

Guest Editorial by Tom Clancy

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

Summer
1991

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| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Review Listings..... | 3 |
| Guest Editorial..... Tom Clancy | 5 |
| Letters..... | 6 |

Opinion

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----|
| Alien Thoughts..... | Richard E. Geis | 7 |
| Elliott's Bookline..... | Elton Elliott..... | 10 |
| The White Hole..... | Alan Dean Foster..... | 12 |
| Word Woman..... | Pamela Sargent..... | 15 |
| The Gimlet Eye..... | Jon Gustafson..... | 18 |
| The New Vivisector..... | Darrell Schweitzer..... | 20 |

Special Fiction Section

| | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|----|
| "The Last Pig in the World"..... | Scott Edelman..... | 23 |
| "No Place to Hide"..... | James S. Dorr..... | 27 |
| "The Sum of the Parts"..... | Joan Marie Verba..... | 30 |
| "Pap"..... | Jack Massa..... | 35 |
| "Supplanter"..... | Kurt Giambastiani..... | 38 |
| "Virtual Uncertainty"..... | J. S. Russell..... | 41 |
| Science Update..... | Elton Elliott..... | 49 |

Reviews

| | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----|
| Chasing Shadows..... | Charles de Lint..... | 50 |
| Lay of the Land..... | Doug Odell..... | 53 |
| Behind the Shroud..... | Gary Ford..... | 54 |
| Short Fiction Review..... | Beatrice Gemignani..... | 57 |
| A Role of the Dice..... | Gene Semar..... | 60 |
| Norm's Notes..... | Norm Hartman..... | 63 |
| Once Over Lightly..... | Gene DeWeese..... | 65 |
| Reviews..... | | 71 |

Reviews

| | |
|---|----|
| NIGHTFALL..... | 8 |
| THE RACE FOR GOD | 9 |
| THE CIPHER | 10 |
| BEYOND THE FALL OF NIGHT | 10 |
| THE SINGERS OF TIME | 10 |
| <i>The Flash</i> | 12 |
| <i>Lair of the White Worm</i> | 12 |
| <i>Erik the Viking</i> | 12 |
| <i>Fantasia</i> | 13 |
| <i>Starlight Express</i> | 14 |
| <i>The Rescuers Down Under</i> | 14 |
| QUEEN OF ANGELS | 50 |
| KINDERGARTEN | 50 |
| SWEET, SWEET POISON | 50 |
| TIGANA | 51 |
| SEVENTH HEAVEN | 51 |
| THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE | 52 |
| MONAD #1 | 52 |
| RUNE | 52 |
| DRAGONS DAWN | 53 |
| ALL IN THE MIND | 54 |
| THE CATHARS AND REINCARNATION | 54 |
| PASSPORT TO MAGONIA | 55 |
| DIMENSIONS | 55 |
| CONFRONTATIONS..... | 55 |
| THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES | 55 |
| MESSENGERS OF DECEPTION | 55 |
| TRANSFORMATION..... | 55 |
| COMMUNION | 55 |
| MATRIX LOGIC..... | 56 |
| THE 1990 ANNUAL WORLD'S BEST SF..... | 57 |
| Swords Against Darkness | 58 |
| THE MAGAZINE OF F&SF: OCT 1990 | 58 |
| ISAAC ASIMOV'S: DEC. 1990 | 59 |
| CHAMPIONS IN 3-D | 60 |
| NEAR ORBIT | 60 |
| AERODUEL | 61 |
| CAR WARS, A NEW; ORIGIN | 61 |
| PLAINS OF PASSAGE | 62 |
| BOAT OF A MILLION YEARS | 63 |
| WARRIOR | 63 |
| THE MUTANT SEASON | 63 |
| THE MUTANT PRIME | 63 |
| CAMBIO BAY | 64 |
| THE LEGION OF SPACE | 65 |
| LOVECRAFT'S LEGACY | 65 |
| GOLDEN FLEECE | 66 |
| PRIME DETECTIVE | 66 |
| STARDUST | 66 |
| YAMATO | 66 |
| ZONE YELLOW | 67 |
| NIGHTFALL | 67 |
| GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS | 67 |
| LURID DREAMS | 68 |

| | |
|--|----|
| THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES: VOLUMES 8 AND 9 | 68 |
| MEMORIES AND VISIONS: WOMEN'S FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION | 69 |
| SISTERS AND STRANGERS | 70 |
| PRAYERS TO BROKEN STONES | 71 |
| SLOW DANCING THROUGH TIME | 71 |
| SPLATTERPUNKS | 72 |
| THE FUGITIVE WORLDS | 72 |
| SUMMERTIDE | 72 |
| THE LAST RECALL | 72 |
| FEAR | 73 |
| THE DREAMING PLACE | 73 |
| NEVER DEAL WITH A DRAGON | 73 |
| TRUE TALES OF THE UNKNOWN: VOL 2 | 74 |
| HEAR THE CHILDREN CALLING | 74 |
| THE CHANTING | 75 |
| CRUSADE | 75 |
| THE FORGOTTEN REALMS ATLAS | 75 |

Individual Book Reviews by:

Andrew M. Andrews
Steven Sawicki
Francis N. L. Sheppard
Colin J. McMillan
Paulette Minare
Derek Vanderpool

Letters by:

Darrell Schweitzer
Rima Saret
Ken Solonika
John Costello
Vincent W. Burch.

