"No." She held up her forefinger and shook it a couple of times. "Not until he comes. It's for him, too."

Andrew sulked, turning away from her and staring beyond the stream at nothing. "What'll *he* want it for?" he muttered.

She sighed. "All right. But just *one*."

Andrew shrugged. "Don't want it now."

She smiled again, although he couldn't see it. "Well, if you don't want it now, I guess that means you won't want it later, so he and I will share it ourselves. All right?"

Andrew trembled a little; then he turned about again and scrabbled over to her. "Okay. I'll just have *one* glass now."

She shut her eyes and tipped her head once, then removed the cover

from the picnic basket and took out a small plastic glass and a large brown bottle with a snowcapped mountain on the label. As she fumbled through the basket in search of the corkscrew, a cracking sound rushed through the trees.

She said: "Sssh!" quietly, and Andrew sat back and held his breath.

The sound approached them slowly: a noise of twigs snapped and shrubbery swept aside. A hand burst through a dense patch of foliage to their left. It groped for a branch, found one and pushed it aside. A curtain of plants parted and before them stood a man: tall, neatly if thinly constructed, his hair dark and disheveled, his eyes dark and astonished, his clothing unremarkable and a little dated. He stood as still as a tree when he saw them before him. One of his hands was empty; the other clutched a rope.

She presented him with her smile. "Hello."

Her greeting was that of one old friend meeting another, and he opened his mouth, shut it, looked at her, looked at Andrew, who was observing him with disdainful curiosity, and looked at her again. "Who the hell are you?"

Always smiling, she extended her arm towards the picnic basket. "Would you like to sit down and have something to eat with us first?" And, almost coquettishly, with a little beckoning twitch of the head, she shook back a stray strand of hair from her eyes.

He sighed in amazement. "What are you doing here? How did you find out I was coming here?"

"She knew," Andrew growled, trying vainly to lift his knoblike head so that it was above his hump. "She always knows what's gonna happen the next day although," his face was bent by an evanescent grin, "she ain't too good at telling about yesterday."

"Andrew," she warned, glancing once at her companion (once was always enough) and returning her gaze to the newcomer, who had been edging away slowly in fear until now his feet were ankle-deep in the stream. "Look out," she said, pointing. "The water's pretty quick here at night. Don't get in too deep. Come on back here and join us."

He shook his head with terrified slowness. The glittering water danced and crashed against his boot, picked up the rope's dangling tip and bounced it on its surface like a toy.

"What do you want with me?" he asked.

"Oh," in a mock-chiding voice, "stop asking all those questions and come sit down with us. I have bread and cheese and wine and fruit."

"Let me die in peace," he said.

"Eat with us first . . . please? This is my way of meeting people."

He stared at her and at

grotesque little Andrew for a long while, almost long enough for the sun to take its final plunge. Hardly knowing what he did, he stepped out of the stream, laid down his rope where he knew he could reach it in a hurry, and seated himself gingerly. "I'm not hungry."

"Well, have a little wine then," she replied, unfolding a large white cloth and setting on it the wine and the glasses and all the rest of the food. "We'd better hurry. Pretty soon it will be too dark to see what we're doing." She filled a glass with wine that danced and glittered like the stream in the dying light. Handing the glass to him: "Your name is Steven, right? I ask that because you look like someone else named Steven that I met about about two months from now."

Shivering, he put the glass down. "You know my name. Who put you up to this?" He started to rise.

Andrew threw out his huge hand and grabbed Steven's knee. "Sit down. No one put her up to this. This is her idea. So sit down."

"Andrew, can't you be polite? I'm sorry, Steven," she said quietly. "I shouldn't have thrown that at you like that, my knowing your name. I'm not much good at tact today."

"Or any day," Andrew informed her.

"Really?" she asked. "Funny . . . I thought I'd be a fairly tactful person, in some ways at least."

"Please," Steven almost wept, "I don't understand a word of any of this. You know my name, you knew I was going to come here, so you probably know why I'm here. So can't you just let me do what I came here for?"

"Have some wine first" — handing him his glass again. "And some bread if you like. It's home-baked."

He had to surrender, and accepted a large chunk of warm white bread. "How did you know I was going to come here?"

She took a long sip of wine, bending back her head while her stomach tingled with the warmth, and she drew designs on the plastic glass with her long, elegant forefinger. "Hmm . . . now Andrew, does everyone ask me that question?"

His mouth stuffed with food, Andrew nodded vigorously.

"How do I answer them?"

Andrew swallowed his food convulsively, twitching his arms and legs and making terrible faces. "Different answer each time. Sometimes you make up a story."

"Oh, I don't!" Shocked. "Lie?"

"Not lying. Just sort of making up a story. Sometimes they don't believe you." He grinned at a memory.

"Oh well . . ." — sighing. "Steven, this isn't easy for me to figure out either, so I'm afraid you'll just have to bear with me. I've got some sort of talent, or affliction, which lets me remember

the future as well as other people remember the past. I have no idea what happened yesterday, and only a little idea what happened even an hour ago, because the past fades so quickly that soon it doesn't exist for me any more than the future does for anyone else. That's why I'm lucky to have Andrew." She caressed his stringy hair. "He's about the only constant I have."

Andrew looked as if he wanted to sink his head into his hump. "Cut it out. I'm no *constant,* whatever that is."

"It means you're always there. You know about my — whatever it is — and you can keep me in touch with the past." She smiled, and continued to smooth down his hair.

"How do I come into the picture?" Steven asked, going along with her story only to forestall any more long explanations.

"Oh. Well, I remember seeing the story about you hanging yourself here in next week's newspaper, and my curiosity got the better of me. I live near here anyway . . . don't I?" She turned to Andrew. "I haven't moved yet, have I?"

"Not in the last three months or so."

"No. I remember my house as I live in it tomorrow, but I have no idea if I was living in it yesterday." She smiled a little ruefully.

"You still haven't answered my question," Steven said.

"I suppose I haven't. Would you like some cheese? It's very good. Now," she continued, licking the taste of the cheese from her fingertips, "I came here, I think, to talk to you."

"About what?" Steven's glance flickered to the rope lying nearby on the grass.

"About why you're gonna hang yourself," Andrew replied ingenuously, rocking forward on his froglike legs and pulling off another chunk of bread.

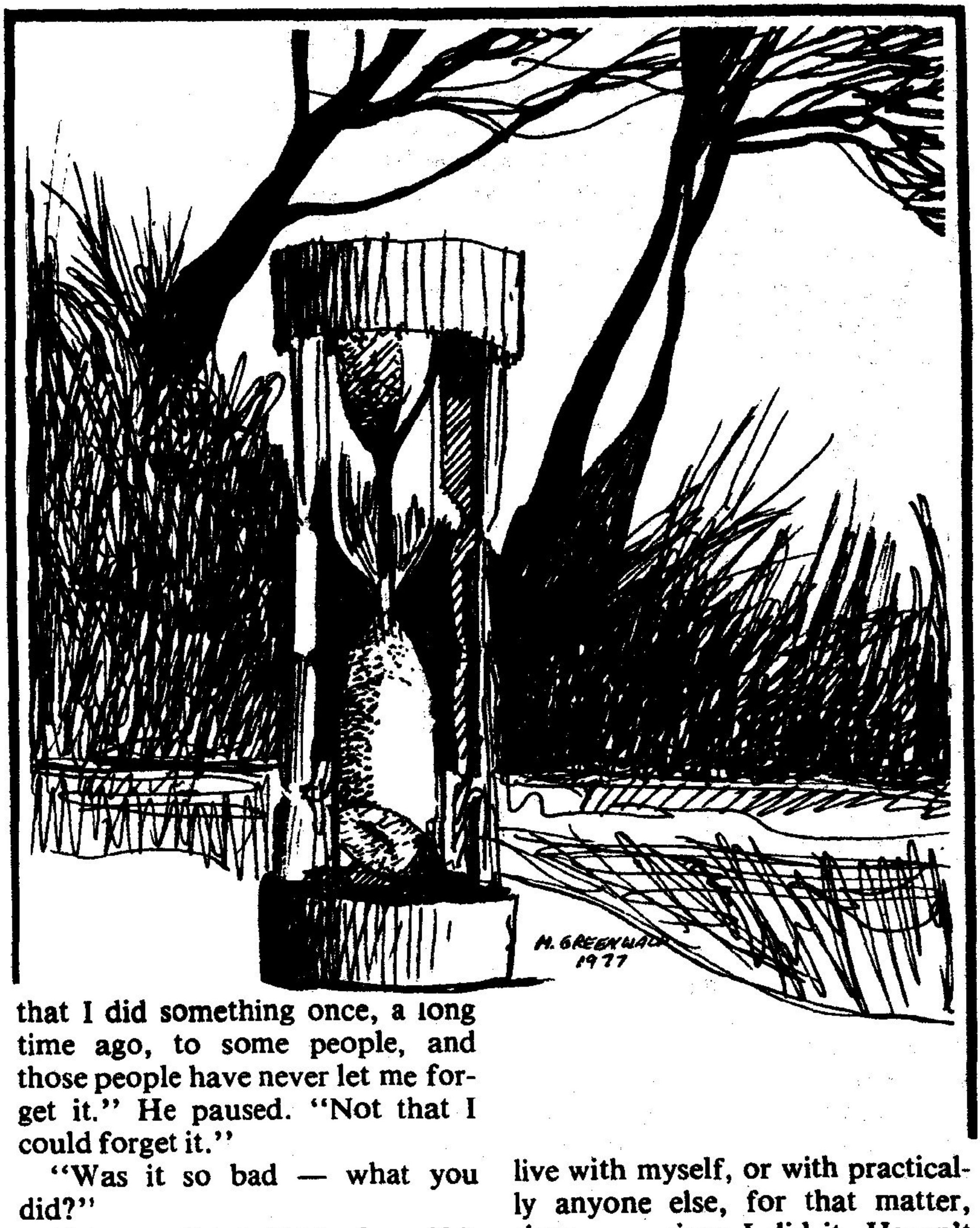
She shook her head in irritation. "Andrew, you're rude."

"Well he *is*," Andrew insisted.

She said nothing, lovingly sipping her wine. Steven's dark eyes squinted with anger. "You're going to try to talk me out of it, aren't you?"

"No," she replied. "No. Not if you don't want me to. It wouldn't do any good anyway. I can change the future about as effectively as you can change the past. But your death is going to mystify a lot of people. So this is only for my own curiosity. I promise I won't tell anyone." She shook the hair out of her face — a heavy breeze had risen and seemed to take pleasure in disarranging the duskdark lengths of her hair — and she gazed at Steven with interest. "Why are you going to hang yourself?"

After a long silence, underscored by the swishing stream and the breeze brushing past the shrubbery, Steven sighed. "Let's just say



that I did something once, a long time ago, to some people, and those people have never let me forget it." He paused. "Not that I could forget it."

"Was it so bad — what you did?"

"Do you think I'd be here if it wasn't?" He had raised his voice then, only a little bit. Turning his head away: "I haven't been able to live with myself, or with practically anyone else, for that matter, since . . . since I did it. Haven't been able to wake up in the morning and look forward to the rest of the day. The rest of my life. So if

you'll excuse me." He leaned over, snatched up the rope, and got to his feet.

"You're going to do it here," she announced nonchalantly, and pointed to a nearby tree. The bank next to the tree dropped sharply a few feet to the water. One of its branches reached across the stream and stood motionless in the breeze.

"It's very strong, I suppose."

"Then the rope snaps a coupla days later," said Andrew, "and you go plop into the water and they find you a few days later washed up in some place or other. Right?" He turned to her. "All decomposed?"

She threw him a scolding glare, but it was too dark for him to read its meaning.

Steven shuddered at the picture Andrew had summoned up; then sighed. Turned and slowly approached the tree. Flung one end of the rope over the branch. Leaned over to tie it securely. Noosed the other end. Slipped it over his head.

"Just tell me one thing," he said, turning to look in the darkness to where he assumed she must be. "Do you remember dying?"

She said, "Yes." The memory made her squint a bit.

"What's it like?"

She paused, wondering what to say. "It's not as uncomfortable as you'd expect."

He stared, just for a moment, and leapt off the bank. The soles of his shoes danced on the surface of the stream and brushed it back and forth. Two or three minutes passed; then, at last, the day gave its dying breath, stirring the leaves and the light branches and swaying Steven gently to and fro.

After a long silence, a long silence, Andrew touched her arm. "Time to go?"

She shook herself a little, to clear away not her hair now but the image before her. "All right. Help me put things back in the picnic basket, will you, Andrew?"

In the darkness they began stuffing the uneaten fruit, the leftover bread and cheese and the almost empty bottle of wine back into the straw basket, covering it all up with the cloth. As they stood to go Andrew said, "Was it like you remember?"

She searched her mind for the memory, found it and turned a moment to compare it with the reality. "Well . . . it's not . . . it's not as *horrible* as I remember it being."

"Rope hasn't broken yet," Andrew reminded her, making a splashing noise: "Pssshhh!"

She said nothing, but turned her back to the black stream and led them away, clutching the violet shawl about her neck to ward off the chill.

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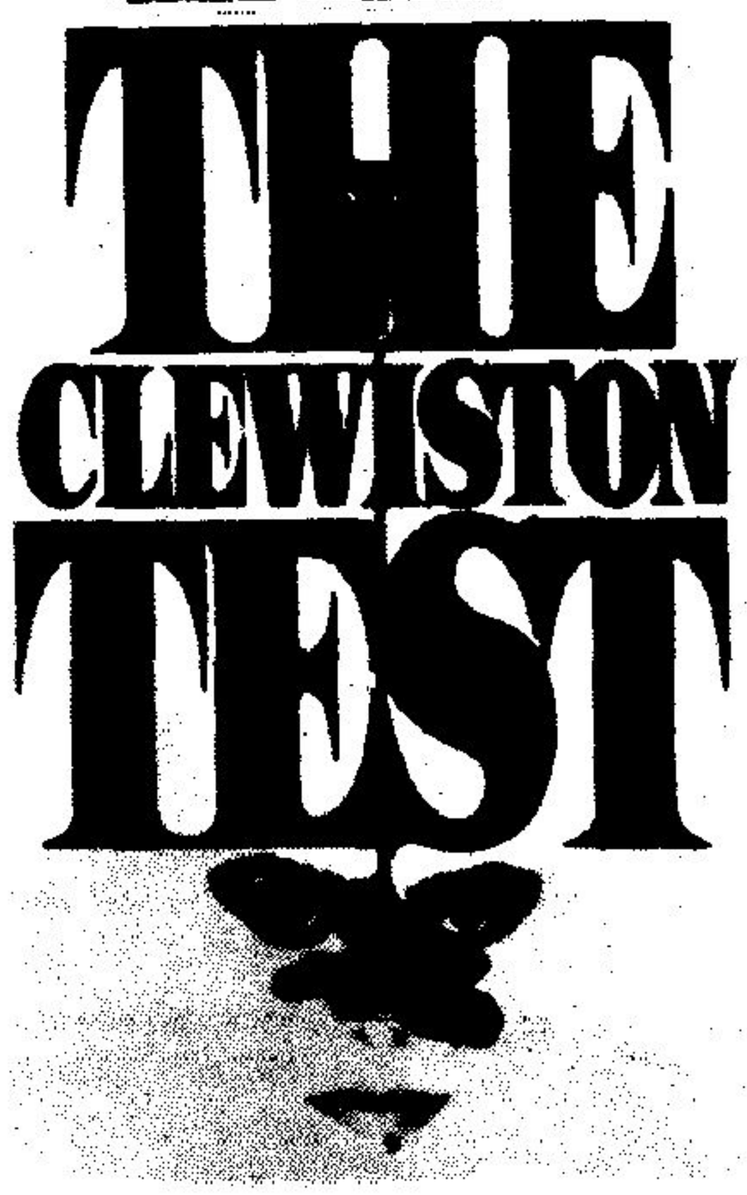