Illustrations by:

Richard Scott: 6, 37
Tim Kirk: 7
Alexis Gilliland: 9, 17, 58
Russ Fletcher: 10, 12, 28, 73
David Transue: 18, 24, 25, 40, 43, 64, 74
Alfred R. Klosterman: 19, 32, 46, 55, 56, 66
William Rotsler: 21, 26, 34, 51, 53, 60, 76
Todd Shrull: 29, 48, 61
Randy Prinslow: 49, 68, 77
Monika Livingstone: 63
R. J. Bartrop: 69, 75
Allen Koszowski: 74, 78

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GO TELL THE SPARTANS



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Guest Editorial

by

Tom Clancy

Remember when people called the Dallas Cowboys "America's Team?" Well, America's team now wears brown "cammies," or flies airplanes or drives tanks. The pay isn't all that great, but they're out there for us, doing the job we need them to do.

And doing it damned well.

All those weapons--you know, American weapons, made by the country that can't do anything right?--that you've heard so much about on *60 Minutes*: The M1 Abrams main battle tank--a dog, critics said, the turbine engine won't work in the desert (originally made by Chrysler, would you believe?). The M2-M3 Bradley fighting vehicle that can't swim very well (good thing it's in a desert, eh?) and can't cross ditches. The infrared-imaging Maverick air-to-surface missile that, critics said, was more likely to attack a telephone pole. The overly complex airplanes that cost too much and were always broken.

So many critics, defense experts and self-styled reformers who think a Swiss Army knife is not user-friendly enough have made a career of trashing them. And on the very night before our people went in, they were still warning us that nothing would work.

I suppose they never asked the Iraqis how effective our weapons were. That is understandable--one doesn't want to disturb a perfectly good theory with fact, right?

Imagine that you are a Soviet fighter pilot, and you've trained for 10 years to duke it out over Central Europe with the F-15 Eagle and the Patriot surface-to-air missile. You see that no country has *ever* killed the Eagle, air-to-air, and then you

realize that you had actually thought about trying your luck in an airplane against a missile that kills other missiles! Pass the vodka, Boris.

Oh, yeah, and now there's this new beast that Lockheed makes called the F-117A--people don't even know where it's been until they hear the bang.

Do you suppose that all those anti-defense experts might actually have been a ploy, an elaborate CIA trick to lull our country's enemies into a false sense of security?

But the worst thing of all was what they said about our kids--those young men and women who transform lifeless steel and computer chips into living, deadly force. People count more than machines, always have, always will.

The American military, they loved to say, hasn't done anything right since 1950 or so--the Inchon landings in Korea. Our soldiers are inept, drawn from the dregs of society, nearly illiterate, poorly motivated--careerists. You've heard all of this, right?

Only a week ago, people were worrying out loud about the body bags that would be coming home. Well, some will, and nothing can change that. But the experts warned us that we were facing "battle-hardened" Iraqi troops, the fourth-largest army in the world, and this was something we just ought not to do. After all, we barely dealt with Grenada, and really made a mess of Panama, right?

They were wrong--they've been wrong all along the way.

There is no truer measure of any society than its armed forces. In uniform you will find the best and worst, the tools, the people, the ideas, all distilled in one place. Does America still have it? Ask the Iraqis. Do our

people care enough to do things right? Ask the Iraqis.

Pretty soon, of course, the experts will say that, well, this never was a real test of American power. The Iraqi army was grossly overrated (by them, but they won't say that), and because of that we really can't draw too many lessons from this. We were pretty lucky to have had such an easy time. They'll dig up numbers to show how dumb and lucky we were, and that our weapons didn't really work all that well. Already my local paper has run a lengthy story saying that about 15 percent of our smart bombs miss their targets. Gracious. After all, the experts must have something to talk about.

But that's not really important, is it?

We did something right this time. The president had the good sense to let these people do their job, without Lyndon Johnson's crushing oversight, without Jimmy Carter sitting by a radio and giving orders. We gave our people the tools, the training and the confidence, and let them do their jobs--and guess what? It worked.

Yes, America still does have it, when we have the good sense to use our people and our tools properly. Remarkable, isn't it?