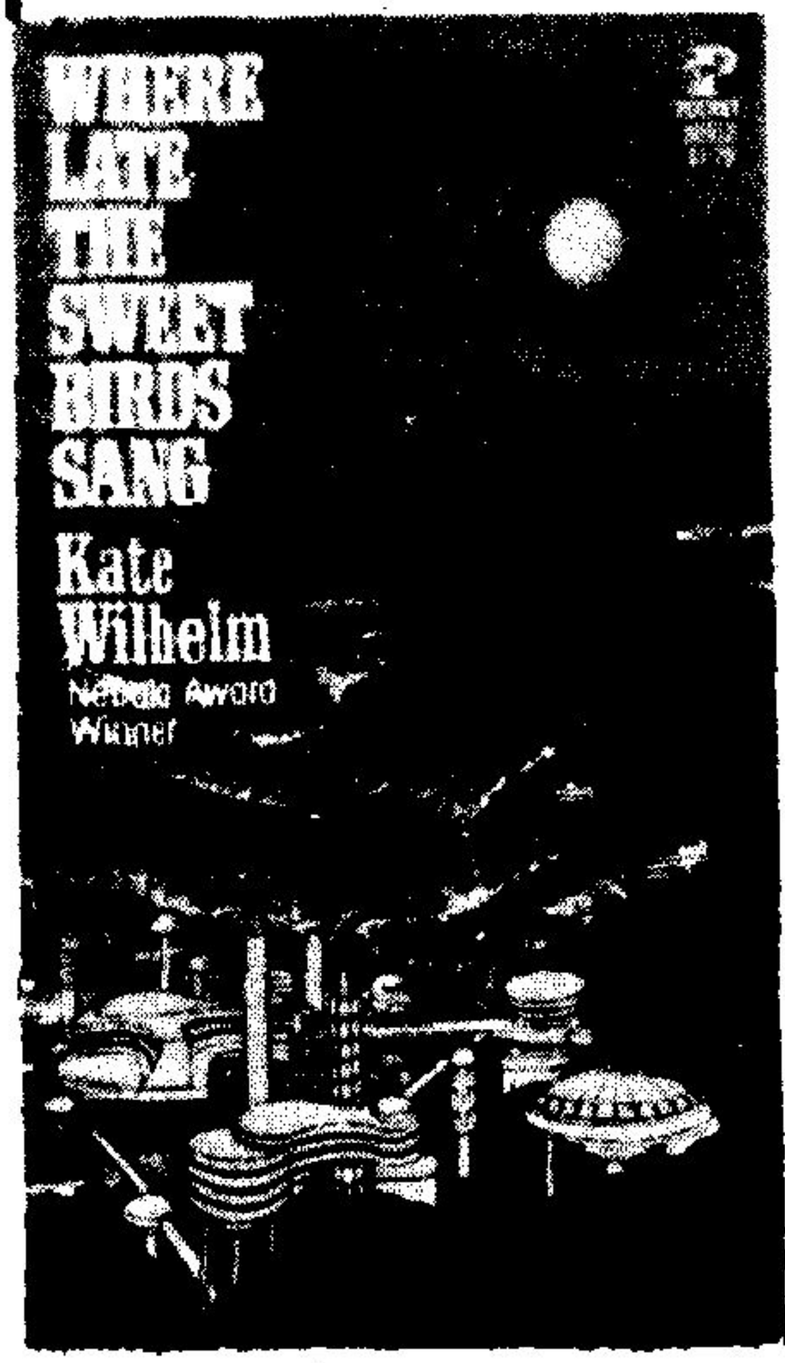

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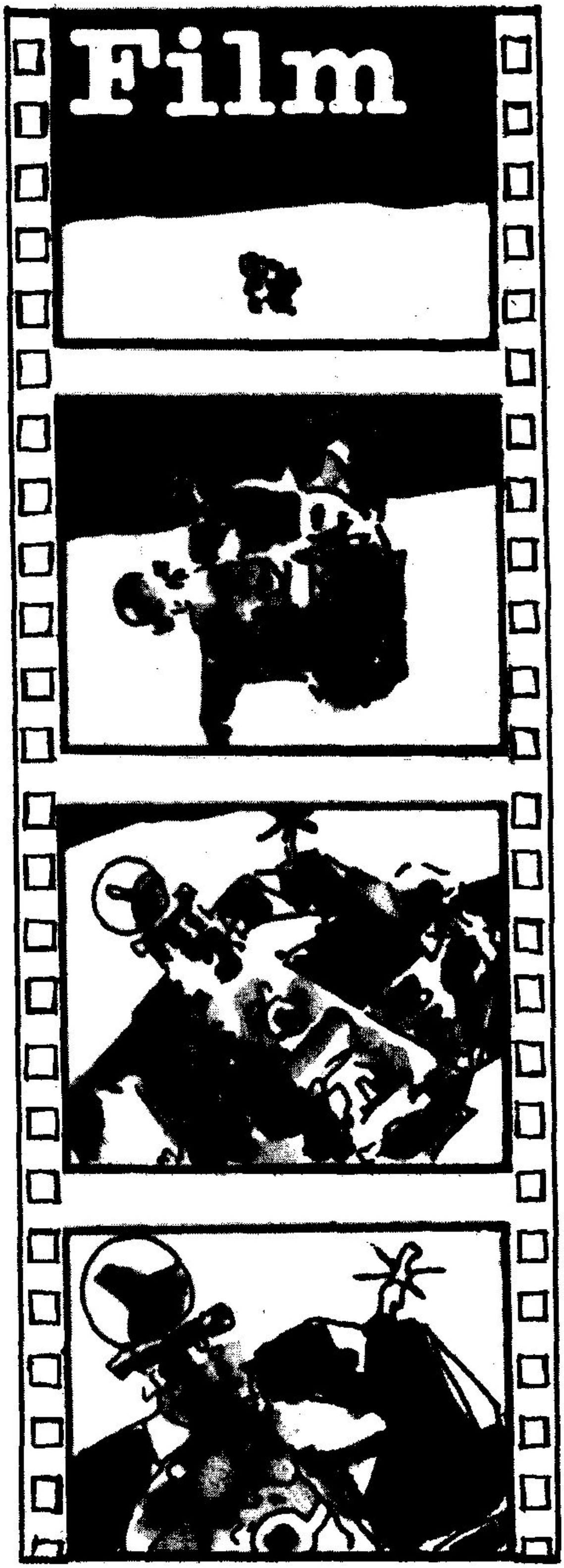

Craig Gardner

Myth Movies

"Surabaya" appears in white letters at the very beginning of *King Kong*. Surabaya. A name that rolls off the tongue, denoting mystery, romance, adventure, unknown danger. A few seconds later, a second word is superimposed below the first: "Indonesia." Indonesia? The Far East of today; corruption, a bit of squalor, perhaps, a stopover point on the way to Vietnam. We are dragged back to reality.

The relationship of these first two words on screen sets the tone for the new version of *King Kong*, a film that consistently presents the fantastic in a way that makes it commonplace. Ultimately, the new *King Kong* is a good adventure story with tremendous production values. But the original *King Kong*, flawed and corny as it was, was something much more.

In the original *Kong*, Skull Island was a place of mystery, a truly frightening panorama of giant monsters that humans were virtu-

ally helpless against. And Kong was the greatest of them all. He was the archetypical beast, an elemental force too great to be controlled.

In the new version, Skull Island is the biggest disappointment of all. It begins well enough, with a group of well-choreographed natives, but degenerates as soon as the crew goes in search of Kong. The new Skull Island has no mystery, no horror. It is, in fact, just plain *dull*. The only monster on the island besides Kong is a giant mechanical snake which is so stupid looking it would make Toho Studios blush. (For such a big budget movie, many of the special effects are just plain embarrassing.)

Kong has traveled some distance from his origins as well — so far, in fact that he actually has *charisma*, for chrissakes! For all his breast-beating and random destruction, the new Kong ends up coming across as a nice guy! And that, oddly enough, is what make the movie work.

Kong giving the girl a bath and blowing her dry. Kong smiling at the girl through a window. Kong bravely protecting the girl from marauding helicopters. These are some of the best moments in the film, and they work because Kong has been transformed into a very large, hairy, human being.

Having set the new *Kong* in the present, this is perhaps all they can do.

I recently attended a very enlightening presentation made by Alexei and Cory Panshin, "The Coming Apocalypse in Science Fiction." As a part of their duologue, the Panshins reviewed the major themes evident in the development of science fiction.

The very first of these themes is the "lost race," in existence from before the turn of the century until the mid-1930's. Prominent examples of the lost race theme can be found in Burroughs, Merritt and *King Kong*.

The basic premise of lost race stories is this: There is some unknown corner of the world, often complete with an ancient civilization, which leads adventurers out of the everyday into danger, mystery, etc. The lost race story essentially died out just before the Second World War, when the world ran out of unknown corners.

The new *King Kong* tries hard to revive the old lost race concept, but it is a myth past its time, and the whole effort ends up looking a little thin. Given this, shifting the emphasis to Kong's personality was the only thing the producers could do.

Carrie, a much better film made with much less hype, centers itself around a more current myth. The main action of the film takes place in a suburban high school, thus plunging headlong into one of the most popular media themes now going: nostalgia, the joys of adolescence, whatever you want to call it.

Brian DePalma directed *Carrie*,

and it's a fortunate mating of man and material. DePalma's work has always contained elements of the absurd, even an occasional tone of adolescent silliness. His best films before Carrie were his earliest (*Greetings, Hi, Mom*!); small budget productions where he could let the silliness take full reign. Later films, like *Sisters*, tended to dilute DePalma's madness, and were less interesting because of it.

With *Carrie*, DePalma finally has a theme uniquely suited to his style. His control is especially evident in the movie's prom sequence. DePalma turns it into a sort of Everyprom, aglitter with elements that anyone who has suffered through high school in the last twenty years is sure to recognize: The decorated gym with the theme "Lost in the stars," the chubby, friendly girl who immediately takes Carrie in tow and offers to show her around, a young girl dancing the night away with the boy of her dreams.

For a horror movie, *Carrie* isn't very frightening. DePalma's version of high school keeps you interested and quite often amused, and the fantastic elements of the story are just that: fantastic, not frightening. The film does hold one terrifying moment, saved to the very end, that is one of the most frightening scenes ever put on film.

Carrie is DePalma's best movie. Go see it.

Books (cont. from pg. 25)

both cases, but it's as though he had referred to *Gone With the Wind* as the story of a young woman whose marriages all ended tragically. All the flavor of the story is missing.

Out of alphabetical order for a moment, there's no indication that Terry Carr edits the *Universe* series, or that he assembles his own "Best of the Year" anthologies.

Typos occasionally rear their ugly heads. Cordwainer Smith is a prime victim: *Quest of the Three Worlds* becomes *Guest of the Three Worlds*, and *Norstrilia* comes out as *Norstrilla.* William Tenn is abused, too; not only does Ash fail to mention that he is a professor at Penn State, he also mangles two of the man's titles, one quite badly. Not a pretty sight.

That's not the end of the mistakes I found, but you get the idea. To be fair, I did find several of the entries informative and entertaining. But how informative? My experience with the sketches of the authors I knew something about was enough to make me doubt the accuracy of the data on the people I wasn't familiar with.

Again—*don't* buy this book. If you need a helpful reference book of this nature, save your money for one of the better ones. It's well worth it.

— *Tyler Matthews*

Science
Hal Clement

Science for Fiction #2

It remains my firm opinion that using "known" science and coherent extrapolations thereof in science fiction not only fails to restrict the imagination, but provides it with take-off points unlikely to be noticed by the non-scientist and the anti-scientist. As long as the editors permit, I shall continue to seek converts to this viewpoint, by providing examples in this column (*advertisement*).

Last issue, I promised to follow up the implications of one possible result of genetic engineering, the production of a human or quasi-human species able to live naturally under water. From the story-telling viewpoint, this seems to divide more or less logically into three parts, though the divisions may be a bit foggy in places.

The first, if you will forgive the statement, is not really a scientific one, but sociological; it is the question of *why* should anyone create such a species, and *whether* or not we should. I don't mean to be snob-

bish when I imply that the "social sciences" are hardly yet sciences, but are about where biology was when Linnaeus was attempting to classify life forms. This is no reflection on anybody. The fact is simply that social problems are intrinsically far more complex than the ones we face in nice straightforward subjects like thermodynamics and relativistic quantum mechanics. (This, admittedly, does not prevent some people from being far more certain of the answers to the social ones.)

There would be many people (I am one) who would support such a project, on the grounds that the sea covers three-quarters of our planet, contains an enormous fraction of the resources to which we are addicted, and an aquatic variety of man would be able to get at these resources (including, emphatically, *knowledge*) much more easily than we air-breathers. Others would be opposed to the action, using the same basic facts but asking why we should create a race which would be able to compete effectively with "us" for these highly critical resources, and which might not feel any inclination, much less any moral compulsion, to share with its creators. In spite of my personal feeling in the matter, I must admit that there is much to be said for this attitude. The question is sociological and even philosophical, I claim no real competence in such matters, and will stay with this first part only enough to point out that even here one can find a huge set of story possibilities — the arguments and the activities they lead to, the lives of the workers on each side of the question, the lives of merPeople created over the objections of small or large groups of air-breathing society. Perhaps the creators are idealists who refuse to take the risks seriously and create a new species free to do its own thing; perhaps they are deeply concerned about the future of "us" — the air-breathing men — and take steps to be sure the merPeople can never be a serious rival by creating them with very low intelligence, passing up the chance of using them as helpers in marine research. Maybe — lots more story material here — the water-breathers are so designed that they can reproduce only under conditions the creators can control; the males might have to spend twenty-four hours in warm, fresh water before they could function sexually, or the females might have to eat half a pound of fresh strawberries each day of pregnancy to prevent miscarriage.

So much for whether and why, and the first infinity of story possibilities. Let's get down to science, and see what the problem of designing merPeople actually implies. Remember, again, we are assuming that the genetic code has been reduced to engineering practice, and we can grow a zebra-striped centaur if we want one. We can make a humanoid organism with gills, finger webs, a six-inch-thick layer of blub-

ber, or whatever else may be necessary for it to function under water with the same general level of freedom that mankind has on land.

Most obvious is the oxygen problem. An active person of, say, seventy kilograms mass needs something over a hundred grams of oxygen per hour. In everyday life, this is obtained by cycling about two thousand liters of air through the lungs. These organs present about a hundred and twenty square meters — rather more than the total floor, ceiling, and wall area of my living room — of moist, thin membrane to the air, and about a fifth of the oxygen soaks through the membrane to the blood on the other side. The key facts are: air has low viscosity, and a liter of it can be drawn through the human windpipe and distributed through the very much tinier bronchi and alveoli with comparatively little effort; a liter of air contains roughly seven grams — a quarter of an ounce — of oxygen; and the oxygen, like any other gas, can diffuse rapidly in air, so the alveoli — the tiny air sacs in the lungs where absorption actually takes place — can be much larger than they would otherwise have to be. That is, oxygen molecules can reach the wall of an alveolus from the center in the fairly short time a given sample of air is present. Even so, only about a fifth of the oxygen in any given lungful actually gets through to the blood; inhaled air is normally about twenty percent oxygen, and the exhaled lungful is still about sixteen percent.

A liter of water at human body temperature can hold in solution only about a thousandth as much oxygen as we find in a liter of air — remember, it is not the O of H_2O a fish or our merPerson uses; it's the *dissolved* elemental oxygen, O_2. And O_2 is a nonpolar molecule which does not dissolve very readily in the highly polar water. Of course, the solubility of a gas goes up with the pressure, and a liter of water *could* hold about seven grams of dissolved O_2 at a depth of roughly six miles. This is not saying it *does*; a mer-People community at the bottom of the Mindanao would also have to stay down there; so much for the "advantage" of water-breathing.

Water is far more viscous than air. Pulling a liter of it into your lungs and squeezing it out again would be a major muscular effort. Doing this to enough liters in one hour to supply your hundred grams of oxygen would be a rank muscular impossibility — especially as oxygen will diffuse less rapidly in water and we'll have to redesign the lungs with much smaller alveoli.

This seems a little silly. There are water-breathers more massive than any man, with enough muscular power and endurance to put up a really good fight at the end of a fish-line, sometimes overpowering the man at the other end. Their biochemistry is essentially the same as ours. How do they get an adequate oxygen supply?

First, instead of tiny sacs which have to be filled and emptied, they have very thin filaments which the water can flow *around*; and more important, they maintain one-way traffic. A fish gulps water in through his mouth (usually a large one!), lets it flow past the enormous surface area of his gill filaments, and exhausts it at the sides of his "neck." (That's a poor word when we're talking about fish, but you know what I mean.)

It looks as though our merPerson is going to need a very large mouth (or some other water intake), a gullet so large that the word "neck" will be just as meaningless as with a fish, and exhaust slits between the ribs.

In passing, telling him to keep his mouth shut would be the equivalent of "Drop Dead!"

Then there is temperature control. The gills will be extremely good heat exchangers; blood flowing back into the main circulation from the gill banks will be very, very close to the same temperature as the surrounding water. I see no way to design a membrane system able to exchange molecules but *not* heat. I don't like the word "impossible," but that seems to be bucking some pretty fundamental physics.

So what? Unfortunately, there seems to be good reason to believe that a brain of human caliber is very sensitive to temperature variation. Certainly a rise of a couple of Celsius degrees commonly associates with delirium in human beings, and a very moderate drop causes unconsciousness. I would judge that designing a brain which didn't need a thermostat would be a far, far more difficult job than merely reworking a lung system into a gill one; it would be an alteration of quite fundamental biochemistry, rather than gross structure. I could be wrong about this, and ignore the point if you wish — and at your own peril. Have you ever had relayed from your editor a letter beginning, "Mr. Clement does not seem to be aware..."? It takes a very good convention to inflate the ego back to normal size.

I grant that there are a few seemingly quite intelligent poikilothermal types, with octopus perhaps heading the list, but don't try to pass the dolphins off on me. They're not only homeothermal mammals, but air-breathers.

Personally, I think the temperature problem is a very real one, and I don't see how our merPerson is going to solve it. Heavy body insulation — inches of blubber, or well-oiled fur, or something analogous to feathers, would be necessary but far from sufficient; the outside water has to get in through the insulation (or past it) to the gills. External gills, a la tadpole, don't solve the problem; they simply bring the blood outside the insulation, besides being extremely vulnerable to any sort of physical attack. A tremendous amount of heat is going out from the gills; a tremendous amount will

be needed to replace it. This puts more load on the food intake system, *and* on the oxygen system. Fancier gills, more oxygen intake — and therefore more heat loss...

Maybe this isn't a closed loop, but I'm beginning to worry about the whole operation. Of course, even if success eluded the project forever, the attempts would provide lots of story material. What about the unfortunate who can breathe under water but has restrictions, like the air-breather with that disease whose name I forget which makes him unable to stand exposure to sunlight?

Oxygen and temperature factors are the two most obvious problems in designing our merPerson, but won't be the only ones. The list could be extended a long way. Locomotion, for instance. They'll presumably be a little denser than water — light enough, submerged, to make walking a poor technique because of low traction and high friction, and swimming probably little better unless we streamline the design (looking more and more like a fish or dolphin all the time!).

Eyesight. Lens curvature will have to be altered to permit focussing under water — so they'll have to wear very strong concave lenses, or else water-filled goggles, if they do have any business in air. (Of course, they'd probably be wearing water-filled breathing helmets *and suits* — remember the gill slits, so seeing would be a minor problem.) Hearing equipment would have to be modified, since *our* middle ears are filled with air and are very sensitive to gross pressure changes.

Should the hands be webbed, or would this interfere too much with manipulation? Should feet be modified to really efficient flippers, or should some ability to walk be left? Sometimes they may have to get around out of water.

All of these factors will control what the characters can and can't do, in and out of water. The more completely you specify them, the more consistently and believably your water-breathers can act. You don't need to describe all the features, but have as many of them as possible in your own mind. It isn't quite the same, but a well-known science fiction and fantasy writer once published a story in which the main character's father was stated to be dead in the opening chapter, but appeared quite alive — with no psychic or superscientific overtones — in a later one. If this isn't embarrassing, your standards are very low.

The third part of this whole matter is the set of situations in which design problems are solved, the story takes them for granted, and our water-breathers are simply characters having adventures. This may bring us back to old-style action-adventure science fiction, but it doesn't have to. Also, it may let us do without very much science, merely having a few standard shark and octopus fights, but again it

doesn't have to. Learn, and use, some oceanography.

What kinds of life forms will the merPeople encounter? What will hunting, and farming, and travelling be like? Do you know what turbidity currents are? What will happen if your character gets involved with one?

What sort of relations exist between the water-breathers and their air-breathing creators? Do the latter regard the others as things, as robots, or as People? Will the merPeople find it necessary to enforce in some fashion their rights as People? Our present air-breathing species finds it very easy to dismiss People as non-People for very superficial reasons — they have a different skin color, or speak a different language, or follow a different political system/religion, or aren't born yet. I tend to be optimistic, but I have a strong suspicion that the merPeople, if and when, will spend quite a long time at the bottom of that totem pole. And every step up is story material.

To summarize, the water-breathing human being is almost certainly possible if we grant the mastery of genetic engineering, and potentially useful enough to a technical society to be produced when the techniques develop. It will not be very beautiful by Hollywood standards, except perhaps for specific individuals designed by or for Hollywood for show purposes (there's a really pitiable character for an author who can handle personalities). He or she will, beyond much doubt, have many of the grosser as well as the more subtle attributes of a fish. Interbreeding with "normal" humanity will not be possible in any productive sense, though this aspect may provide material for writers of psycho-oriented stories.

The merPeople, if well engineered, will be able to "master" the seas about the same way that air-breathing humanity has "mastered" the much smaller land surface of our planet. They will probably have comparable, but certainly not identical, troubles with disease and food production, with climatic factors and competing life forms, and with the designing of viable social systems. Their relations with the air-breathers would be extremely complex and range through the whole spectrum from close friendship to open war.

Each of these factors promises its own huge set of stories, varying in scope from epics of the whole race trying to decide between capitalism and communism to the problems of an individual trying to design, or learn to put up with, a system of traffic laws for an essentially three-dimensional community.

I'd like to finish on a professional, but not a scientific, point. I have been suggesting general story ideas all through this article; I plan to continue the practice. If anyone is worried about ethics and plagiarism,

(cont. on pg. 59)

First Sale

In each issue, UNEARTH presents a unique special feature — the first story ever sold by a major author.

Hal Clement

His first story (and many thereafter) appeared in ASTOUNDING, which is appropriate: his work, perhaps more than anyone else's, has always embodied the qualities Campbell demanded in the fiction he bought. Few writers have ever matched his ability to combine strict attention to scientific detail with a well-developed sense of wonder.

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We're pleased to present Hal Clement's first published story, "Proof."

INTRODUCTION

I have never been, and have never expected to become, a professional writer of science-fiction or of anything else. I enjoy high school science teaching, and plan to stay with it until I am retired.

I am, and have been since about 1934, a science fiction fan, hooked by Buck Rogers and gaffed by Professor Jameson. I enjoy science fiction of the "hard" type, and from early childhood have been that irritating personality which loves to show its knowledge, and makes life difficult for a teacher whenever the latter suffers a slip of the tongue.

Naturally, I was critical of the science in the s-f of the '30s. I used to tell the stories at Boy Scout campfires; then I tried to improve on their science. This usually involved such gross changes in the story as to force me either to retreat to the original or do something entirely my own. The latter doesn't work well for me, off the top of the head; I have a very, very slow mind, and it takes me a long time to produce a coherent story.

But I tried. During the summer of 1939, my cousin and I each wrote a science-fiction story. I don't remember his, and the only reason I remember mine is that I've read it so many times since, written by others (not plagiarism; parallel thought on a very low level).

In 1940, I wrote an 18,000 word novelette and sent it to John Campbell. It came back. (He didn't remember it either, claiming later that he had bought the first story I ever submitted to him.)

In 1941 came PROOF, based on that nicely contrary attitude, "whenever anyone says *of course,* think what would happen if that particular *of course* weren't true."

Of course there can be no life in a star.

I wasn't the first with this theme, but I don't plead guilty to plagiarism (see my column elsewhere in this issue). I had read Jack Williamson's *Islands of the Sun,* and remembered his sun-dwellers, the xyli. But I handled it differently enough to keep my conscience clear.

John bought it. $65 was a real winfall to a college astronomy major in the days when tuition was $400 a year, so I kept writing. No lessons, just the blessing of two parents who had always had high standards in use of English, so I had no trouble writing paragraphs which could be read. I wish high school English teachers would admit that this art was still worth cultivating.

Of course.

PROOF

Kron held his huge freighter motionless, feeling forward for outside contact. The tremendous interplay of magnetic and electrostatic fields just beyond the city's edge was as clearly perceptible to his senses as the city itself — a mile-wide disk ringed with conical field towers, stretching away behind and to each side. The ship was poised between two of the towers; immediatly behind it was the field from which Kron had just taken off. The area was covered with cradles of various forms — cup-shaped receptacles which held city craft like Kron's own; long, boat-shaped hollows wherein reposed the cigarlike vessels which plied between the cities; and towering skeleton frameworks which held upright the slender double cones that hurtled across the dark, lifeless regions between stars.

Beyond the landing field was the city proper; the surface of the disk was covered with geometrically shaped buildings — cones, cylinders, prisms, and hemispheres, jumbled together.

Kron could "see" all this as easily as a human being in an airplane can see New York; but no human eyes could have perceived this city, even if a man could have existed anywhere near it. The city, buildings and all, glowed a savage, white heat; and about and beyond it — a part of it, to human eyes — raged the equally dazzling, incandescent gases of the solar photosphere.

The freighter was preparing to launch itself into that fiery ocean; Kron was watching the play of the artificial reaction fields that supported the city, preparatory to plunging through them at a safe moment.

There was considerable risk of being flattened against the edge of the disk if an inauspicious choice was made, but Kron was an experienced flier, and slipped past the barrier with a sudden, hurtling acceleration that would have pulped any body of flesh and bone. The outer fringe of the field flung the globe sharply downward; then it was free, and the city was dwindling above them.

Kron and four others remained at their posts; the rest of the crew of thirty relaxed, their spherical bodies

lying passive in the cuplike rests distributed through the ship, bathing in the fierce radiance on which those bodies fed, and which was continually streaming from a three-inch spheroid at the center of the craft. That an artificial source of energy should be needed in such an environment may seem strange, but to these creatures the outer layers of the sun were far more inhospitable to life than is the stratosphere of Earth to human beings.

They had evolved far down near the solar core, where pressures and temperatures were such that matter existed in the "collapsed" state characteristic of the entire mass of white dwarf stars. Their bodies were simply constructed: a matrix of close-packed electrons — really an unimaginably dense electrostatic field, possessing quasi-solid properties — surrounded a core of neutrons, compacted to the ultimate degree. Radiation of sufficient energy, falling on the "skin," was stabilized, altered to the pattern and structure of neutrons; the tiny particles of neutronium which resulted were borne along a circulatory system — of magnetic fields, instead of blood — to the nucleus, where it was stored.

The race had evolved to the point no material appendages were needed. Projected beams and fields of force were their limbs, powered by the annihilation of some of their own neutron substance. Their strange senses gave them awareness not only of electromagnetic radiation, permitting them to "see" in a more or less normal fashion, but also of energies still undreamed of by human scientists. Kron, hundreds of miles below the city now, was still dimly aware of its location, though radio waves, light and gamma rays were all hopelessly fogged in the clouds of free electrons. At his goal, far down in the solar interior, "seeing" conditions would be worse — anything more than a few hundred yards distant would be quite indetectable even to him.

Poised beside Kron, near the center of the spheroidal sun ship, was another being. Its body was ovoid in shape, like that of the Solarian, but longer and narrower, while the ends were tipped with pyramidal structures of neutronium, which projected through the "skin." A second, fainter static aura enveloped the creature outside the principal surface; and as the crew relaxed in their cups, a beam of energy from this envelope impinged on Kron's body. It carried a meaning, transmitting a clear thought from one being to the other.

"I still find difficulty in believing my senses," stated the stranger. "My own worlds revolve about another which is somewhat similar to this; but such a vast and tenuous atmosphere is most unlike conditions at home. Have you ever been away from Sol?"

"Yes" replied Kron, "I was once on the crew of an interstellar projectile. I have never seen your star, however; my acquaintance with it is entirely through hearsay. I am told it consists almost entirely of collapsed matter, like the core of our own; but there is practically no atmosphere. Can this be so? I should think, at the temperature necessary for life, gases would break free of the core and form an envelope."

"They tend to do so, of course," returned the other, "but our surface gravity is immeasurably greater than anything you have here; even your core pull is less, since it is much less dense than our star. Only the fact that our worlds are small, thus causing a rapid diminution of gravity as one leaves them, makes it possible to get a ship away from them at all; atoms, with only their original velocities, remain within a few miles of the surface.

"But you remind me of my purpose on this world — to check certain points of a new theory concerning the possible behavior of aggregations of normal atoms. That was why I arranged a trip on your flier; I have to make density, pressure, temperature, and a dozen other kinds of measurements at a couple of thousand different levels, in your atmosphere. While I'm doing it, would you mind telling me why you make these regular trips — and why, for that matter, you live so far above you natural level? I should think you would find life easier below, since there would be no need to remain in sealed buildings, or to expend such a terrific amount of power in supporting your cities."

Kron's answer was slow.

"We make the journeys to obtain neutronium. It is impossible to convert enough power from the immediate neighborhood of the cities to support them; we must descend periodically for more, even though our converters take so much as to lower the solar temperature considerably for thousands of miles around each city.

"The trips are dangerous — you should have been told that. We carry a crew of thirty, when two would be enough to man this ship, for we must fight, as well as fly. You spoke truly when you said that the lower regions of Sol are our natural home; but for æons we have not dared to make more than fleeting visits, to steal the power which is life to us.

"Your little worlds have been almost completely subjugated by your people, Sirian; they never had life forms sufficiently powerful to threaten seriously your domination. But Sol, whose core alone is far larger than the Sirius B pair, did develop such creatures. Some are vast, stupid, slow-moving or immobile; others are semi-intelligent, and rapid movers; all are more than willing to ingest the ready-compacted neutronium of another living being."

Kron's tale was interrupted for a moment, as the Sirian sent a ray

probing out through the ship's wall, testing the physical state of the inferno beyond. A record was made, and the Solarian resumed.

"We, according to logical theory, were once just such a race — of small intelligence, seeking the needs of life among a horde of competing organisms. Our greatest enemy was a being much like ourselves in size and power — just slightly superior in both ways. We were somewhat ahead in intelligence, and I suppose we owe them some thanks — without the competition they provided, we should not have been forced to develop our minds to their present level. We learned to co-operate in fighting them, and from that came the discovery that many of us together could handle natural forces that a single individual could not even approach, and survive. The creation of force effects that had no counterpart in nature was the next step; and, with the understanding of them our science grew.

"The first cities were of neutronium, like those of today, but it was necessary to stabilize the neutrons with fields of energy; at core temperature, as you know, neutronium is a gas. The cities were spherical and much smaller than our present ones. For a long time, we managed to defend them.

"But our enemies evolved, too; not in intelligence, but in power and fecundity. With overspecialization of their physical powers, their mentalities actually degenerated; they became little more than highly organized machines, driven, by an age-old enmity toward our race, to seek us out and destroy us. Their new powers at last enabled them to neutralize, by brute force, the fields which held our cities in shape; and then it was that, from necessity, we fled to the wild, inhospitable upper regions of Sol's atmosphere. Many cities were destroyed by the enemy before a means of supporting them was devised; many more fell victims to forces which we generated, without being able to control, in the effort. The dangers of our present-day trips seem trivial beside those our ancestors braved, in spite of the fact that ships not infrequently fail to return from their flights. Does that answer your question?"

The Sirian's reply was hesitant. "I guess it does. You of Sol must have developed far more rapidly than we, under that drive; your science, I know, is superior to ours in certain ways, although it was my race which first developed space flight."

"You had greater opportunities in that line," returned Kron. "Two small stars, less than a diameter apart, circling a larger one at a distance incomparably smaller than the usual interstellar interval, provided perfect ground for experimental flights; between your world and mine, even radiation requires some one hundred and thirty rota-

tions to make the journey, and even the nearest other star is almost half as far.

"But enough of this — history is considered by too many to be a dry subject. What brings you on a trip with a power flier? You certainly have not learned anything yet which you could not have been told in the city."

During the conversation, the Sirian had periodically tested the atmosphere beyond the hull. He spoke, rather absently, as though concentrating on something other than his words.

"I would not be too sure of that, Solarian. My measurements are of greater delicacy than we have ever before achieved. I am looking for a very special effect, to substantiate or disprove an hypothesis which I have recently advanced — much to the detriment of my prestige. If you are interested, I might explain: laugh afterward if you care to — you will not be the first.

"The theory is simplicity itself. It has occurred to me that matter — ordinary substances like iron and calcium — might actually take on solid form, like neutronium, under the proper conditions. The normal gas, you know, consists of minute particles traveling with considerable speed in all directions. There seems to be no way of telling whether or not these atoms exert appreciable forces on each other; but it seems to me that if they were brought closely enough together, or slowed down sufficiently, some such effects might be detected."

"How and why?" asked Kron. "If the forces are there, why should they not be detectable under ordinary conditions?"

"Tiny changes in velocity due to mutual attraction or repulsion would scarcely be noticed, when the atomic speeds are of the order of hundreds of kilometers per second," returned the Sirian. "The effects I seek to detect are of a different nature. Consider, please. We know the sizes of the various atoms, from their radiations. We also know that, under normal conditions, a given mass of any particular gas fills a certain volume. If, however, we surround this gas with an impenetrable container and exert pressure, that volume decreases. We would expect that decrease to be proportional to the pressure, except for an easily determined constant due to the size of the atoms, if no interatomic forces existed; to detect such forces, I am making a complete series of pressure-density tests, more delicate than any heretofore, from the level of your cities down to the neutron core of your world.

"If we could reduce the kinetic energy of the atoms — slow down their motions of translation — the task would probably be simpler; but I see no way to accomplish that. Perhaps, if we could negate nearly all of that energy, the interatomic

forces would actually hold the atoms in definite relative positions, approximating the solid state. It was that somewhat injudicious and perhaps too imaginative suggestion which caused my whole idea to be ridiculed on Sirius."

The ship dropped several hundred miles in the few seconds before Kron answered; since gaseous friction is independent of change in density, the high pressures of the regions being penetrated would be no bar to high speed of flight. Unfortunately, the viscosity of a gas does increase directly as the square root of its temperature; and at the lower levels of the sun, travel would be slow.

"Whether or not our scientist will listen to you, I cannot say," said Kron finally. "Some of them are a rather imaginative crowd, I guess, and none of them will ignore any data you may produce.

"I did not laugh, either. My reason will certainly interest you, as your theory intrigues me. It is the first time anyone has accounted even partly for the things that happened to us on one of my flights."

The other members of the crew shifted slightly on their cradles; a ripple of interest passed through them, for all had heard rumors and vague tales of Kron's time in the space carrier fleets. The Sirian settled himself more comfortably; Kron dimmed the central glove of radiance a trifle, for the outside temperature was now considerably higher, and began the tale.

"This happened toward the end of my career in space. I had made many voyages with the merchant and passenger vessels, had been promoted from the lowest ranks, through many rotations, to the post of independent captain. I had my own cruiser — a special long-period explorer, owned by the Solarian government. She was shaped like our modern interstellar carriers, consisting of two cones, bases together, with the field ring just forward of their meeting point. She was larger than most, being designed to carry fuel for exceptionally long flights.

"Another cruiser, similar in every respect, was under the command of a comrade of mine, named Akro; and the two of us were commissioned to transport a party of scientists and explorers to the then newly discovered Fourth System, which lies, as you know, nearly in the plane of the Solar equator, but about half again as distant as Sirius.

"We made good time, averaging nearly half the speed of radiation, and reached the star with a good portion of hulls still unconsumed. We need not have worried about that, in any case; the star was denser even than the Sirius B twins, and neutronium was very plentiful. I restocked at once, plating my inner walls with the stuff until they had reached their original thickness, although experience indicated that the original supply was ample to carry us either back to Sol, to Sirius, or to Procyon B.

"Akro, at the request of the scientists, did not refuel. Life was present on the star, as it seems to be on all stars where the atomic velocities and the density are high enough; and the biologists wanted to bring back specimens. That meant that room would be needed, and if Akro replated his walls to normal thickness that room would be lacking — as I have mentioned, these were special long-range craft, and a large portion of their volume consisted of available neutronium.

"So it happened that the other ship left the Fourth System with a low, but theoretically sufficient, stock of fuel, and half a dozen compartments filled with specimens of alien life. I kept within detection distance at all times, in case of trouble, for some of those life forms were as dangerous as those of Sol, and, like them, all consumed neutronium. They had to be kept well under control to safeguard the very walls of the ship, and it is surprisingly difficult to make a wild beast, surrounded by food, stay on short rations.

"Some of the creatures proved absolutely unmanageable; they had to be destroyed. Others were calmed by lowering the atomic excitation of their compartments, sending them into a stupor; but the scientists were reluctant to try that in most cases, since not all the beings could stand such treatment.

"So, for nearly four hundred Solar rotations, Akro practically fought his vessel across space — fought successfully. He managed on his own power until we were within a few hundred diameters of Sol; but I had to help him with the landing — or try to, for the landing was never made.

"It may seem strange, but there is a large volume of space in the neighborhood of this Sun which is hardly ever traversed. The normal landing orbit arches high over one of the poles of rotation, enters atmosphere almost tangentially somewhere between that pole and the equator, and kills as much as remains of the ship's velocity in the outer atmospheric layers. There is a minimum of magnetic interference that way, since the flier practically coasts along the lines of force of the Solar magnetic field.

"As a result, few ships pass through the space near the plane of the Solar equator. One or two may have done so before us, and I know of several that searched the region later; but none encountered the thing which we found.

"About the time we would normally have started correcting our orbits for a tangential landing, Akro radiated me the information that he could not possibly control his ship any farther with the power still available to him. His walls were already so thin that radiation loss, ordinarily negligible, was becoming a definite menace to his vessel. All

his remaining energy would have to be employed in keeping the interior of his ship habitable.

"The only thing I could do was to attach our ships together with an attractor beam, and make a nearly perpendicular drop to Sol. We would have to take our chances with magnetic and electrostatic disturbances in the city-supporting fields which cover so much of the near-equatorial zones, and try to graze the nucleus of the Sun instead of its outer atmosphere, so that Akro could replenish his rapidly failing powers.

"Akro's hull was radiating quite perceptibly now; it made an easy target for an attractor. We connected without difficulty, and our slightly different linear velocities caused us to revolve slowly about each other, pivoting on the center of mass of our two ships. I cut off my driving fields, and we fell spinning toward Sol.

"I was becoming seriously worried about Akro's chances of survival. The now-alarming energy loss through his almost consumed hull threatened to exhaust his supply long before we reached the core; and we were still more than a hundred diameters out. I could not give him any power; we were revolving about each other at a distance of about one tenth of a Solar diameter. To lessen that distance materially would increase our speed of revolution to a point where the attractor could not overcome centrifugal force; and I had neither power nor time to perform the delicate job of exactly neutralizing our rotary momentum without throwing us entirely off course. All we could do was hope.

"We were somewhere between one hundred and one hundred and fifty diameters out when there occurred the most peculiar phenomenon I have ever encountered. The plane of revolution of our two ships passed near Sol, but was nearly perpendicular to the Solar equator; at the time of which I speak, Akro's ship was almost directly between my flier and the Sun. Observations had just shown that we were accelerating Sunward at an unexpectedly high pace, when a call came from Akro.

"'Kron! I am being pulled away from your attractor! There is a large mass somewhere near, for the pull is gravitational, but it emits no radiation that I can detect. Increase your pull, if you can; I cannot possibly free myself alone.'

"I did what I could, which was very little. Since we did not know the location of the disturbing dark body, it was impossible to tell just what I should do to avoid bringing my own or Akro's vessel too close. I think now that if I had released him immediately he would have swung clear, for the body was not large, I believe. Unfortunately, I did the opposite, and nearly lost my own ship as well. Two of my crew were throwing as much power as they could convert and handle into the attractor, and

trying to hold it on the still easily visible hull of Akro's ship; but the motions of the latter were so peculiar that aiming was a difficult task. They held the ship as long as we could see it; but quite suddenly the radiations by means of which we perceived the vessel faded out, and before we could find a band which could get through, the sudden cessation of our centripetal acceleration told us that the beam had slipped from its target.

"We found that electromagnetic radiations of wave lengths in the octave above H-alpha would penetrate the interference, and Akro's hull was leaking energy enough to radiate in that band. When we found him, however, we could scarcely believe our senses; his velocity was now nearly at right angles to his former course, and his hull radiation had become far weaker. What terrific force had caused this acceleration, and what strange field was blanketing the radiation, were questions none of us could answer.

"Strain as we might, not one of us could pick up an erg of radiant energy that might emanate from the thing that had trapped Akro. We could only watch, and endeavor to plot his course relative to our own, at first. Our ships were nearing each other rapidly and we were attempting to determine the time and distance of closest approach, when we were startled by the impact of a communicator beam. Akro was alive! The beam was weak, very weak, showing what an infinitesimal amount of power he felt he could spare. His words were not encouraging.