One more thought to ponder--might Vietnam have worked out like this if we had made the same decisions in 1965 that George Bush made in 1991? We'll never know, but think about it anyway. Pretty soon they'll be coming home, the regulars and the reservists. Not all of them, unfortunately, because it never has and probably never will work that way. Even so, they

Letters to SFR

Conducted by
Richard E. Geis

Darrell Schweitzer: Jess E. Stewart raises a couple of valid points, one of them consciously, the other unconsciously. First, he is right that my example of the longshorman as someone whose occupation hasn't been changed by technology is not a good one. Should I have a chance to revise my last letter for book publication, I will have to come up with something better.

Inadvertently, he reveals why he and so many others believe nonsense in the total absence of evidence. It meets an emotional need. We are lied to by the government. We are confronted by a confusing "orthodoxy" of science which is very difficult — and requires years of study — to penetrate. An astronomer or physicist or biologist is like your doctor. If he or she tells you some scientific "fact" you can only accept it, because you haven't got the background to do otherwise. Similarly, you can't refute your doctor's diagnosis without having gone to medical school and done an internship yourself.

This is very ego-battering. Worse yet, the universe itself is bossy, and things are either true or not true without having consulted us. We may wish for telepathy, but if it doesn't exist, it doesn't exist. Sorry.

So what do we do? The more fantasy-prone among us take the easy way out by believing all manner of "unorthodoxies," and then we flatter ourselves that we are the ones with the brilliant minds capable of accepting these "new" ideas on the first pass. The fact that most of them are not new, that "channelling" was going on in

Hellenistic Alexandria, that Strieber is no more than Shaver with good grammar, that Hubbard's ideas are no more than a mish-mash of pop-Freudianism, Crowleyan occultism, possibly a little Theosophy, and just plain superstition—well, all this has to be conveniently forgotten. But it's *still* a lot easier than getting a science degree.

Incidentally, I do have friends who think they have had psychic experiences. It's very hard to find an ESP-believer who *doesn't* believe he/she has such powers. That's an essential part of the I'm-special fantasy. I also have a quite good friend who has not "seen" a UFO, but believes that there is an objectively-verifiable phenomenon at work here, presently unknown to science. I counter that the phenomenon is perfectly well known to science, and is akin to mystical experiences and religious apparitions. I do not expect to ever "see" a UFO because I lack the faith and conditioning required to do so. This does not mean I will never see something in the sky which I will fail to identify, but possibly I will be a little less hasty to identify it as something coming out of an established folk-mythology. I haven't seen any fairies either, and wasn't very convinced by Conan Doyle's book. . .

I suppose I *should* let my mask down. Yes, I *am* a member of a C.I.A. conspiracy to cover everything up. I have regular, weekly meetings with Phil Klass, Jesse Helms, and the assassins of John F. Kennedy. We meet in a small Chinese

continued on page 76

Alien Thoughts

by

Richard E. Geis



"Jeez! Geis! Wake up!"
Mmmphh? Alter Ego. You again. The nagging, sarcastic, insulting voice in my mind. Leave me alone.

Even as we speak, Elton Elliott is on his way north to Portland to collect this column which you—you, sir!—led him to believe would be ready and waiting."

Well, yes, I did say... "No problem, Elton. See you on Wednesday. I did?"

"And I just took a call from him saying he'd be here in an hour-and-a-half! It is time to hie thyself to the keyboavord—will you learn to spell?—and produce something with your time and talent besides loud farts and flatulent political opinions."

You can't talk to me that way, Alter! I am human, male, American, Oregonian and solvent! I demand respect.

"Demand all you like, but you've earned zilch. Now stir from watching CNBC, C-SPAN 1 and 2, and CNN, and get your ass in gear!"

All right...all right....*mumble* *grunt* *Bluuurt* Say, backup a minute. Did you say just now you could have a corporeal existence? I'd like to see that!

"You will if you don't start commentating and reviewing. The sight will scare the living shit out of you."

"Commentating? Don't be a SMART ASS. Write!"

Okay, okay. *Yawn* I had some notes somewhere on this desk. . . .

"There! Under your big nose!"

Ah. Yes. 'Norplant. Future uses. Consequences. Forced use? By whom? On whom?' That's not much. Alter, do you remember what I was thinking about?

"Norplant is the new, recently approved for Americans contraceptive device which is being discussed in the media. It consists of five or six tubular implants under the skin in a woman's upper right arm which dissolve verriy slowly over five years and supposedly insure infertility for that long."

Oh, yeah. Well, it's only a question of costs and consequences, isn't it?

"The in-office surgical implant procedure is estimated to cost around one thousand dollars. The side effects from the dissolving drugs and/or hormones can be headaches, nausea, dizziness, indigestion, and a few other minor ills."