"Kron! You may as well cut your attractor, if you are still trying to catch me. No power that I dare apply seems to move me perceptibly in any direction from this course. We are all badly shocked, for we hit something that felt almost solid. The walls, even, are strained, and may go at any time.'

" 'Can you perceive anything around you?' I returned. 'You seem to us to be alone in space, though something is absorbing most of your radiated energy. There must be energies in the cosmos of which we have never dreamed, simply because they did not affect our senses. What do your scientists say?'

" 'Very little,' was the answer. 'They have made a few tests, but they say that anything they project is absorbed without reradiating anything useful. We seem to be in a sort of energy vacuum — it takes everything, and returns nothing.'

"This was the most alarming item yet. Even in free space, we had been doubtful of Akro's chances of survival; now they seemed reduced to the ultimate zero.

"Meanwhile, our ships were rapidly approaching each other. As nearly as my navigators could tell, both vessels were pursuing almost straight lines in space. The lines

were nearly perpendicular but did not lie in a common plane; their minimum distance apart was about one one-thousandth of a Solar diameter. His velocity seemed nearly constant, while I was accelerating Sunward. It seemed that we would reach the near-intersection point almost simultaneously, which meant that my ship was certain to approach the energy vacuum much too closely. I did not dare to try to pull Akro free with an attractor; it was only too obvious that such an attempt could only end in disaster for both vessels. If he could not free himself, he was lost.

"We could only watch helplessly as the point of light marking the position of Akro's flier swept closer and closer. At first, as I have said, it seemed perfectly free in space; but as we looked, the region around it began to radiate feebly. There was nothing recognizable about the vibrations, simply a continuous spectrum, cut off by some interference just below the H-alpha wave length and, at the other end, some three octaves higher. As the emission grew stronger, the visible region around the stranded ship grew larger, fading into nothingness at the edges. Brighter and broader the patch of radiance grew, as we swept toward it."

That same radiance was seriously inconveniencing Gordon Aller, who was supposed to be surveying for a geological map of northern Australia. He was camped by the only waterhole in many miles, and had stayed up long after dark preparing his cameras, barometer, soil kit, and other equipment for the morrow's work.

The arrangement of instruments completed, he did not at once retire to his blankets. With his back against a smooth rock and a short, blackened pipe clenched in his teeth, he sat for some time pondering. The object of his musing does not matter to us; though his eyes were directed heavenward, he was sufficiently accustomed to the southern sky to render it improbable that he was paying much attention to its beauties.

However that may be, his gaze was suddenly attracted to the zenith. He had often seen stars which appeared to move when near the edge of his field of vision — it is a common illusion; but this one continued to shift as he turned his eyes upward.

Not far from Archernar was a brilliant white point, which brightened as Aller watched it. It was moving slowly northward, it seemed; but only a moment was needed for the man to realize that the slowness was illusory. The thing was slashing almost vertically downward at an enormous speed, and must strike Earth not far from his camp.

Aller was not an astronomer, and had no idea of astronomical distances or speeds. He may be forgiven for thinking of the object as traveling perhaps as fast as a modern

fighting plane, and first appearing at a height of two or three miles. The natural conclusion from this belief was the the crash would occur within a few hundred feet of the camp. Aller paled; he had seen pictures of the Devil's Pit in Arizona.

Actually, of course, the meteor first presented itself to his gaze at a height of some eighty miles, and was then traveling at a rate of many miles per second relative to Earth. At that speed, the air presented a practically solid obstacle to its flight, and the object was forced to a fairly constant velocity of ten or twelve hundred yards a second while still nearly ten miles from Earth's surface. It was at that point that Aller's eyes caught up with and succeeded in focusing upon the celestial visitor.

The first burst of light had been radiated by the frightfully compressed and heated air in front of the thing; as the original velocity departed, so did the dazzling light. Aller got a clear view of the meteor at a range of less than five miles, for perhaps ten seconds before the impact. It was still incandescent, radiating a bright cherry-red; this must have been due to the loss from within, for so brief a contact even with such highly heated air could not have warmed the Sun ship's neutronium walls a measurable fraction of a degree.

Aller felt the ground tremble as the vessel struck. A geyser of earth, barely visible in the reddish light of the hull, spouted skyward, to fall back seconds later with a long-drawn-out rumble. The man stared at the spot, two miles away, which was still giving off a faint glow. Were "shooting stars" as regularly shaped as that? He had seen a smooth, slender body, more than a hundred feet in length, apparently composed of two cones of unequal length, joined together at the bases. Around the longer cone, not far from the point of juncture, was a thick bulging ring; no further details were visible at the distance from which he had observed. Aller's vague recollections of meteorites, seen in various museums, brought images of irregular, clinkerlike objects before his mind's eye. What, then, could this thing be?

He was not imaginative enough to think for a moment of any possible extraterrestrial source for an aircraft; when it did occur to him that the object was of artificial origin, he though more of some experimental machine produced by one of the more progressive Earth nations.

At the thought, Aller strapped a first-aid kit to his side and set out toward the crater, in the face of the obvious fact that nothing human could possibly have survived such a crash. He stumbled over the uneven terrain for a quarter of a mile, and then stopped on a small rise of ground to examine more closely the site of the wreck.

The glow should have died by this time, for Aller had taken all of ten

minutes to pick his way those few hundred yards; but the dull-red light ahead had changed to a brilliant-orange radiance against which the serrated edges of the pit were clearly silhouetted. No flames were visible; whence came the increasing heat? Aller attempted to get closer, but a wave of frightfully hot air blistered his face and hands, and drove him back. He took up a station near his former camp, and watched.

If the hull of the flier had been anywhere near its normal thickness, the tremendous mass of neutronium would have sunk through the hardest of rocks as though they were liquid. There was, however, scarcely more than a paper thickness of the substance at any part of the walls; and an upthrust of adamantine volcanic rock not far beneath the surface of the desert proved thick enough to absorb the Sun ship's momentum and to support its still enormous weight. Consequently, the ship was covered only by a thin layer of powdered rock which had fallen back into the crater. The disturbances arising from the now extremely rapid loss of energy from Akro's ship were, as a result, decidedly visible from the surface.

The hull, though thin, was still intact; but its temperature was now far above the melting point of the surrounding rocks. The thin layer of pulverized material above the ship melted and flowed away almost instantly, permitting free radiation to the air above; and so enormous is the specific heat of neutronium that no perceptible lowering of hull temperature occurred.

Aller, from his point of observation, saw the brilliant fan of light that sprang from the pit as the flier's hull was exposed — the vessel itself was invisible to him, since he was only slightly above the level of the crater's mouth. He wondered if the impact of the "meteor" had released some pent-up volcanic energy, and began to doubt, quite justifiably, if he was at a safe distance. His doubts vanished and were replaced by certainty as the edges of the crater began to glow dull-red, then bright-orange, and slowly subsided out of sight. He began packing the most valuable items of his equipment, while a muted, continuous roaring and occasional heavy thuds from the direction of the pit admonished him to hasten.

When he straightened up, with the seventy-pound pack settled on his shoulders, there was simply a lake of lava where the crater had been. The fiery area spread even as he watched; and without further delay he set off on his own back trail. He could see easily, by the light diffused from the inferno behind him; and he made fairly good time, considering his burden and the fact that he had not slept since the preceding night.

The rock beneath Akro's craft was, as we have said extremely hard. Since there was relatively free escape upward for the constantly liberated

energy, this stratum melted very slowly, gradually letting the vessel sink deeper into the earth. What would have happened if Akro's power supply had been greater is problematical; Aller can tell us only that some five hours after the landing, as he was resting for a few moments near the top of a rocky hillock, the phenomenon came to a cataclysmic end.

A quivering of the earth beneath him caused the surveyor to look back toward his erstwhile camp. The lake of lava, which by this time was the better part of a mile in breadth, seemed curiously agitated. Aller, from his rather poor vantage point, could see huge bubbles of pasty lava hump themselves up and burst, releasing brilliant clouds of vapor. Each cloud illuminated Earth and sky before cooling to invisibility, so that the effect was somewhat similar to a series of lightning flashes.

For a short time — certainly no longer than a quarter of a minute — Aller was able to watch as the activity increased. Then a particularly violent shock almost flung him from the hilltop, and at nearly the same instant the entire volume of molten rock fountained skyward. For an instant it seemed to hang there, a white, raging pillar of liquid and gas; then it dissolved, giving way before the savage thrust of the suddenly released energy below. A tongue of radiance, of an intensity indescribable in mere words, stabbed upward, into and through the lava, volatizing instantly. A dozen square miles of desert glowed white, then an almost invisible violet, and disappeared in superheated gas. Around the edges of this region, great gouts of lava and immense fragments of solid rock were hurled to all points of the compass.

Radiation exerts pressure; at the temperature found in the cores of stars, that pressure must be measured in thousands of tons per square inch. It was this thrust, rather than the by no means negligible gas pressure of the boiling lava, which wrought most of the destruction.

Aller saw little of what occurred. When the lava was hurled upward, he had flung an arm across his face to protect his eyes from the glare. The act unquestionably saved his eyesight, as the real flash followed; as it was, his body was seared and blistered through the clothing. The second, heavier shock knocked his feet from under him, and he half crawled, half rolled down to the comparative shelter of the little hill. Even here, gusts of hot air almost cooked him; only the speed with which the phenomenon ended saved his life.

Within minutes, both the tremblors and hot winds had ceased; and he crawled painfully to the hilltop again to gaze wonderingly at the five-mile-wide crater, ringed by a pile of tumbled, still glowing rock fragments.

Far beneath that pit, shards of neutronium, no more able to remain

near the surface than the steel pieces of a wrecked ocean vessel can float on water, were sinking through rock and metal to a final resting place at Earth's heart.

"The glow spread as we watched, still giving no clue to the nature of the substance radiating it," continued Kron. "Most of it semed to originate between us and Akro's ship; Akro himself said that but little energy was being lost on the far side. His messages, during that last brief period as we swept by our point of closest approach, were clear — so clear that we could almost see as he did the tenuous light beyond the ever-thinning walls of his ship; the light that represented but a tiny percentage of the energy being sucked from the hull surface.

"We saw, as though with his own senses, the tiny perforation appear near one end of the ship; saw it extend, with the speed of thought, from one end of the hull to the other, permitting the free escape of all the energy in a single instant; and, from our point of vantage, saw the glowing area where the ship had been suddenly brightened, blazing for a moment almost as brightly as a piece of Sun matter.

"In that moment, every one of us saw the identifying frequencies as the heat from Akro's disrupted ship raised the substance which had trapped him to an energy level which permitted atomic radiation. Every one of us recognized the spectra of iron, of calcium, of carbon and silicon and a score of the other elements — Sirian, I tell you that that 'trapping field' was *matter* — matter in such a state that it could not radiate, and could offer resistance to other bodies in exactly the fashion of a solid. I thought, and have always thought, that some strange field of force held the atoms in their 'solid' positions; you have convinced me that I was wrong. The 'field' was the sum of the interacting atomic forces which you are trying to detect. The energy level of that material body was so low that those forces were able to act without interference. The condition you could not conceive of reaching artificially actually exists in nature!"

"You go too fast, Kron," responded the Sirian. "Your first idea is far more likely to be the true one. The idea of unknown radiant or static force fields is easy to grasp; the one you propose in its place defies common sense. My theories called for some such conditions as you described; granted the one premise of a sufficiently low energy level; but a place in the real universe so devoid of energy as to absorb that of a well-insulated interstellar flier is utterly inconveivable. I have assumed your tale to be true as to details, though you offer neither witnesses nor records to support it; but I seem to have heard that you have somewhat of a reputation as an entertainer, and you seem quick-

witted enough to have woven such a tale on the spot, purely from the ideas I suggested. I compliment you on the tale, Kron; it was entrancing; but I seriously advise you not make anything more out of it. Shall we leave it at that, my friend?"

"As you will," replied Kron.

Science (cont. from pg. 42)

please understand that neither scientific facts nor basic situation ideas are in any sense private. If you think you can write a better story about a heavy-gravity planet than I did, go to it. If you think you can handle the old possession theme better than I did in *Needle*, that's your right. If you want to use a sunless planet as a background, don't let my "Logical Life" bother you — it wasn't the first, and I trust won't be the last.

If fifty good merPeople stories get written in the next year by people who read this column, it will be wonderful for science fiction — and very flattering to me. Go to it.

gargate

by sterling taylor

Donnoh slipped in the mud and fell heavily against a tree. Mumbling curses, he clung to the trunk for a moment, then slid to his knees. He was tired. The old man in the village had said he could reach the temple by nightfall, but the light was turning sunset pink and there was no hint of an end to the forest. Donnoh slumped to a sitting position and ran his hand under the black straps on either shoulder. He had been sweating and the leather stuck to his skin uncomfortably. Wiping the droplets off his chest he allowed his palm to rest a moment on the silver medallion that sat where the straps crossed. It was made in the shape of a weasel's head with tiny ruby eyes.

"What now, Maretta?" he whispered.

The medal did not respond. Donnoh sighed and closed his eyes. He felt like crying; he felt like slamming his fist into the ground. Neither seemed adequate.

Suddenly the medal jumped, slammed against his chest, then strained to the right. Donnoh jerked his head in time to see a white snake flick its black tongue, and rear to strike. He drew his dagger and deftly skewered the snake at the base of its skull, sending the blade through to the hilt and lifting the snake as though it were a torch. With a sinister grace, its head lolled back, and as it opened its mouth wide, a delicate pink bubble formed between its jaws. Donnoh flicked his wrist, the bubble burst, and the snake hung limp. With one cut outward through half the neck, then one cut more, he sliced off its head.

"A thousand thanks, Maretta, I am ever your slave," he murmured, and thrust the bloody end of the severed head against the medallion. The ruby eyes gleamed hotly amid the blood. Donnoh wiped his blade on a tuft of grass and shoved it back under his belt. He felt somewhat better having made the offering, but he hoped the opportunity to steal a jewel or two for her would come soon. Although blood satisfied her appetite, Maretta appreciated an occasional present. It is well to keep patron demons happy.

Donnoh glanced down at the medal. It was again burnished and shiny, without a spot of blood.

"Time to move on, eh?"

Maretta gave a contented bounce. Donnoh flung his stained black cloak over his shoulder and started off again down the elusive path,


MARTHA FLOOD
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stumbling on the uneven dry ground and slipping in the mud patches that lay between. More than once he wished he had a broadsword. Rapiers and daggers are of small use for hacking through underbrush.

As the light grew fainter he began to fear he had lost the path entirely. The undergrowth grew thicker until it formed a wall of bracken. Donnoh closed his eyes and plunged straight into the thicket. Wet fronds slapped his face and sharp twigs scraped his skin. He tripped on a low-lying branch, crashed through a thorn bush, and stumbled onto open ground.

He blinked and wiped his forearm across his face. When he opened his eyes again, he saw that he was on the edge of a vast clearing. In the middle of the clearing rose a huge stone edifice. A lush meadow studded with wildflowers extended beyond the building, but the distant hills looked barren and sandy in the crimson glow of the recently set sun.

Donnoh stuffed a corner of his moustache into his mouth and chewed vigorously. Villagers often refer to their local shrine as a "temple," and he had expected a crudely-built wooden shack similar to Maretta's shrine on the outskirts of Karanth. But this...

Above the imposing outer wall, arches, spires, and domes gleamed blood red in the fading light. Donnoh glimpsed, through the central arch, a distant colonnade receding into the shadows. And to all clung flowers. Dense vines sporting waxy white blooms twined up the pillars. Fleshy orange blossoms hung in heavy languor between the arches. Circling the main arch, deep blue cups wavered slightly on their spindly stalks.

Donnoh took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and strode up to the main arch. He rapped with his rapier hilt on the open gate.

"Hallo! Anyone about?"

The only sound was the faint breeze rustling the leaves.

"Hallo! I seek lodging for the night!"

Only the rustling.

Donnoh slumped against the wall. Exhaustion and the heavy odor of the flowers had made him slightly dizzy. One of the blue bell-shaped flowers brushed his cheek. The scent was soft and thick. Dreamily he turned it towards his face and peered into its cup. It was deep but he could see the pollen sprinkling its base, and something else. . .Donnoh strained his eyes. . .Insects! He jerked his head back. The plant was a carnivore. He glanced down at Maretta for support.

"I bid you welcome. Come you as a supplicant?"

Donnoh whirled and faced the girl. She seemed very young, Donnoh thought, no more than seventeen, but she was very beautiful. Her white hair hung in two long braids plaited with yellow ribbon. Her eyes were black. In her hand was a torch of bound reed. The pale green flame

illuminated little in the sunset glow, but its light shimmered in the folds of her long, flowing gown.

"No," said Donnoh. "I know not what god is worshipped here. I am only a traveler who begs food and a place to sleep."

"Then you shall have it."

She turned and walked with a smooth, gliding stride across the courtyard. Donnoh stood for a moment, admiring the soft sway of her hips, and then followed her along the stone pathway.

"What god is worshipped here?" he asked.

"Viorra."

"And of what is she the patron?"

Her laughter came light and musical. "Can you not tell? Flowers."

Donnoh gazed at the sea of blossoms that filled the courtyard.

"Forgive me. I have traveled hard today. My wit is slow."

She led him through an arch into a high-vaulted hallway.

"And what god do you worship?"

"I worship none."

She glanced briefly at him over her shoulder but said nothing.

The walls were hung with intricate tapestries. In the flickering torchlight, the floral patterns seemed to change and flow, writhing with a life of their own. A gnarled branch momentarily became a twisted hand, a leaf abruptly revealed a grinning face. Donnoh nibbled at his moustache.

The girl paused before a massive oaken door. She lowered her torch, shot back the iron bolt, and heaved her weight against it. The heavy door creaked open. A damp breeze blew through the doorway, whipping the flame around her hand and scattering a shower of pallid sparks. She inclined her head for Donnoh to follow, and swept through the opening.

The air was thick and fetid. Donnoh groped for the doorframe and clung for a moment, holding his breath. Maretta tugged impatiently at the straps and he saw her eyes flare red in the gloom. He stepped into the chamber.

Ivy-choked gaps in the ceiling admitted a few rays of fading light, but the further reaches of the room were lost in shadow. The girl stood near a low dais, her torch held high above her head.

"Viorra," she whispered.

The statue was twenty feet of milky jade, translucent, lustrous. It represented a woman whose hair, twined with flowers, tumbled below her knees, cloaking her slender body. Her arms were thrown wide in a welcoming embrace. Donnoh let out his breath in a rush.

Around the feet of the goddess hosts of flowers were piled as offerings. Some were tiny and woven into garlands; others were deep bowls, delicately tinted near the rim but shading to rich scarlet and gold at the base. But it was offerings of quite a different sort that set Maretta throbbing against Donnoh's chest.

Strewn among the flowers, sapphires and emeralds twinkled in the torchlight. A large scimitar with a bejeweled hilt and a wicked blade lay on the bottom step. Donnoh ran his tongue along his lower lip. He was pleased that Viorra shared some of his tastes.

"Will you not bow?" asked the girl, her black eyes gleaming.

Maretta stirred in her straps. "I mean no disrespect to you or your goddess, but I give obeisance only before my patron."

The girl arched a slim eyebrow. "Patron? Yet you say you worship no gods?"

"Maretta is patron of actors and wayfarers," replied Donnoh, prudently omitting all reference to thieves. "But she is no goddess."

"You are an actor, then?"

"No, my lady, only a traveler."

"Always?"

Donnoh nodded. "Always."

The fierce devotion faded from the girl's eyes; her slow smile was almost shy.

"Come," she said.

He followed her through an open portal down another hallway of shifting tapestries. Again hands and faces came drifting into view like those of drowned corpses breaking the surface of an turbulent sea. This time Donnoh paid them scant attention. Instead he watched the gentler undulations of the girl's gown. He had seen no women but gap-toothed village wenches since he fled Karanth. He wondered how far Viorra's hospitality extended.

Light streamed through an archway at the end of the hall, and as they neared it, Donnoh became aware of music, softer than the rustling of the girl's gown. Placid, serene, it was a creation of voices purged of the vicissitudes of emotion, a music beyond both hope and despair. He thought of a choir, lost in a subterranean grotto, singing a hymn to the darkness. He began to hum along.

They emerged into a high-vaulted room lined with columns, each one studded with a basin of oil burning bright yellow. The pallid light of the torch had made Donnoh uneasy, but in the warm glow from the oil flames, the tension knotted between his shoulder blades began to relax. Maretta, too, nestled more comfortably against his chest.

The girl thrust her torch into a small font of water, sending up a puff of acrid smoke. She led him through the nearer rows of columns. Set in a niche in the stone wall was a one-legged table resembling an elongated mushroom. Atop the table were trays heaped with fruit and nuts, cakes and breads. The girl swept her hand toward the cushions piled about the table.

"Why do you wait? Sit down. You are tired."

Donnoh unbuckled his rapier and sank down amid the cushions. A dull, numbing ache of exhaustion flooded his arms and legs. One of the girl's long braids brushed his

cheek as she slipped down beside him, tucking her legs beneath her and neatly pulling her robe over her toes.

Donnoh, sprawled among the cushions, silently surveyed the splendor of the table. The plates were broad water lily leaves hewn from veinous green stone, and the handles of the knives and forks were carved with intertwining vines. But it was the cups, the glorious cups, that set Donnoh's heart thudding against his rib cage and sparks flickering behind Maretta's eyes. Rising high above the table on slender stems, the vessels blossomed into huge shimmering ruby bowls vibrating in quiet harmony with the music that filled the room.

"Do you not wish to eat?" asked the girl.

Reluctantly, Donnoh shifted his gaze to her.

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I was just. . . ." Donnoh shrugged and gestured vaguely at the table, barely restraining a guilty chuckle by stuffing a slice of bread into his mouth. He glanced nervously at the girl, but she seemed absorbed in heaping her plate with cake.

Donnoh decided a cool bit of fruit would be a pleasant beginning to his meal. None of the fruits was familiar to him, but he gamely chose a dusty blue-grey globe resembling a large plum. He hesitated for a moment, examining it, hefting it in his hand, then bit into it. His mouth was flooded with thick, syrupy juice that squirted between his teeth and dribbled down his beard. Restraining the impulse to wipe his mouth with his forearm, he awkwardly dabbed at his chin with a finely-woven napkin. He dropped the shrivelled rind beside his plate, and selected an orange ball with a waxen finish. He bit into it, cautiously at first, then more desperately, but his teeth would not pierce the skin. Smiling, the girl took it from him and peeled it with a few quick strokes of her knife.

"Have you, perchance, a bit of mutton?" asked Donnoh.

"No," replied the girl, "Viorra forbids the eating of meat."

"Ah. Yes. Of course."

"Try this," she said and handed him a slice of nut bread. "You can eat the crust," she added.

Donnoh accepted it, hoping that his smile looked more spontaneous than it felt. The crumbs stuck in his throat.

He gazed longingly at his cup. The trek through the forest had made him very thirsty, but the tall grace of the cup appeared difficult to manipulate. He envisioned dumping the liquor into his lap.

Without noting his discomfort, the girl casually grasped her cup and brought it down to her mouth. The supple stem did not lift off the table, to which it seemed rooted; it merely bent. Donnoh carefully took hold of his own. The stalk afforded no resistance, but bent so easily it felt immaterial. He experimentally

released the cup half way. The stem held it perfectly secure. He brought it down to the table level. It remained as stable as the plate beside it.

He tipped the cup to his lips. The wine was cool and sweet, with enough sharpness to the aftertaste to avoid being cloying. He fingered the underside of the bowl, but could gain no clue to the means of its extraordinary support. He tipped the cup again. And again. The liquor seemed to taste even more pleasant as the harsh edge left his thirst. A lightness seeped through his limbs.

His gaze lingered more and more on the girl. She, too, was taking healthy draughts of the wine. He hoped that familiarity had not made her capacity too great. He had plans for another sort of familiarity of his own. Her eye caught his and held it. Her pupils and irises were black, twin spots of ink upon her eyeballs. Donnoh's stomach lurched as if he were falling. He turned from her in confusion and drained his cup.

"Where do you come from?" she asked.

"I was born in a small village far to the north, but I have traveled in many lands."

"How come you here?"

Donnoh settled back among the cushions. He felt expansive from the wine, and related his escape from the dungeons of Karanth in detail, embellishing some points, glossing over others. He made his altercation with the Duke sound political, or perhaps romantic, rather than the result of simple thievery.

". . .so I paused for a moment outside the wall, deciding which road to follow. I chose the South, for none knew of me there." Donnoh took another sip of wine to ease his throat. "After many days of hard traveling and little adventure, I came to your temple."

"But why did you not go north, find friends, perhaps raise an army against the Duke?"

"My lady, I have no friends. I rely only on myself and Maretta. Remember, too, I am no warrior. I fight only when I must."

"And you do not now feel you must?"

"No."

"I see."

Donnoh fancied a hit of displeasure in her tone.

"And how came you to be a votary of Viorra?" he asked in turn.

"I was brought to the temple as a child by the monks. I have never been anything else."

"Monks? I have seen no monks."

"They do not live in this part of the temple. Only I am here."

"But do you not wish for more? To travel? Marry?"

"I could wish for nothing more than serving my lady."

"And you are never lonely?"

"I? Why, travelers come, and the monks, and. . . ." She hesitated and looked down. Her fingers toyed with the hem of her gown. Donnoh put his arm around her

shoulders and drew her to him. She offered no resistance, but laid her head gently on his chest.

"What are your duties?" he asked.

"To provide for the comforts of travelers."

Donnoh regretted that she could hear his heart.

She reached out her hand and fingered Maretta. "What is this? It looks like a weasel."

"Only an ornament. Would you like some more wine?"

As he filled both cups, he felt Maretta growing restive, twisting in her straps, tapping at his chest. Although she always grew annoyed when handled, Donnoh decided that this time she was excited at the prospect of a romantic encounter. She loved to watch.

Donnoh dropped back against the cushions and replaced his arm about the girl's shoulder. One of her braids coiled in his lap.

"Very pretty," he murmured, stroking the plaited ribbon. "How is it done?"

She picked the tiny knot apart with her fingernails and drew the ribbon from her hair. It fell in a cascade down her breast. Ducking her face away from him, she undid the other braid. It tumbled beside the first. She tossed her head, flinging her tresses behind her, and turned to face him.

Donnoh sat up and shifted his weight toward her. His hand reached out to caress her cheek and his mouth drifted toward hers. She stopped him with a quick smile and a finger to his lips.

"Soon," she said, "but come with me first."

She rose and swept across the room. Donnoh gripped the table edge and floundered to his feet. As he fumbled with his rapier, he saw the girl pause to ignite a torch and disappear through an archway. He hurried after.

The tapestries writhed and revealed their leering faces and hooked hands, but Donnoh's mind was brimming with visions of the girl's bed chamber. Velvet carpets and marble walls. Brocade draperies concealing a deep, scented pool where he could wash off the forest mud. The girl — flinging aside her robe and plunging in beside him, rivulets streaming down her face. Then the two of them together, wrapped in each other's arms on a silken couch or perhaps a bed of rose petals, soft as flesh. He felt an ache of yearning spread through his stomach.

The gut-wrenching odor of rot brought Donnoh to himself. He did not need to see the huge statue of jade to know where he was. The girl approached her goddess, her torch held high above her head. When she turned to face him, her face was a mask of blind devotion.

"Will you bow down now?"

Donnoh gazed up at the gaps in the ceiling. A star glittered like a chip of ice between the masses of ivy. The room began slowly to

revolve. He wished with all his soul that he had been more moderate with the wine. His knees began to buckle and he started to sink to the ground. Maretta give a mighty wrench at the straps, cutting them deeply into his shoulders. Donnoh moaned with pain and disappointment.

"I am deeply sorry, but I may bow only before Maretta."

"Very well," she replied tonelessly. "I will show you where to sleep."

Donnoh followed her into a hall smaller and darker than any he had yet seen. No tapestries danced on these walls. Moisture seeped through the stones and collected in small, murky pools underfoot.

They passed a row of wooden doors bound with rusty iron bands. Without giving him a glance, the girl thrust open one of the doors.

"You may sleep here."

The room was a tiny cell containing only a wretched mound of moldy straw. A small, barred window near the ceiling admitted wan streaks of moonlight. Donnoh staggered into the room. Quarters for the infidel. He had slept in worse places. The door slammed shut behind him. Guessing it was locked, he leaped for it and jerked hard. It swung easily. The girl's lips were drawn back in a sneer that exposed an even row of small white teeth.

"Do you think Viorra would make *you* a prisoner?" She left him staring after her from the doorway.

Donnoh crossed to the window and hoisted himself up to peer out. He could see the top of an inner wall, the moon, and a sprinkling of stars. He sank down on the pile of straw and buried his face in his hands. He tried slamming his fist into the straw, but his hand jarred painfully against the stones below. Without even removing his rapier, he threw himself across the rude bed and drew his cloak up to his chin. He wondered if the faint smell of stale sweat came from himself or the straw, then closed his eyes.

He was awakened by Maretta banging against his chest. He sprang to a crouch, his dagger in hand. There was no sound. He peered through the gloom, searching for danger. Nothing. The sky was still dark through the window, with no hint of dawn. The moon was no longer in sight. Maretta tapped his breast bone and strained the straps toward the door. He gathered up his cloak and stepped into the hall.

The darkness was impenetrable. Donnoh stretched out his hand to the opposite wall and began to feel his way to Viorra. He understood now why Maretta had awakened him. She wanted a gift. Her eyes were twin points of fire.

He stumbled on uneven bits of masonry and sloshed through puddles. Water seeped between his sandal and his foot. The stones in

the wall were damp and slimy between clumps of moss which felt like matted hair. Donnoh could hear nothing but erratic drips of water and his own labored breathing.

He reached the door and opened it enough to slip inside. Fetid air washed over him. He grabbed a torch from the stack near the door and lit it at the small basin of oil. Viorra loomed before him. She had no votive lights, for she glowed with a soft green phosphoresence of her own. Donnoh crept up to the offerings heaped on the steps of the dais. He tossed aside the flowers, burrowing down for a bauble for Maretta. Scattered amid the rotting plants beneath were emeralds, topazes, sapphires. Maretta was unimpressed. He uncovered a large chalice carved with arcane symbols and finished in gold, but Maretta heaved impatiently toward the door. Donnoh hefted the heavy scimitar with the jewel-encrusted hilt and showed it to Maretta.

"I want it even if you do not," muttered Donnoh as he crossed the room. He turned by the arch and saluted the statue with a mock bow.

"Your servant, Viorra. Many thanks for the sword. I am sure your posies please you more in any case." He entered the hallway.

The tapestries undulated as if billowed by a wind behind. Before he averted his eyes to the floor, he caught sight of a hand with too many fingers that seemed to reach for him. He almost wished that he had not brought the torch, but he would then have been forced to feel his way. He fancied touching the tapestries even less than seeing them.

Voices began to murmur around him. He froze, fearing that the leering faces had begun to accuse him. A wave of relief washed over him as he realized it was the solemn music of the dining chamber. He ran on, trying to puzzle out why Maretta would lead him there.

He came to the archway and stepped through the forest of pillars. The basins of oil were unlit, but crimson light glowed from across the room, providing enough illumination to see. He plunged his torch hissing into the font and crossed toward the ruby light. The mushroom-shaped table was clear of all but the cups which sprouted from its surface; it was the cups that lighted the room. The lines of the bowls burned fiercely within crimson haloes. Maretta's eyes flared in response. She tugged at the straps. Donnoh set his jaw and advanced on the table. He knew now why he had been guided here. Maretta wanted one of the cups.

What a worthy tool for hacking Viorra has provided, he thought, as he aimed a powerful blow at the slender stem. The sword clanged off, jarring his arm to the shoulder. Donnoh brough his free hand quickly to his pained wrist, then stood unmoving, sword half raised, breath held, eyes wide with staring at the undamaged stem. Maretta ham-

mered his chest, and he began to bring the scimitar down again and again. Sparks flew from the blade, and the singing of the dark choir rose to a keening wail that beat against Donnoh's brain.

With a final might effort he brought the sword crashing down on the stem. The blade shivered into glittering fragments. A shard slashed his cheek and blood trickled down into his moustache. The bowl of the cup lay on the table, its stalk nearly severed. The light oozing from it was the color of dried wine.

Donnoh paused to regain his breath and wipe the sweat from his eyes. Sensing someone behind him, he spun to face the girl. She stood impassive. Her pale form shimmered; the light seemed to pass through her. Her hair stirred as if tossed by a breeze.

"Thank Viorra for the cup," shouted Donnoh over the howling voices, "but tell her that her swords are not much good."

Donnoh grabbed hold of the bowl and pulled. Sweat ran into his beard and mingled with the blood. His pulse pounded in his ears. The stem gave way and Donnoh staggered back, grabbing for the edge of the table. The light plunged through purple to dark blue. The floor gave way beneath his feet and his hand slipped through the table. The room wavered, faded, and disappeared entirely. Donnoh was falling.

The girl flew about him like a moth at a candle, fluttering, swooping her hair streaming behind her like flames. She was shaking with laughter which Donnoh thought he could hear ringing out above the deafening wail. He drew his rapier and made impotent stabs at the circling wraith. Below him he could see yellow dust like sand, and large indistinct forms. Strange, bloated shapes almost like. . .insects. With a shout of rage and horror Donnoh remembered the carnivorous flower at the gate. He was plummeting into its maw.

Maretta bucked against his chest. He dropped the rapier and clapped his palm against the medal. She jumped from the leather straps into his hand. He flicked his wrist and four slender blades clicked out from the rim, like points on a compass. Grasping one blade he flung the medal at the girl. Maretta gleamed for an instant in a lethal blur and then she sliced through the girl's robes and bit deeply into her flesh. The girl's laughing mouth contorted with a silent scream.

A blinding flash seared Donnoh's eyes, his muscles contracted, bending his body backward in an arc of agony, his eardrums seemed to burst in the roar. . .

. . .and he was lying in the dust outside the temple gate. A burning slice of sun was visible above the hills. Donnoh experimentally moved his arms and legs. Nothing appeared to be broken. He sat up carefully. Maretta lay face down near his foot,

with his rapier not far beyond. He heaved himself to his feet, clapped the medal back on his chest, and shoved the sword back into his belt. Turning to face the sun, he started a prayer of thanksgiving to Maretta.

"My patroness, I am ever your slave. In this new dawn, I. . . ." He stopped. The sun had disappeared behind the hills. It was sunset. Donnoh looked about wildly at the clouds, the light, the temple, the blue flower lying on the ground, sliced through the stem.

"The flower, Maretta. The smell. I felt sick. It must drug its prey." Donnoh laughed aloud in exultation. He ground the carnivorous bloom beneath his heel.

Maretta said nothing.

"I bid you welcome. Come you as a supplicant?"

He whirled and faced the girl. Black eyes and white hair plaited with yellow ribbons.

"No," said Donnoh, smiling broadly, "I am only a traveler seeking food and lodging."

The girl arched an eyebrow.

"Indeed? Your need seems greater than that. What of the blood on your cheek?"

Donnoh shot his fingers to his cheek. He found the gouge dug by the scimitar shard. He glanced down at Maretta. She was as silent as a lump of lead.

"But how. . . ?"

"In Viorra's garden there are many flowers," said the girl. "Come you as a supplicant?"

Donnoh dropped to his knees and kissed the ground.

"Yes," said Donnoh. "Yes, I do."

He followed her into the temple.

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ILLUSTRATORS

Steve Gildea	pg. 2-3
Miriam Greenwald	pg. 26, 31
Martha Flood	pg. 61
Janice Flood	pg. 72, 78, 80, 88, 91

Cover Picture by
[illegible] Flood

The Symbol Hunter

Keith L. Justice

[illegible] and unusual story defies all attempts to categorize it.
We can say only that we hope you enjoy it.

The subtitle — if you like them, which I myself do not, unless the pay rate is more than ½¢ per word — is HOW TO BREAK INTO THE SCIENCE FICTION FIELD IN A MEANINGFUL WAY. If that does not suit you, perhaps you'd like HOW TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION, WIN FRIENDS, AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE. If you don't like either of them, stuff it.

*

Traditionally, science fiction stories have plot. Traditionally, they have structure. Traditionally, they display at least some vestiges of coherence. This narrative (if you choose to call it that) has none of these. Why? you ask. And well you might.

*

Look, a writer can't make guarantees. That's pretty much self-explanatory. We're dealing with words, and ideas, and feelings here, as well you know. Writing isn't a visual medium, but the writer has the unenviable task of making his creation visible. Writing isn't an auditory medium, but the writer has the maddening task of making his creation audible. Writing isn't a tactile medium, either, but the writer has the impossible task of making his creation a tangible thing. Nor is writing an olfactory medium, and there's the rub: it's too, too easy to make a story smell. Why do writers bother? you ask. And well you might.

There can be no guarantees. But just to show how many conventions are being questioned here, I, the writer, in full possession of all my faculties, do hereby make this guarantee. This book will not self-destruct five seconds after you put it down, whether or not you choose to read it. More than that I cannot promise; if you want more than that, you've got to work for it. You could, I suppose, become a symbol hunter. It is s/m-addening to think that a reader may breeze through and dismiss in twenty minutes the work of three or four days. There's time and thought compressed between the words and lines. You won't find that out by whittling at a story like a block of white pine under a flashing new pocket knife, trying to make it fit what you already know. What if the story is trying to tell you something you didn't already know? Got you there — all you end up with is curly little white slivers and splinters in the ball of your thumb.

In case anything I've written so far is causing any trepidation, I will soothe reader anxiety by stating for the record that this story will not attempt to tell you anything you don't already know. There, now you've nothing to worry about.