Uh-huh. That sounds like an unpleasant five years to me, just to keep from getting pregnant ninety-five percent of the time. Why don't scientists do something about killing sperm in the male body? Why not drugs to alter (sorry) newly made sperm so they can't possibly fertilize a human ovum?

"Geis, you must know that most scientists are male, and most males have a bias in these matters which translates to: MALE SEXUAL EQUIPMENT IS SACRED! Can you imagine the furor if a male anti-fertility drug was perfected which killed the sacred little wrigglers and left them to rot in the testes and prostate? What if they came out during orgasm as a green sludge?"

Umm, yes. Outrage city.

"As for changing sperm...were you thinking of genewarping here, Geis?...so sperm could not do the deed or so that the female ovum would reject their advances out of hand—or out of penis—and so prevent conception?"

Yes, Alter, I was. But something reversible. Something easy and uncomplicated.

"Forget it. Stick to Norplant. Besides side-effects, what are the consequences?"

Well, if the government required Norplant implants for welfare mothers. . . or for mentally retarded women. . . . During a worldwide depression the cost of a government clinic Norplant implant compared to a welfare mother having yet another baby would be a bargain.

"But wouldn't race rise up and complicate things? Wouldn't some spokesmen for African Americans start talking about genocide—a government policy to impose birth limits on the black race—as a 'final solution' to the minority problem in this country?"

That's happening already, Alter. (The protests, not the solution.) And I'm sure the catholics would raise an enormous ruckus over mass use of Norplant contraception.

"And, Geis, what if parents started pressuring their teenage daughters to have Norplants? What if congress passed a law mandating Norplants for convicted intravenous female drug users and/or AIDS-infected women?"

Yes, Alter, all of the above might come to pass. But first a few hundred court tests will intervene as civil liberties questions rear up to bite; can the state force medication and illness on an individual in the name of saving the state money? Can a parent force a daughter to have Norplants since the parent is legally responsible for the actions of the minor? Are kids property? To what extent? If it is legal for a parent to prevent a minor from stealing

or avoiding school or from running away from home, how can it be illegal for the parent to prevent the creation of an illegitimate child, especially if the parent is forced to care for and be responsible for that child of his/her child?

"And sex, Geis? How would extensive use of Norplants affect sex practices and values?"

What if Norplants were viewed as an evil punishment to be avoided; the last resort for girls who got pregnant? Sure, you can have all the sex you want, but you'll feel like shit most of the time. Norplants might impel a new morality.

"Ho-ho, and what if it was discovered that crack cocaine countered the effects of Norplants?"

Does it? Alter, do you know something?

"No, but science and technology surely complicate life, don't they?"

Immensely, Alter. I'm close to becoming a Latter Day Luddite (A new religion I'm thinking of starting, with myself as head martyr). Life is just too complicated for "civilized" humanity, with perhaps fifty percent of the people all at sea, unable to understand their world and only barely able to cope with its rising demands.

"That's a terrible confession to make, Geis. You need a keeper?"

I need simplicity! Have you looked under the hood of a new car lately? I need easily verifiable cause and effect! I need fewer hoops to jump through in my journey to the grave. I thought science and technology—the wonderful computer age—were supposed to make living easier? No, computers have only allowed and compelled more and more diversity and complexity. Look at copier machines, fax machines, cordless limits, no escape!

"Take it easy, Geis! Take a valium."

No, no, no. I'd rather get drunk. Peace the old fashioned way.

"I suppose you'd like to grow your own food."

No. I'm a reactionary, not a fool. It's just that I look into my trusty crystal ball and I see ever-more incomprehensible technology driving ever larger percentages of humanity into servitude and escape into a life dominated and ruled by the needs and functions of technology. The rule will be: If it's cost effective, do it, no matter the problematical effects on human beings.

"You're all wrought up today. What else do you see in your crystal ball?"

I see hell happening when the scientists complete the gene map of the human species. Think of the turmoil when it is known exactly which genes control and to what extent the form, function *and thinking* of humans?

"I could tell you, but I'll let it happen as it must."

You know, Alter?

"Of course I know. But I'll let it happen as it must. I'm from an advanced civilization, remember? We went through this eons ago. We adjusted to the knowledge of how controlled by hereditary we are."

How did your species do it?

"The same way yours did. My species feels superior, naturally. We think about ourselves, and therefore we are special. The "I" is inevitably infatuated with itself and cannot endure the thought of ending or of being controlled by a kind of blueprint! From that avoidance impulse spring all varieties of illusions and delusions, mostly religious. This sequence may be universal to all self-aware creatures. Since my species can inhabit the minds of lesser creatures—"

Hey!

"—we have attained a kind of immortality via mind-hopping. Thus we have a proof of our wisdom and natural superiority. Yes, Geis, I may say smugly that we—not the Glerki of the Antares system in this galaxy—are the true masters of the sevagram."