Most of the best stories are told in the third person author-omniscient manner. Some people believe this makes for a smoother and more organic narrative. I couldn't care less. I'm not trying to write something that is smooth and organic. Traditionally, readers cringe at the

thought of a story that stops along the way to insert a sound and very factual explanation of something or other. Why this should be is anyone's guess. Explanations are almost always helpful. What is a story anyway, if not a writer's explanation of some character's point of view concerning something or other? I see that already I have stopped along the way to explain something, and in all probability, that is a very bad/good thing. I do hope you find lots of good/bad signs along the way.

*

As you can see, I'm returning "Bugbear." I enjoyed reading it for the most part, but there are a couple of problems. The first six pages really have nothing to do with the story; they are merely background info which would be better cut down (all of that about colonization has nothing to do with this story) and worked into the story as it moves along (the info on the drug's addictive qualities, etc.). Unless you do that, the first part of the story will be slow going. Second, the ending just died on me. From page 6 to the last page, the story was going great; then it died. Would work great as a prologue to a novel about Jiff making his way on another planet, using the prologue to explain where he'd come from, his attitudes, etc. But as it is it's merely a big fight scene (with lots of preparation, I admit, but...). I like stories that have some point to make, in addition to the color and action. Sorry.

Stephen Gregg

*

There is a very special amateur writer's club near where I live, and sometimes I go to the meetings. It is a science fiction writer's club, but that isn't what makes it special. The group has about a dozen people in it, and only one of them is a published writer. He is a stout, portly gentleman who wears good-fitting expensive clothes. The clothes are not somber, exactly, but subdued and dignified. Grays, light browns, etc. Calls himself William Rootbush, Sr., but tell us that is a pseudonym. He says he's had over fifty short stories published, but those are all under another pseudonym, and he won't tell us what it is. He won't tell us his real name, either. Rootbush can't make it to every meeting (the meetings are every other Wednesday night, 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM); he's a diplomat or something, and flies all over the world with fifteen minutes notice, and things like that.

*

I have chosen a first person narrative, in defiance of most critical opinion, not because I am ordinarily the defiant sort — Lord have mercy — but because I've been trying to crack this particular nut for 17 years, and I would call that a very personal, even intensely personal, sort of thing. And a person can hardly get

any more personal than to say "I did this" or "I said that." Besides, the cross-symbolization between "I" and "eye" is too much to resist. Anyway, there is no better way to attempt to straighten a short kinky section of reality's ordered chaos than by plumping yourself down (figuratively) in front of a piece of it and telling it how it is. Right then, right there, and to hell with the fact that it will all change even as you are describing it.

The only real drawback is the fact that what you describe is only one small piece of a large and overwhelming whole. If using the first person is somewhat presumptuous on one level, what might one call a blithe attempt to pretend to godhood or god-dom by telling a story as if what is narrated is completely and totally a truthful reality in all aspects? Monumentally ludicrous. Personally, I think it is much less presumptuous to tell how things in a limited area *seem* than to tell how everything *is*.

Assuming, of course, there is some sort of story to tell in the first place.

*

Thanks very much for showing me "Sojourner," which is a pretty good story. The plot is good and the structure is nice, and in fact I think this has a very good chance of selling elsewhere. But, to me, the characterization and the writing itself were both a bit weak. In a piece like this, characterization is of primary importance, and there isn't enough of it. The people aren't fully human, and the reader never learns quite enough about them. You could remedy this in a couple of ways, either a la Steinbeck or Wilhelm by giving them particular mannerisms or body movements or, in general, special behaviors. Or you could work in a series of flashbacks (a la Saul Bellow in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*). Or both.

Still, the story line itself is quite strong and the story is at least up to the sf par, if not better... And I'm very interested in seeing anything else you'd care to show me.

Scott Edelstein

*

Look. At this biweekly meeting of would-be writers, we talk about writing. We talk about selling, too, which is considerably more difficult than writing. We have a know-it-all named Arnold Pallas who gives pretty good advice in spite of the fact that he's never sold anything. Each meeting, we always expect Arnold to come limping in (he has a prosthetic leg) to tell us of his first sale.

One of our regulars sits down with Arnold and says, "Arnie, I think the whole field is just a joke. They don't want new talent and fresh ideas, they want mostly the same old crap by the same old people. Even the new names are starting to sound old. After you see them fifty or a hundred times they aren't

'bright new talents' anymore. They're dull old talents, and they keep doing the same old stuff. But because they did some good stuff to start out, they've got names, and they keep writing and selling on their names, like frog legs that still twitch in the frying pan even after the frog is dead and tossed in the garbage. Right?"

Arnie shakes his head slowly, as you might imagine the Liberty Bell would swing to and fro slowly, maybe even majestically. "No. That's not true. It seems true, yes. But sf is a field on the upswing. It's been on the upswing since it picked itself up off the ground after the great magazine bust of the 1950's. The people who edit sf now don't have a big golden dream ahead of them, showing them what sf should be — all they know is that sf has been, and that isn't enough. They're looking for something. They don't know yet themselves what it is, though they may spend hours gee-hawing over the subject. When they see a spark of what they're looking for, they know it, all right. Your job is to show them what they're looking for.

"Of course, it isn't very easy. Since nobody knows what they're looking for, they can only find it in pieces. And that's the way they have to present it — in small pieces. It isn't a whole thing yet, but it's coming along. You know how you can tell it's coming along?"

Nobody knows, of course.

"After a literature goes through an arty-farty stage, it comes to a cross-reference stage. The arty-farty stage is where they do cute things, like dribble the last few words down the page — you know, one word to a line and each word backspaced under the one above it to make an inclined plane. It's already gone through that. Now is the cross-reference stage. It took ten years for sf to go from an undelineated but accepted form to stripped-down pulp; it took forty more years to get up to the arty-farty stage; in another forty, nobody'll even know it was a separate thing."

*

Arnie's advice, if you were able to pick it out of his philosophical ramblings, is usually easier to give than to use. That is the hallmark of virtually all advice — except that which isn't really meant to be taken seriously — and so I suppose that I have failed at giving you any usable criteria (or is that 'criterion?' I always confuse them, as well as data and datum, so I usually just don't use them) for telling good advice from bad. But when were problems ever *truly* soluble? (or is that "solvable?")

*

You haven't developed your idea into a real story. As a general rule, submissions of 2000 words or less aren't good bets to sell to *NEW DIMENSIONS*, because it's rarely possible to bring off a story of strong

impact in so small a span. The story line's too slender to make for compelling reading. And you ought to work toward greater simplicity of style — "black" instead of "ebony," etc.

Robert Silverberg

*

Arnie's got a fake leg. It's quite ingenious — he explained it and showed it to us once. It's plastic, flesh colored, with a padded socket on top for him to put the stump of his thing into. There are straps to hold it on. He can even put a shoe and a sock on the thing so it will match his real leg. The thing is slotted and hinged at the knee, and has an odd pressure-lock action that I don't understand. But he swings it forward and puts his weight down on it,and it holds him. He falls forward on it, catches himself with the other leg, and takes the weight off it — then it swings forward for the next step.

Before I saw Arnie's fake leg I never realized that the way Arnie walks is exactly the way an ordinary person with two legs walks; push forward, lock the knee, push the body up and over the leg like doing a small pole vault, let the body freefall for a fraction of a second, then swing the other leg forward and catch the body just in the nick of time, just before it goes far enough to make the body fall on its face. The only difference is that Arnie can take his leg off and put it in the corner of his bedroom while he sleeps.

"Yep," Arnie said after he'd showed us how the leg worked, "I can't help thinking that this here leg —" he slapped it, and it sounded like he'd slapped the fender of a car "— is a lot like a typewriter."

"Huh?" was the general reaction, though there was a snort or two and a couple of snickers.

"Well, this fake leg ain't the best way of walking, but I get along. And writing ain't the best way of expressing something, but the world bumbles along anyway. There are a lot of really good books and stories, sure, but at the bottom of it all, don't you almost always come away from a book feeling like there really ought to be more?" (Even if we hadn't shared his sentiments, he could always get us to believe that we did.) "Like the writer was trying to say something important, maybe even something of cosmic significance, and he ended up dancing and tippy-toeing around it like a two million B.C. caveman trying to chase away bad spirits by dancing around a fire? Maybe we never have made a change in mode, only in manner." He slapped his leg again. "Not the best way — but the only way we got."

*

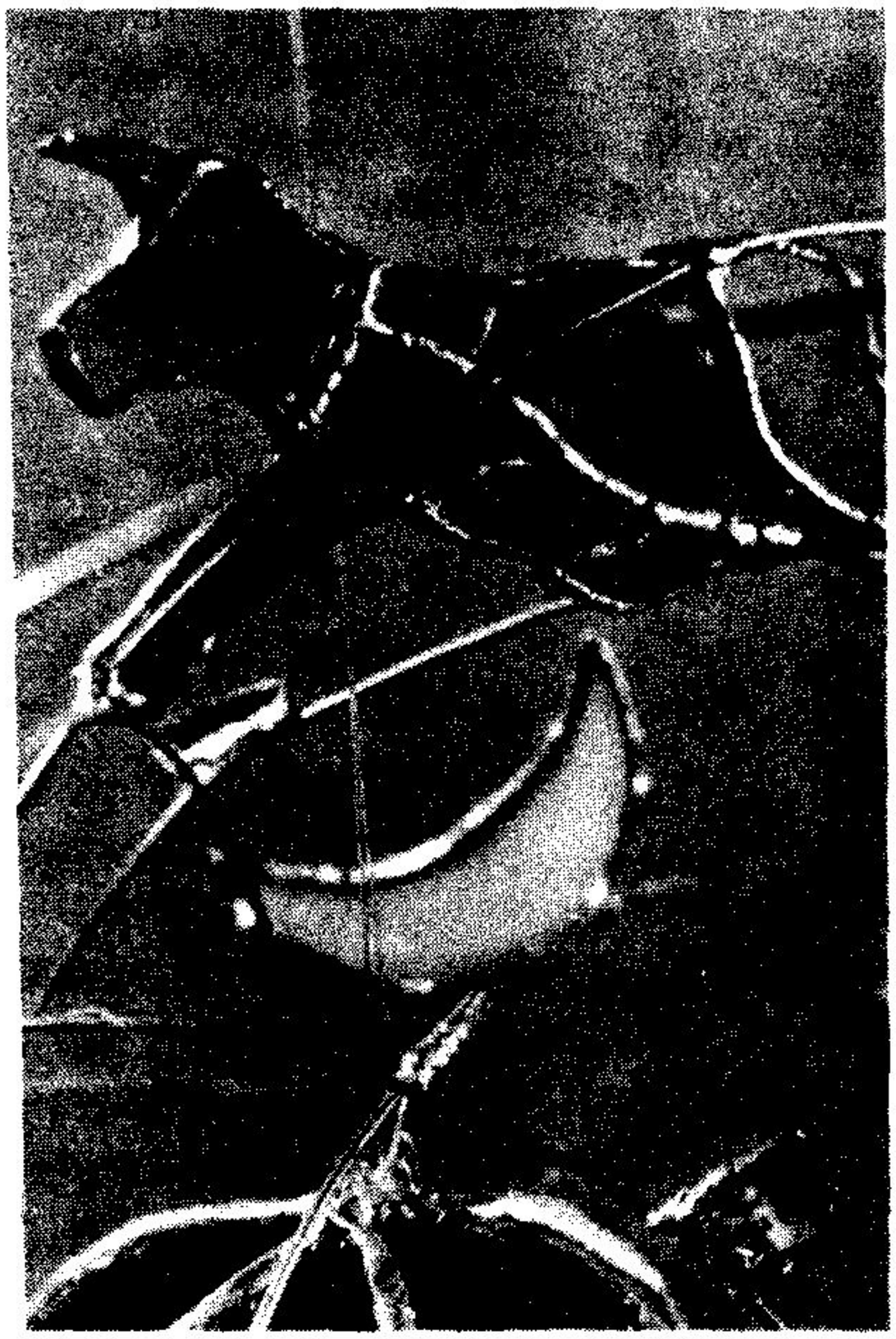
I think this is a quite surprisingly successful transplantation of natural-history fiction into sf, & I liked the way your space explorers were casually tromped into the background, but it is difficult to identify with a 5,000 ton cow, & although I was interested in Roo as a curiosity I found I really didn't care whether she made it to the water hole or not. The trick in a story like this is to make the reader care very much — if you could manage that, I think you would have a winner.

Damon Knight

*

Sometimes I think I could do a really good story if I just followed Arnie around for a few days, copying down everything he says. It might not be science fiction, but maybe I could crack the mainstream with it. Listen, there are other people in our group — like Winnie MacPerson. She can't hear very well, so she has a hearing aid. It's a fat little crescent of flesh-colored plastic that curls behind her ear like a thick, heavy caterpillar. She doesn't like wearing the thing — bad eyes or small boobs are acceptable shortcomings in women these days, glasses and foam rubber support cups are, like Arnie's leg, legitimate props. But hearing aids aren't.

Winnie (sometimes we add "the Pooh") might as well not have a hearing aid. She only wears it half the time, but she ignores good advice *all* the time.



"The most common advice to fledgling sf writers I can find," says Winnie the deaf Pooh, "is to write, write, write."

Write she does — probably more than any two of the rest of us put together. But advice-taking is not her thing, so she keeps writing the same old drivel in the same old way. Her stuff reads like a feminist version of Cap Kennedy or Perry Rhodan — perhaps a Capella Kennedy or a Sherry Rhodan. It isn't particularly enlightening or terribly good. We have (hopefully) left behind the bad old days when true literature was the man's point of view during rape and other terribly elemental and raw and true and deep shit, but we probably aren't

going to locate any good new days on the strength of turned tables. Chauvinism is a drag, and has been pretty well petered out by opportunists of the last fifty years — God help us if a new breed of female chauvinist is a-borning. The answer to an unconscious repression is not a conscious counter-repression, no matter how tempting it might be by way of retribution.

Listen. When Winnie told Arnie that writers advise fledgling writers to write, he thought about it then said, "I believe I'd amend that, Winnie. Surely it is important for a writer to write, but it is just as important — if not more so — for him to read. I would say read as much as you write. Or read more than you write, if you have the time."

"What do I need to read for?" demanded the Pooh, suspiciously. "I want to be a *writer*. I want to *write*."

"Of course, of course. Don't we all? But you see, it is important to read so that when you write, you'll know what's already been written. Reading is also a good way to see how people who have sold their writing structure their work. Writing is an art, and art is a lifetime devotion. Seeing and understanding how others have taken steps to perfect their art can save those steps for you. *They* had to learn the hard way, by doing, you can learn the easy way, by seeing how they solved some of their problems."

*

Thanks for sending "Cocktail Carnival," but I'm afraid this one doesn't appeal to me.

Terry Carr

*

There is another member of our group, Arthur Meezer. His left hand is missing. He lost it to a trimsaw in a lumber mill while working summers to put himself through college many years ago. He has several different hands that he can attach as needed. He even has a social hand, set in a permanent unnaturally natural configuration and complete with a soft and rich-looking black leather glove, for occasions when just the appearance of a hand is needed. My favorite among his several hands is the curved, shining, needle-tipped hook, a gleaming chrome-plated wicked thing, though I don't know what he uses it for. I heard that his eight year old daughter asked him to play Captain Hook in a school play production of *Peter Pan*, and he was mad for a week.

Meezer was there the night Winnie was doing her spouting about writing rather than reading, the night Arnie was telling us that we could learn how others solved their problems while learning to write by reading what they had written, and he looked over at Arnie — who was drinking pink lemonade from a Dixie cup and eating Oreos, our standard refreshment fare at meetings — and said, "Baloney."

Arnie wiped little black crumbs from his upper lip. "Baloney what?"

"Baloney on art. On that crap about spending your life learning about an art. That's crappola. The last person who lived and died for art probably croaked about 200 B.C."

"Don't you believe in art, Art?"

"I believe in turning out something that somebody might like to read. I believe in writing something that somebody might like well enough to pay hard cash for. The best art is what somebody will take in trade for crossing your palm with some bucks."

Please forgive me if I stop here for a moment to insert a random observation or two. Note the artificiality of Art's value system; observe the commercialism in his outlook, the cynical realism of getting the palm crossed by some bucks — and this from a man who has only one real palm. If you have, by now, become a fair-to-middling symbol hunter, you may already have thought of the contrasts inherent in a situation in which Art's fake palm gets crossed by some greenbacks; a facsimile of a human appendage accepting a paper symbol of material Wealth. Definitely not big game, as symbol hunts go, but interesting, don't you think, in its subtle intimations about the value systems of people and their societies?

I'm now ready to continue with the story, but I note that there isn't much left to tell in this particular segment. Arnie didn't argue with Art.

*

I do appreciate the chance to read "Cocktail Carnival"; regretfully, I'm returning it. I have no quarrel with most of the writing in this novelette, but there were a few things

which struck me wrong: It strikes me wrong that $^{7}/_{8}$ of the story is very much an extended "chase sequence" — which, for me at least, tends to make the story's effect lopsided. It seems to me also that Sin, considering her action at the end, deserved a more three-dimensional treatment in the preceding story.

I felt the most effective writing was the deadender sequence; in a few grotesque examples, you *showed* the result of immortal ennui.

Ed Bryant

*

Perhaps you can see now that our club is a somewhat odd one. There is literally something wrong with everyone in the group. Art is missing a hand, Arnie is minus a leg, Winnie is almost deaf. What is the matter with me, you say? I have a glass eye. My favorite trick to play is to say "I see, I see," when someone who knows about my eye must explain something to me. They never know if I'm using the phrase unconsciously or as a grotesque joke on myself and them.

Perhaps you have also noticed the lack of structure in this little piece of reality. Good, very good. If you've also noted a switch in verb tenses here and there, that's even better. If, on the other hand, you haven't noticed these little details about the cockeyed tapestry of reality that I am trying to explain, perhaps you are trying to see a point.

I'm not a writer who is hard to live with — I am merely confused, more or less on a permanent basis. From where I sit, I can see into some of the wrinkles and folds of the tapestry of reality that are not within your range of vision. I will relate the details as best I can. Bear with me. If you are the type who must have a point, I will try to work one in. Be patient. Trust me.

Perhaps you have come to the conclusion that my use of the first person "I" narrative is somehow linked to the fact that my particular cross to bear is a glass eye. Think so, if you must. It makes good sense — I'll leave that as my point, in case I can't come up with another before this narrative comes to an end.

*

"Cocktail Carnival" is one of the best stories I have ever read, by anyone in any field, published or unpublished...This is a brilliant and wholly successful work. The characterization is superb, the story-line fascinating, the images and ideas just incredible — and the whole thing fits together into an utterly perfect unit. I have only one minor criticism, and that is that the symbolism in the story speaks quite clearly for itself, and that therefore I feel that the chapter titles are both useless and in fact a bit heavy-handed. I think they can be dropped all together: simply separate the story into seven sections by the days, and leave breaks between certain scenes. The chapter titles from the prayer aren't going to enlighten a thick-headed reader: and they're only going to irritate the perceptive one. Right?

The hell of it is that I'm editing the following anthologies at the moment: one on future professions, one on sf and altered states of consciousness, one on futureshock, one of sf parodies, and one of sf for fourth graders. And, good as your story is, it simply doesn't fit any of these themes, and so I am forced to return it.