You in your infinite wisdom think mankind will ignore genetic proof of a lack of free will, and will go on living in a solipsistically necessary mental world which must include religion and the supernatural?

"Of course. Your own yearning for a simple, uncomplicated life . . . 1938? . . . 1955? . . . proves my point. The results of the gene-mapping of the human DNA will be buried, ignored, flinched from by all but a few. Depend on it."

You confirm my angst, Alter. Long may you rave.

"You, too, Geis. I have over the decades come to like you a lot.

What?

"So much so that I'll give you a life after death."

How!?

As I said, I'll mind hop through the centuries after you die, and some time in the future I imagine a technology will be perfected which will allow the reconstruction of a mind pattern of character and personality copied from a flash-frozen brain."

You mean—

"Absolutely, Geis. Put instructions in your will for your brain to be cryogenically frozen when you die, and when the time is ripe in the future, I'll have your self copied from your dying moment and inserted into...something."

Something?

"No guarantees, old boy. Maybe a robot. Maybe a human. Depends on how the future goes."

Uhh, thanks, Alter.

"Think nothing of it."

I think I'd better do some reviews.

NIGHTFALL by Isaac Asimov
& Robert Silverberg;
Doubleday/Foundation;
November 1990; Hardcover \$19.95

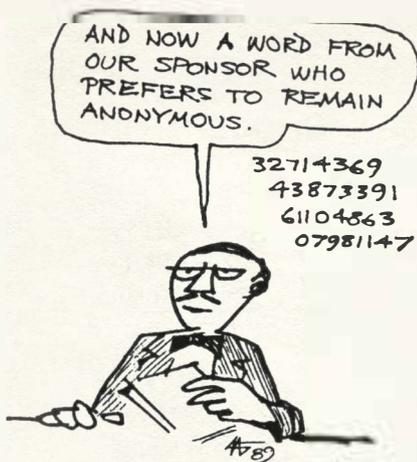
They have expanded and padded Asimov's original 1941 short story to novel length. The emotional impact is diminished by the added preamble events, characterization and love story, and by the long after-the-Darkness-&-Fires survival stories.

The description of the night of ultimate disaster is very well done as Kalgash, the planet with six suns, is suddenly plunged into utter darkness by a once-every-2049-years eclipse of a one-sun-in-the-sky "night". . . and people behold thousands of powerful stars.

They had thought themselves the center of a tiny universe. And most of them go mad and burn anything at hand to regain light, to blot out the night and the terrible stars!

Asimov and Silverberg deserve great credit for making the reader feel the horror and disorientation and terror of people in these circumstances.

(But wouldn't the other suns be shining on the other side of the planet? The collapse of civilization wouldn't occur unless for some reason the civilization of Kalgash was limited to this particular hemisphere of the planet. An old criticism of the story, and I don't recall that in this version the authors addressed it.)



The novel is hurt mostly by the humor, nothing-new struggle-to-survive stories of the major characters after the Night of Stars which destroyed civilization again (for the tenth time in a row?). The novel is divided into three sections: Twilight, Nightfall and Daybreak. It seems to me that Daybreak is mostly padding to bring the story to novel length.

So it goes.

THE RACE FOR GOD
by Brian Herbert; Ace Sf,
August 1990; Paperback

Brian very kindly sent me a copy when, intrigued by the title, I expressed an interest in reviewing it, and I'm consequently unhappy to give it a bad review.

THE RACE FOR GOD could be called an absurdist Science Fiction novel, since it opens with the promoter of a satirical religion who is given an important, real, direct message from God.

God has provided the exact location of his home planet in the "barely discernible galaxy 722C12009" which is an inconvenient several trillion parsecs away.

Evander Harold McMurtrey, self-proclaimed Grand Exalted Rooster of the Interplanetary Church of Cosmic Chickenhood who walks around with a rooster perched on his shoulder and who has a mantra which goes:

'O Chubby Mother,
Let me rubba your belly . . .
Let me rubba your belly.'

goes to the offices of a major media outlet and is treated predictably irreverently.

However, God magically provides a lot of self-contained, computer-operated super-spaceships and various and sundry other world religious leaders and reps arrive. . . .

So they all board the ships and they are in a race to reach God first.

The trouble is (or perhaps the virtue is) that this is set initially on the planet D-Urth, the religions of D'Urth are thinly disguised renamings of old and current Earth religions: Zillasterism, Middism, Krassianism, Isammedanism, Nandus. . . . The Bible on D'Urth is The Babul and the Koran is named the Kooraq. And so on. Santa Claus is mentioned, as are current American figures of speech: "We aren't an item. ". . . He would not pussyfoot around. . . He would kick ass!

McMurtrey is the central character, and is clearly not an imposing person. But he does gradually change for the better.