Scott Edelstein

*

I've wanted to write for seventeen years. God knows why, for I certainly don't. I don't like being driven from my bed at 2:00 AM to jot down notes for a story. But I like even less to remember the next day that I thought up the best short story of my life the night before, only to lose it by snuggling up closer to my wife and refusing to get up to write myself some notes or a memo on my thoughts. (Most of the time my wife sleeps on her side — facing away from me. Does that symbolize something?)

*

Listen, sf is a whole world unto itself. Sometimes I feel like an Atlas, doomed to carry it all around like a dead weight, never to be part of it, never to gain anything of value from the strange symbiosis sf forces you into. In my mind I *become* the sf field. Sometimes I have an *Orbit*-ache; at other times I have distinctly unpleasant pains in my *New Dimensions*; now and then I feel as if my poor *Universe* had been severed from my body and tossed into a huge clearing where the entire Prussian army was allowed to bivouac on it for a week, marching and pitching tents and doing maneuvers. As I grow older my *Dangerous Visions* grow ever more tame, my *Epoch* is bruised and sore, my feet grow heavy and painful with the sprouting corns and bunions of the really sad and sick series material that crawls from the publishing houses in gaudy insect waves.

*

"Editors are human," Arnie tells us. "They've got feelings and likes and dislikes and prejudices. They get horny and get hungry. They aren't ogres hiding in basements counting the money they peel off the top before they divide what's left among the writers."

"Well, you can't prove any of that by any of us."

"Each editor has his own thing," Arnie continues stubbornly. "They all say they are looking for the best sf that the field has to offer, and that's true — up to a point. But in some subtle ways you have to see beyond immediate content to the slant."

"Don't go breaking any bubbles," Art interjects. I take sudden notice of the fact that interjecting is the one thing at which Art is unquestionably accomplished. "We don't want to think they're as dumb as everyone else."

"But that's just the point," insists Arnie. "They aren't. If you assume they are, you do yourself a grave injustice — and you certainly hurt your chances of a sale to a major anthology. There are only two ways to make a sale to someone who has himself been a major force in the development of sf — you either write good sf with the particular subtle slant that he likes, or you write what you want and how you want and do it so brilliantly that you convince him that how you see

it is how he really ought to see it. And since the latter way will happen perhaps twice in an editor's lifetime, you have a much better chance of doing the former."

"Yeah," Art growls, "but how do I know what they want? I've had so much stuff bounced from the top editors I think they've got rubber mailboxes."

"That's very simple," Arnie says, quite gravely, as if addressing a eulogy to an assembled multitude. "Take Knight, for example. He's pretty well stuck on some isms. If you have a basically good story, and you make sure to do it up with a little imagism, you're well on your way. Cubism will do, or perhaps a kinky and original sort of vorticism. Toss in a dash of the mechanistic theory of the universe insofar as the inanimate objects in your story, and you're home free."

Timidly, Winnie (who, surprisingly, has been using her hearing aid) asks, "But how do we know how to use all those things? What is vorticism? What is imagism?"

Arnie looks pained. "But Winnie, that's exactly what we were speaking about a few weeks ago. I said you should read. Haven't you ever heard of anyone named Joyce? Eliot? Pound?"

"In frosh lit."

"Didn't you ever *read* anything by them?"

"A page out of *'The Waste Land.'* But what have they got to do with sf? Two of them are *poets,* for Crissake, and the other wrote *mainstream.* I want to write *sf.*"

Arnie clomped over to the lemonade and Oreos.

*

Sorry to say that *Universe 8* is now filled, so I'll have to return your manuscript unread.

I probably won't be buying stories for *Universe 9* till the end of 1976, at which time I'll put announcements in the SFWA publications and LOCUS. I hope you'll think of me about that time.

Terry Carr

Why should I want to hunt symbols, you ask? Why should eye want to hunt symbols? (Eye'm sure that by this silly little device ewe can sea what fun eye could have with a paragraph or too eye mite have written especially two mix up and confuse homonyms — most especially the homonyms "I" and "eye" — butt wee will fourgo such tricks under the assumption that the cymbal of my semi-blindness is not lost on ewe.)

A good question. Perhaps there is no answer. Then, again, perhaps there is. I'm not a dogmatic type, I think you'll agree. Perhaps there is no symbolism in the natural canine act of pissing on trees. Perhaps the dog is just marking out his territory, utilizing what materials he has at hand; perhaps he is just relieving his bladder, and pissing sideways at a tree is safer than just letting it splash

down between his back paws; pissing on trees doesn't necessarily *have* to symbolize the average creature's disregard for the environment, or the natural tendency of organisms to despoil nature simply by the act of existing. On the other hand, many people do not realize that Mayday is a barbaric old fertility rite, a legacy of delightful naughtiness handed down by ancestors who knew more about human nature than about culture or socialization. There's no particular need to dwell on the fact that spring is the symbol of new life and fertility, and that dancing about a Maypole is the same as having an idol before you.

In this case, the idol is a symbol of a human member, and so is perhaps not as harmful to the spirit as forsaking God completely and giving him the bum's rush in favor of someone/something else. This, too, can be good/bad. Dancing round the Maypole is the same as rejoicing in the fact that everyman can get it up and share it with someone.

And last but not least, you have the impotent man who gets into an argument with his wife and shoots her. The gun may not symbolize the physical violation that he himself cannot accomplish. The explosions of the cartridges may not be symbols of the orgasms he hasn't experienced. The lead bullets may not symbolize the actual penetration of the female body that he has not been able to accomplish. The fact that one or two of his bullets were aimed vaguely at her groin, in deadly parody of the act he could not consumate, may mean nothing. He may, after all, be only murdering his wife. Who's to say — the wife?

*

This is what the Clarion people call "a white room story." It is a drug on the market just because everybody wants to write one. I'm sorry; please persevere.

Damon Knight

*

"No, no," Arnie hastened to explain. "The others have their points, too. You just have to look them over and see. Now, you take Silverberg. He isn't so much into isms. He likes stories that go somewhere and do something *within the story*, but which end by resolving or changing nothing. If you've got to resolve something, don't make it a real physical thing — make it a feeling, an intention. Furious activity, with no real outward change at the end. If all else fails, throw in some typographical tricks. He's the only one who'll go for them but they've gotta be good, not just cute.

"Carr is borderline. He likes really good descriptive images, but he's a little more down to earth. Subtleties aren't lost on him, but he prefers some solidity with the abstract. Pure outre abstract doesn't work unless you're Le Guin or somebody."

Heads nodded, as they always have, and I knew they would all go

home and scribble in notebooks the same as they always had. Every third meeting we take turns reading excerpts from a work in progress, and I dread those meetings. I've had this feeling, lately, that I might enjoy following Will Rootbush, Sr. home, to see where he lives and maybe get his real name off his mailbox or something. But it's too much trouble.

*

"Monsters" is very nicely done, intriguing, and even has a nice title. But it won't fit any of my anthologies thematically, and in any event though it works I don't like it quite enough to want to publish it.

Scott Edelstein

*

First you have to have a goddam story. My characters clatter out onto the page and look dumbly up at me. I am a god, albeit a paper one, and to create less than full characters is a sin. Lord, how I have sinned. 2D characters, fluttering about like cutouts on a mobile, forgive me. A sheet of paper has but two dimensions, since the paper represents a plane and a plane, by definition, has no thickness. And it is hard to cram three dimensions down onto two. The height and width take care of themselves but the depth must be redirected into a human dimension, and we all fail more often than not. How many poor, helpless, silly puppets have been published over the years?

Do you begin to see? I, with my one good eye, I see. And Arnie, with his one good leg, will make it. But will it all slip between the rigid plastic fingers of Art's social hand? Will the truth flit like a cloud of butterflies past the Pooh's ears because her hearing aid is turned off? I have, I believe, inserted a point. It may not be the best, but it will have to do. I am as good as my word; gentle reader, never say I gave you nothing. Never say I lied.

*

It's an interesting idea, but the execution isn't up to the standard of literary excellence I'm trying to maintain in *New Dimensions*. It's much stronger than the last one, but the first-person narrative spoils things. Your protagonist is forced to stand around *explaining* things about the immortal society — background details that ought to grow organically out of the action. Compare Damon Knight's "Dio" for a definitive handling of this theme.

Robert Silverberg

*

"Never waste your writing," Arnie tells us. I look around; Rootbush is gone, has missed several meetings. We have no address on him, and do not expect to see him again. He has tired of our trying. "You only have so many words stored up in you. If you started writing now and did a story a day till you died, you'd still have a finite num-

ber of words to express yourself with."

"You're exactly right," said Art, agreeing with Arnie for perhaps the first time. He held up his fake hand, rather than hiding it down by his side or in his pocket, and for one glorious moment forgot that the hand was not his own warm flesh.

"The way I see it, you got two kinds of words in you, though. You got words that you just write, words that are just words — words you use to fill up a space that you have to fill because of a contract, words that you use to write letters to relatives, just regular words. And you got words that come out because of some sort of inspiration. These words have part of you that comes out with them. They are straight from your soul, and they drain you — but they do it in a pleasant way, like sex drains you. You only got so many of them, and when they are gone, you are used up. But most of us have more than enough of the soul words to last us all our lives. We just have to be jogged into using them."

"That's a beautiful thought," said Arnie. "Regular words and soul words. But how do you tell which is which? Do you just know?"

"Naw. The soul words don't start to come until you get more than 2¢ each for them."

*

You have perhaps noticed by now that I frankly and honestly address the reader as "you" occasionally. An English teacher once told me that I should never write anything as if I were addressing it to a specific person — but I have now realized that that is the only way to write. Writing is reaching; writing is looking for a way to say something indirectly, perhaps a bit artfully, something that might be rather flat and unpleasant when ejected into the world like a nasty-flavored burp after a particularly fiery pizza.

Perhaps that is what writing is — perhaps it is only a way to embroider, to make something prettier or uglier or more interesting with some decoration. Certainly it is more fun, more meaningful, to read *The Hamlet* and find out that commercialism can be destructive and corrupting; certainly it would be a much less exciting life if one bought books for 5¢ each and found that they were nothing but folded covers with "Commercialism can be destructive and corrupting" printed on the inside.

But where does sf fit in, you ask? And well you might.

*

Editor, o ye of little faith, can ye not see the blood upon the pages? Can ye not see the wrinklespots of dried tears, can ye not smell the sweat? Even that which is unacceptable has had the days and hours of someone's life poured into it — if only you could wring *that* out of the pages in lieu of the funny little lines of black markings which will not serve your purpose.

You look calmly upon the work of others, passing judgment as best

you can — do you not see the grimness, the awfulness in what you do? There is consolation, of course — for us, not for you — in the fact that you cannot see, can never see, the whole picture. For you can only see what is on the paper *and not what was in the heart or mind that gave birth to that which is on the paper*, whether it be abortion, stillbirth, preemie, congenitally deformed, or healthy. For what it is worth to us — more to some than to others — we know not only *what* but *why*. And you, poor misguided soul that you are, you select for quality of what without ever knowing why. How sad.

But it is the best we can do, all of us. May we be forgiven for sending it all to you — and may you be forgiven for sending it all back. If you only knew — we send the words on paper because we cannot send ourselves, and you wouldn't know what to do with us if we could. "Up yours!" we think, each and every time, but not for the reasons you may think — never for the reasons you may think.

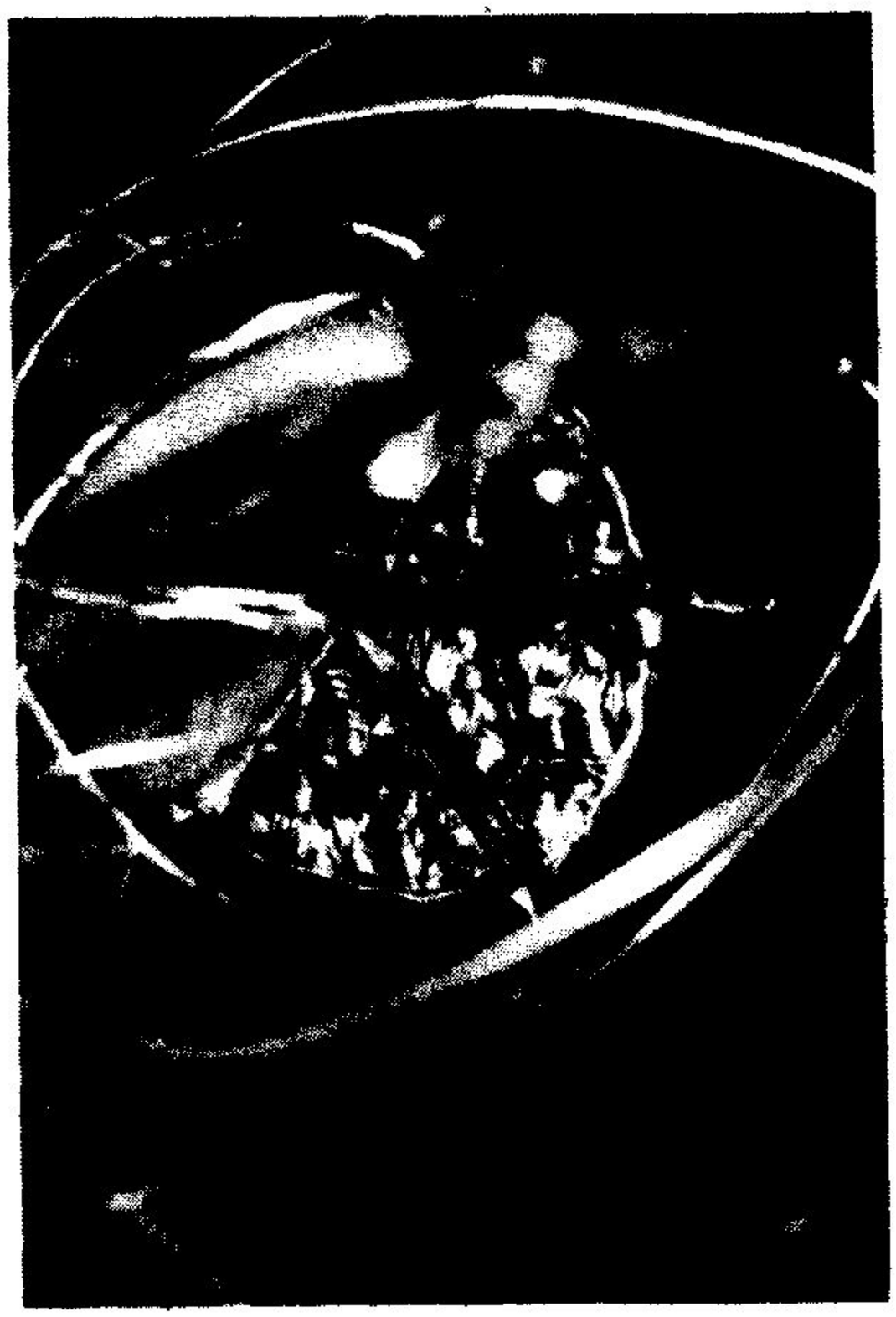
*

I got tired of listening to the bull. I just couldn't take it anymore. Arnie was looking for a place to dump his crumpled-up Dixie cup; we always meet in the cafeteria of a local school, and the janitor hides all the trash cans at night. I told Arnie, and he nodded and came with me. We strolled around the building while the writers in the cafeteria were reading excerpts of works in progress to each other and making inane comments. There never was time to read a whole story, and if no one ever read a whole story, how could anyone else know where it was supposed to go? And how could they comment on whether or not it got there?

Arnie and I walked through shadowed corridors. I was going to quit the group soon. Hell, I was getting better, I could *tell*, and somebody would buy something soon. Then I could join the SFWA and everything.

We walked, and it was strange that Arnie's feet made two different sounds as they hit the floor. The real foot made a slapping sound, as his ankle pivoted to let the front of his foot fall forward after the heel had taken the initial shock, but the fake foot made more of a light thudding sound as the rigid ankle let the heel take all of the shock. Arnie once told me he thought it funny that a shoe would wear out on the prosthetic leg before the matching shoe on his real foot got beyond use. The heels wear out.

But the two distinct sounds made by Arnie's two vastly different feet were really not any different in principle than my being able to see someone walking on my right but not on my left. If a companion walks on my left side and I look straight ahead, it is like trying to watch a ball game through the wrong end of a pair of field glasses, or dancing with an invisible partner.



We toured the classrooms, saw the seats where rows of squirming young butts sat while the teachers, armed with chalk and quiet desperation, tried to inject a little knowledge into the heads that were attached to the butts.

We sat down on desks that were nothing like the desks we'd sat on when we were young and in school. The thought of school itself became a sweet and sad memory, like thoughts and memories of the girl who took away your awful, clumsy virginity for you. All those little fannies, twisting in those seats, wanting to get out and away — and when the emphasis shifted around front, then it would be all those itching, quivering fronts wanting to get out and get together.

Life seemed lived between the buttocks and the genitals, and the head hardly got a chance. What with human nature, it seemed a true mystery how anyone ever learned anything.

"You're going to quit the group," Arnie said.

"I think so," I said. "Rootbush quit, and all our respectability seems to have gone kaput. We don't have a published writer among us anymore. And all we ever had was a group of grotesque people attempting to work their way into a grotesque profession. A man without a name, one without an eye, one without a leg, one without a hand, a woman without her hearing, and a motley and assorted group of other turkeys who are variously missing their teeth, good eyesight, common sense, and assorted body parts and faculties, doesn't make for a healthy atmosphere. What the hell, though, maybe I'll write a story about us all. They say truth is stranger than fiction, and I'm certain no one would believe a story based on the Tuskamonga Science Fiction Writer's Association."

We were silent for a few heartbeats. Then I asked, "Where's it going, Arnie? Too much has changed. It seemed so easy when I started out. I was sure my fourth or fifth story would sell. Now I'm on my fiftieth story, and nothing's sold yet. There are so many people writing now that I can't keep track of them all. Where's it all going?"

"They're all searching," he told me. "We're all looking for something, and it may take thousands and thousands of books over hundreds of years before we find out what it is. Writing is only words, but it's more — it's relationships. We're exploring. Most of us never get but a few steps into the wilderness, then we scamper back to safety and write of what we've seen. Some never go anywhere, and write only of what they might have seen. But there's something important waiting, if only we can get there.

"And it seems to be a questioning, a questioning of the very relationship between writer and reader. Barry Malzberg was instrumental, a few years ago, in stirring up some of the accepted attitudes about the involvement between a writer and his writing. The questioning has been going on elsewhere — which you would know if you've ever read anything by Samuel Beckett — but it seems to be gaining more momentum in sf now. We need to know the parameters and limits of a writer's involvement with the story. Should the writer provide all the answers, or none? Should the reader have it all handed to him, should he have to work and strain for every idea, or should the writer and reader meet halfway? Does writing involve the creation of new and separate — if sometimes undefinable — realities, or is it all merely redefinition and reinterpretation of current possibilities? If so, is this valid?"

After it sank in awhile, I agreed. "I suppose so. Nice neat stories with textbook development and conscientious structuring according to the four-quarter method aren't the thing anymore."

"Don't throw anything away, though," he advised with a grin. "Some things come back into vogue after a while. Or perhaps your heirs could pick up a nice piece of change by publishing your 'unpublished' stories someday."

"I'll question the relationship between readers and stories," I told him, suddenly confident. "I'll question the hell out of readers and writers. I'll say, 'Hey, what the fuck do you think you're doing, you jerk-off reader, reading my stuff and thinking what a flop I am? Maybe *you're* the goddam flop, you illiterate turd.' I'll question readers and writers, all right, though I may only be able to do it once. How things look to me, here and now, is never going to be anybody's definition of anything — not even mine. A definition implies you can see all of something — or at least enough so that your definition is valid. I don't think there are really very many things that can be defined completely or well. And when you've only got one eye, that makes it even harder to see enough of something to define it."

"There are other ways of seeing besides with your eyes," Arnie reminded me, very gently and kindly.

"That's right," I said, probably

because I didn't know what else to say.

*

Possibly you noticed that, as a character, Arnie started out as a 'know it all' and ended up as a confidant and soul-buddy. Was that an intentional progression, or was it an accidental inconsistency that I am lamely patching up with this question? For considering the way I intend to end this narrative — a fold of reality that will be revealed to you at the proper moment — *it could have been either way*. Think about that carefully and jot down any significances you find. When you are finished, count the significances, throw the paper away, and call yourself a fool as many times as you found significances.

*

Thanks for letting me see "After The Feeling Is Gone." I was quite impressed with your writing style. However, the story's length (we rarely are able to publish fiction that runs more than twenty-five pages in length), and its science fiction theme mitigated against our using it.

However, if you have shorter fiction of different themes, I would like to see it.

Joseph Spieler,
Executive Editor, GALLERY

*

So for my undefinition and my unstory I offer you this. You cannot truthfully say you weren't forewarned. If you want to think this unstory concerns a group of people who never were, and a club that never existed, you're free to do so. Let us just be clear on the fact that by deciding too completely in any one direction, you are taking a lot of responsibility on your shoulders.

Perhaps my unstory is merely a metaphor for life, with handicapped people struggling to write being a parallel to the emotionally handicapped people around us struggling to live. Perhaps these are merely the fevered ramblings of a poor deluded being who has literally scribbled until his fingers give him pain. (All my first drafts are done in longhand on lined paper — and perhaps *that* ought to tell you something, since putting down several thousand consecutive words into an unstory is not a sweaty kind of labor that I do in hopes of making money; writing is in fact an experience of mingled work and sweat and some actual physical pain, as if I were doing some kind of penance.) Maybe the first person narration of my unstory is a symbol for my good eye — or maybe the "I" of the narrator is a symbol for the glass eye. Perhaps the verb tense shifts are symbols of shifting, changing reality — a reality that appears to be one way in the folds of reality that are visible to me and another way in the folds which are unwrinkled enough for you to see into. Maybe the polite notes of rejection herein are symbols for the overall rejection we all feel in life

upon occasion. Maybe there are other symbols, and if there are, that could be a good/bad thing.

Yes, I do question the relationship between what is written and why, and what is read and why; I told Arnie I'd do it and by God I'm doing it, though you, of course, have no way to know if Arnie really exists. At bottom, it doesn't matter. I still promised him, and only a seventeen-year failure with hurting fingers can see that a promise to a fictional character can be as binding — if not more so — than a promise to a regular human. For in the world I share with Arnie, there are dogs that piss on trees only if we agree to have them — though it probably strikes you as odd that we would have handless Arts and deaf Poohs and nameless Rootbushes, just like there are in real life, and not ordinary dogs that squirt ordinary piss on ordinary trees.

If you think you understand all this, you're kidding yourself; and if you don't understand any of it, tough shit.

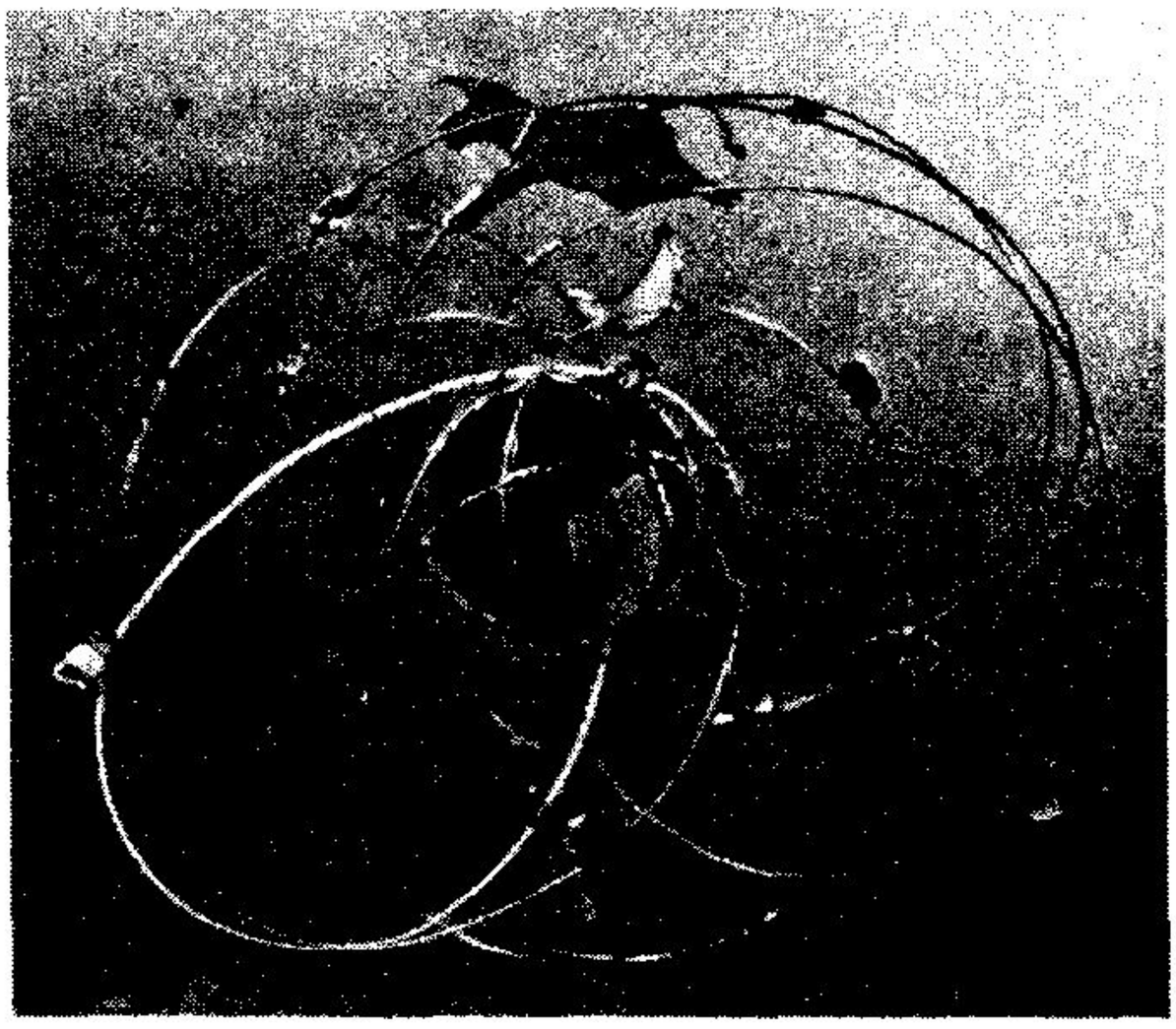
*

I think "The Symbol Hunter" is wonderful — perfect structure, wonderful characterization, and the whole thing is at once very serious and very amusing. Beautifully done. But you know as well as I do that it simply won't fit any of the themes I'm currently working with. I'm sorry. Where else to send it? Gad, I don't know. Probably no one will touch it. Maybe you should add this paragraph onto the story at the very end?

Scott Edelstein

*

I have done so. The rest is now out of my hands.



LETTERS

Dear Jonathan and John,

This written in more haste than I'd like, because of a horrible tottering mound on my desk labelled IMMEDIATE ACTION — and covered with moss. But I just couldn't let your nice hopeful mag and all the kind words go unanswered.

I haven't yet read Issue Nr. 1 as fully as I'd like — enjoyed MacAnn's spooky two christs story — but my opinion of your effort is perhaps best expressed in the enclosed check. Plus lots of good wishes; especially may your eyesight bear up.

I'm glad you came in so strong on Sturgeon, too — and Dick. Anyone who wants to know how to grab a reader ought to go over a flock of Sturgeon's first paragraphs — and cry into his typewriter. Big influence on me...Tell who was another, subliminal influence; and age 10 I had nothing to read for a year but the complete works of Rudyard Kipling. Whatever one thinks of his politics, he knows how to convey that sense of secret worlds behind worlds, "grown-up" mysteries. Plus terrific plot workmanship.

All best to you,
James (Tip) Tiptree Jr.

Dear Jonathan:

Well, if you want to do it, why should I question your sanity? I feel duty bound to inform you there are people named Asimov, or Heinlein, or Clarke, who probably have a little more drawing power than I do...T.P. Caravan, or J. Harvey Haggard — How about Basil Wells — Vaseleos Garson? E.B. Cole? Frederick Arnold Kummler? Arthur Zirul? But I digress.

(*The author of Rogue Moon and Who? is far too modest. We're proud to announce that Mr. Budrys' First Sale will be featured in UNEARTH #3, available in May.*)

UNEARTH is an interesting idea, and a well-executed one. The "first sale" by an established writer is a stroke of genius for a feature idea, and so is the Clement science column. It happens I'm deep into planning my next book, which will be borderline SF on biophysics, and I found Harry's first column specifically valuable.

There's some very nice writing in this issue. I won't comment in detail, and I won't say much about the good things, although there are quite a few of them. There are some things any new writer needs to work on, and here's a short list:

Long stories by new writers tend to consist of scenes strung on a thin thread, or else they tend to be very dense; many novelettes are over-written short stories. The story with incidents like beads is often the victim of its writer's talent; the better the writing, the choppier and less satisfactory the story line, by contrast. The dense story results from the author's love of words, and love of words is often a sign of shaky confidence in storytelling ability. A writer whose readers tend to ask for more explanation between scenes ought to try writing a first draft with no scenic description or fully quoted dialogue at all, but with every character motion, and its cause, fully mapped out. Ideally, the effect of Move One

ought to be the cause of Move Two, etc. Then, with those chores done, you can go back into the story and write the picturesque scenes. On the other hand, the writer whose readers persistently complain that it takes forever to get to the point, ought to try writing the first draft entirely in comic book frames with short balloon dialogue. If you notice that the whole story tells in five frames, you can probably produce it in 2000 words of prose; maybe less.

All effects should probably have story causes. Many new writers go from narrative to inappropriate dialogue simply because they've temporarily tired of writing narrative:

> He swung head-down from the rope, alone over the abyss. He was a blue-jawed, sun-browned man with H-A-R-D T-I-M-E tattooed across his flattened knuckles. "I've had to fight for everything I've ever had!" he screamed.

Some sophisticated writers use this for effect, and it makes up into an acceptable style, but new writers don't give the impression they're using it correctly, or deliberately, and few of them are.

Effect and cause should relate to each other through the storyline, as distinguished from anything else, including popular beliefs:

> Xanthor reached back into the airlock and helped Xanthora down the ladder. "It's beautiful," she whispered, looking around. A broad sweep of virgin prairie extended to the horizon, broken only by occasional clumps of green trees along the creek banks. "You've done it, Xanthor — you've found a word we can live in at peace forever. No one will ever find us here."
>
> "Yes," he said, absently peeling a stick of *Dzuzifrute*. "We shall have our children here." He tossed aside the wrapper, and his eyes barely had time to widen before Xanthora's lightning-fast draw and the crackle of her weapon terminated all thinking forever. "Polluter!" she hissed.

Some writers set up aliens or alien situations in order to make comments on human error in human surroundings. They don't appear to realize that their punchlines depend on the reader's already having received the message from a prior source. Some editors appear to honestly feel they are courageously publishing courageous insights when they do this. But it seems unlikely there's much value in being the fifteenth or five hundredth to second a motion.

I think the essential thing to remember is that a story does not exist for the author's convenience. Any creative choice whose incidental effect is to reduce the author's work, shorten the story to meet a deadline or lengthen it for low-paying markets, make ambiguous something that would seem banal if clarified, or pronounce judgment on some issue with which the author is familiar only through other fiction, may not in fact be a creative choice. The other half of the opening proposition in this paragraph is that authors are almost invariably self-indulgent, and need to keep a firm grip on the human tendency to woolgather while at work, just as so many of us prefer research trips to actually typing up the notes.

Well, anyway, I wish you lots of luck, and I think you're probably doing a good thing. I'll try to find some way to mention **UNEARTH** in useful places.

Sincerely,
A.J. Budrys

UNEARTHED

Our Contributors

CHRIS DORNAN is UNEARTH's first repeat contributor; "The Night the Arcturians Landed" appeared in #1. Born in Scotland, he is now a Canadian citizen, and attends Carleton University in Ottawa. His major activity this semester has been writing for, and producing, a weekly comedy show, "King Zoser's Egyptian Mummification Revue," which is shown on the college's TV station.

JANICE FLOOD was born in Quincy, Illinois, and now lives in Natick, Mass. She has studied jewelry-making, silversmithing, and stained-glass design, and she is a registered nurse.

MARTHA FLOOD has a B.F.A. in Fabric Design from Syracuse University. She is currently working for a silkscreen printer; her ambition is to be a textile designer.

DAVID FRIEZE attended Boston University, where he studied fiction writing with John Cheever, Ivan Gold, and John Updike. He is currently in his first year of law school in Boston.

TERENCE M. GREEN has just turned thirty, an event he still has difficulty believing. He and his wife, Penny, live in Toronto, where he teaches high school English, and she teaches hard-of-hearing and deaf children. His book reviews appear frequently in SF COMMENTARY and SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW.

MIRIAM GREENWALD (who also illustrated "Opportunity" in UNEARTH #1) graduated from the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. She is an elementary school art specialist, and has exhibited her paintings in several shows, including some at SF conventions.

KEITH L. JUSTICE lives in Union, Mississippi; he and his family will soon be moving into a house he designed (and is building) himself. He is attending college on the G.I. Bill, and hopes eventually to teach literature. He has written for a wide variety of fan publications, and himself publishes SF BOOKLOG, a tabloid newspaper SF book review.

TYLER MATTHEWS describes himself as a "hired typewriter." He desperately hopes his availability (he has recently moved to Boston) and willingness to work fast and cheap will make him indispensable to UNEARTH. Some of his great passions in life (in no particular order) are doughnuts, ice cream, amusement parks, miniature golf, bathrooms, speculative fiction, Looney Tunes, and fried clams.

TIMOTHY ROBERT SULLIVAN was born in Bangor, Maine, and currently lives in Boca Raton, Florida, "where the famous battle against the Martians was fought some years ago." He has been, at different times, an acidhead, a hardhat, a collegiate radical, a liquor salesman, a medieval scholar, and a John Wayne fan. In his present incarnation, he is manager of a pinball arcade.

STERLING TAYLOR has a degree in drama from the University of Washington, where he is now enrolled in a graduate program in stage direction. His job experiences include acting and directing, cleaning morgues, and playing piano for tap dancing classes. He has been writing in his spare time since he was a child.

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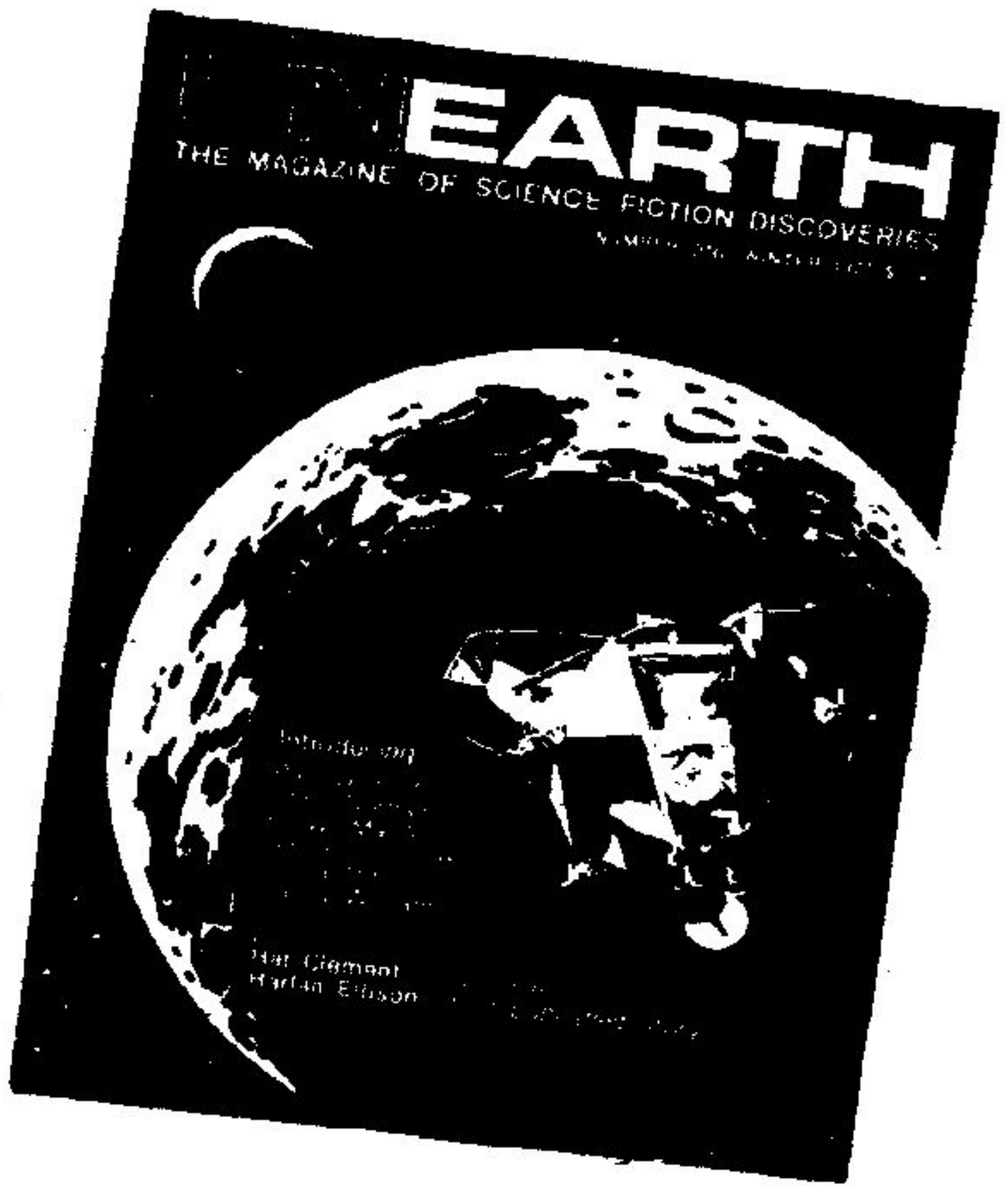

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