During the long voyage much ado is made about religious dogmas and conflicting beliefs, and there is an atheist on board to make trouble (to say nothing of a deranged ship's computer or two, a disguised robot mass killer agent of the D'Urth Inner Planets Govt., and other Types). In addition the passengers are forced to deal morally and judicially with an executioner from D'Urth (who likes to have sex with corpses) who arrived mysteriously during an inter-universe spaceship accident. They shout and scream and use force a lot. Children, they act like children!

I tell you, this is a mish-mash of absurdities and authorial conveniences hard to equal.

They get to God's planet (the other ships had to turn back, fortunately for the author) and find that God is a small, crew-cut, big bellied, old man who is dying from ennui and depression. He wants to find a replacement God from among the one ship's remaining pilgrims (the robot killer had gone on a berserk killing spree and wiped out hundreds of the other voyagers, leaving only eight or nine candidates, again conveniently for the author) and guess who is finally chosen/volunteers?

I could detail more and more things I found ridiculous and irrational and stupid and impossible and sloppy and. . . . But there is a gem of a cosmological idea in this novel: the

concept of universes existing like bubbles with conjoined "skins", and each universe ruled by a separate almighty God/creator.

I noticed that in this "D'Urth" universe there is no afterlife—even God dies. Wouldn't that lack diminish an' undermine most organized religions?

Brian Herbert wrote when he sent this novel that he tried to present comparative religion, normally a complex subject, in an entertaining package — sprinkled with humor.

Okay, but the humor skidded the novel into the absurd, and it all seemed too divorced from a coherent universe; if anything is possible, then nothing is believable, and if there is a serious intent beneath the humor, it is lost in the crazy yuk-yuk an' anything-goes.

I don't think this novel was thought out thoroughly enough.

THE CIPHER by Kathe Koja;
Dell, Feb 1991; Paperback \$3.95

This is the first novel in the new ("cutting edge") Dell Horror line, Abyss. It's a winner on several levels.

Told from the first-person ravaged, down-and-out failed poet male viewpoint of Nicholas, who lives in a low rent apartment in a crummy New York building, CIPHER tracks his growing involvement/enchantment/entrapment with an anomaly—a bottomless black other-dimensional hole—in the floor of a never-used storage room in the building.

This is a tough, savage, uncompromising "Fuck you" novel with fine, battle-scarred characterization of idealistic, life-defeated, depressed Nicholas and his maniacal, self-centered, cynical, mystically-driven black woman friend, Nakota. And their few terrified, fascinated, horrified friends and hangers-on.

There's something in that damned opening. . . and Nakota experiments: bugs in a jar lowered into the hole come out warped and horribly mutated; a camcorder pointed down into its depths produces a video so riveting and gripping and strange that it makes devotees and followers of all who view it—except Nicholas, who is afraid of its images and apparently doesn't see the same things as the others.

continued on page 69

Elliott's Bookline

by
Elton Elliott

BEYOND THE FALL OF NIGHT
by Arthur C. Clarke & Gregory
Benford; Ace Books 1990; 298 pp;
Hardcover \$19.95

AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT (under its slightly enlarged and updated later version, *THE CITY AND THE STARS*) was the first book by Arthur C. Clarke that I ever read, and it's still one of my favorites. When I heard that Greg Benford, one of the finest writers to ever turn keyboard to blank screen, was set to write a sequel, I was immediately intrigued. If anybody could do justice to Clarke's vision I felt Benford could. I was also thankful. I shudder to think what your garden variety Fantasy trilogy writer might have done to Diaspar, Lys and the Central Suns, to say nothing of Alvin, that embodiment of humanity's desire for knowledge and unquenchable curiosity about the world.

Upon rereading Clarke's story I was struck at how smoothly it still reads and how well it held up after forty plus years. It has a timeless, ethereal quality that remains haunting in both scope and atmosphere. That, combined with a sense of vast ages weighting down on what is left of the human race (a feeling perhaps reminiscent of Campbell's "Twilight" and "Night") has made it a landmark in the history of Science Fiction.

But it's more than that. *AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT* is very much a young man's story written by a young man. In a sense Alvin is the young Clarke and a metaphor for all young readers--and indeed youth everywhere--who perceive the world as run by fuddy-duddy adults who have no

conception of the possibilities inherent in the future, who have misread the past and seek to smother the present. In short, *AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT* is Clarke at his best, where the technological poet joins with the visionary mystic to create images that reach across the decades as undiminished and undaunted by the inexorable passage of time as its resilient protagonist.

Benford's continuation is akin to going from a cool distant shoreline, nearly bereft of humanity, to a hot sauna filled with a dazzling variety of lifeforms. From the opening line of Benford's section,

"the naked woman seemed to be dead" the reader has been put on alert, (Clarke's novel is nearly devoid of women, and contained no nudity) that this is neither a slavish sequel, nor a genteel bow to an old master, but a bold, brash tale of towering imagination and uncommon power.

As Benford's narrative continues it expands on the original book and shifts our perspective on the events in *AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT*. Alvin, who it turns out doesn't look like 20th century humanity, takes on a different quality when seen through the eyes of the woman, Cley, an early human, far closer to us in looks and attitude (an adult viewpoint) than Alvin. She is rescued by Seeker, an intelligent raccoon-like creature who heals her. That act conjurs up much wonder and awe. Benford's story details what happens as Alvin and the others attempt to fight off an insane intelligence that in Clarke's novel was responsible for mankind's retreat from the stars. The climactic scenes are SF at its grandest.

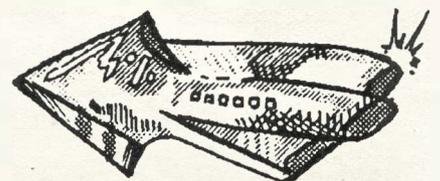
Benford's section also has an intensity not found in the leisurely, sedate, self-assured pace of Clarke's narrative. Alvin seems much less omnipotent, the problems the characters face are much more real and deadly. The final result is not seamless, but cumulative--Clarke's classic flute solo followed by Benford's baroque harpsichord concerto. *BEYOND* is a soaring symphony of the imagination.

This is no small achievement. To avoid inevitable dissimilarities of approach inherent in a forty year gap is difficult, but helped by the fact that Clarke's and Benford's perspectives are informed by their thorough immersion in science. Thus, as the story unfolds in both narratives, the final effect is like science itself, each time you think you've seen the whole picture, some information enlarges the universe and ultimately one's own perception of reality.

THE SINGERS OF TIME
by Frederik Pohl & Jack Williamson;
Bantam Books February 1991;
358 pp; \$21.95 Hardcover
\$10.95 Trade Paperback
(\$27.50 HC/\$13.95 TPB Canada)

THE SINGERS OF TIME is set in the future on an Earth which has been conquered by a race called (by humans) the Turtles. Everything is benignly repressive, unless you're a Taur -- a bovine race, intelligent, but bred by the Turtles as a food animal and imported to Earth where they gradually replaced cows. Suddenly communication from the home world of the Turtles is cut off, and a group of human adventurers and an adolescent Taur join two Turtles as they set off a journey through time and space to find out what happened to the Turtles home-world.

It's an enjoyable romp and further proof that these two masters of SF are at the height of their powers and still going strong. I admire their stamina, diligence and longevity. ∞



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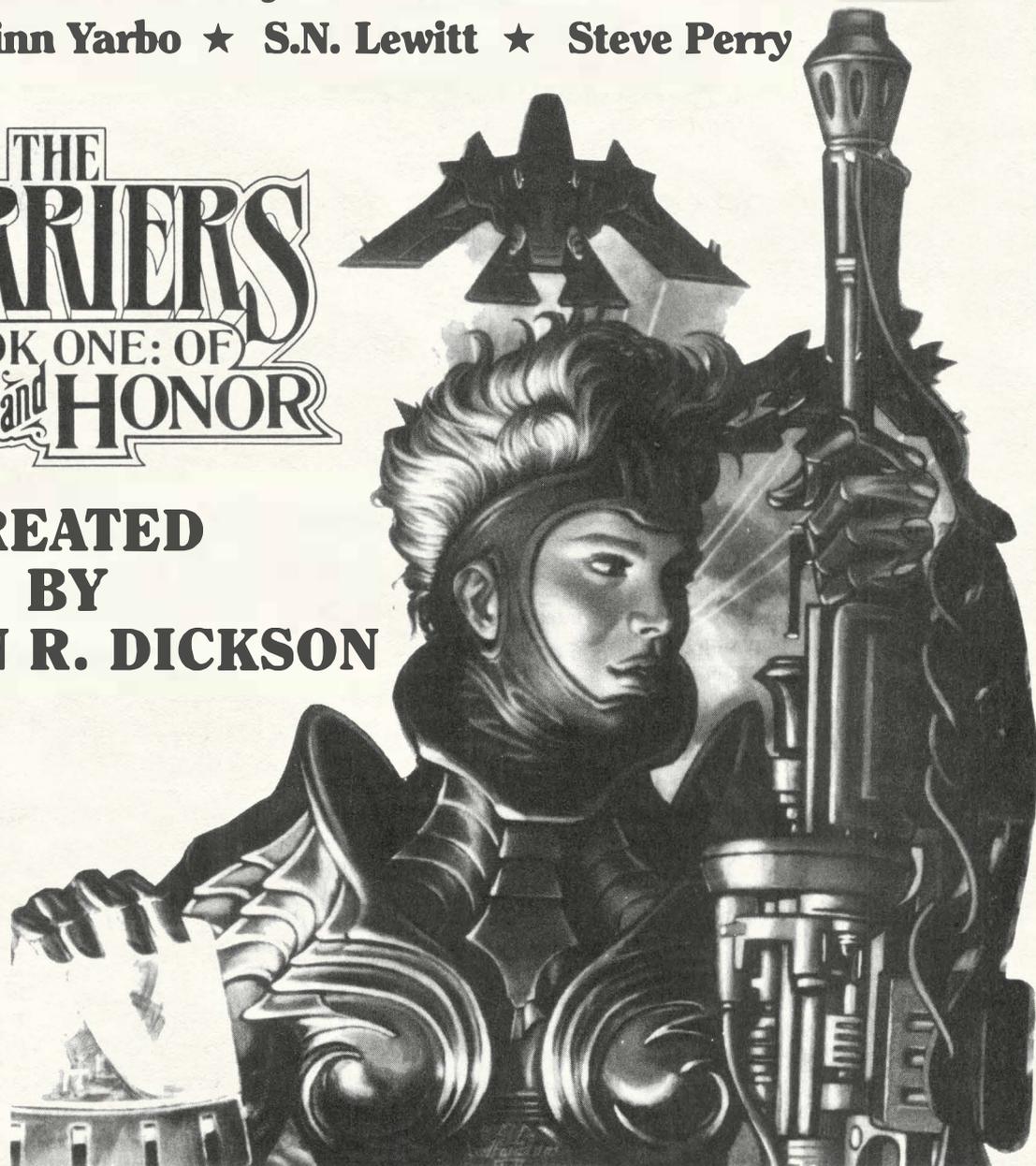
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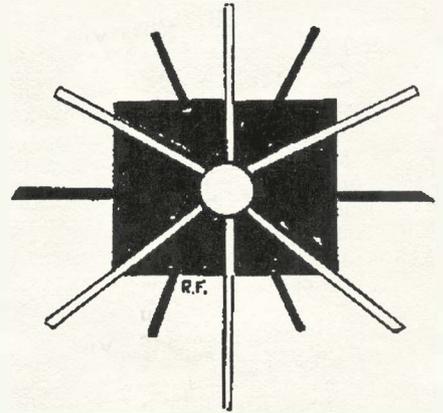
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The White Hole

by

Alan Dean Foster



THE FLASH - If there's a company that specializes in concocting faux latex muscles for incipient cinematic superheroes, now's the time to buy its stock. *The Flash*, of somewhat beloved comic book fame, has a properly Schwarzeneggerized costume physique that makes one wonder Where It Will All End. How many muscles is the human body supposed to have, anyway?

They're all up there in dramatically shadowed relief on your home screen as the man who's faster than a State Department denial of responsibility arrives on network television in the form of a recent movie-for-TV. This series pilot isn't half bad, which means it's also half good.

Barry — not only acts a credible Flash, he even resembles the character as drawn in the venerable comic. None of the other actors in this near-future scenario has much to do except wring their hands anxiously or get shot, but the production is (for television) handsomely mounted and respectably directed. There's also a terrific score (see if you can guess the composer just by listening) and some nice special effects, though Mike Jittlov accomplished much the same thing on a smidgen of the budget.

Six million is a lot to spend to make a guy look like he's running fast. Probably too expensive for a quality series, but hope, like the rabbit, springs. The producers are really giving it an honest try, and if nothing else will recoup much of their investment with a theatrical release overseas.

Oh yeah. In keeping with the times, the Flash also gets to spend

awhile in bed with members of the opposite gender. The seemingly inevitable riposte from his paramour about finishing too soon did not occur and is presumably being withheld for a future episode.

On the other hand, any lady in hay with our hero who inadvertently squeals "Faster, honey, faster!" might be in for an interesting time.

Three stars

LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM - Ken Russell is a director whose penchant for the baroque exceeds that of the men who sculpted the gargoyles atop Notre Dame. In this recent Horror opus he goes for the giggles as much as the gasps and throws in the usual Russellian giant phalluses, impaled nuns, blood-splattered crosses and Imperial Roman orgies just so we don't lose track and think that in a slow moment Woody Allen has taken over the directorial duties.

Come to think of it, I would love to have seen Allen direct this.

Not that Russell's effort is a white-washout. There are some nice atmospheric moments in *Lair* and even a few crepuscular ones. The sets are handsome and the story moves along briskly, if erratically. So involved is Russell with sets and lighting that plot details occasionally get dropped by the wayside.

Much of the humor arises from the dialogue, which too often tends to run along the lines of, "Hmmm. . . you mean your parents vanished in the cavern reputed to be the home of a giant white worm? I wonder if that is a significant coincidence?"

There really is no mystery to the story, except perhaps for the policeman

who is bitten one night by a snake and worries that it might be poisonous. I was under the impression that there are no poisonous snakes in England.

Unfortunately, the giant serpent-worm itself is a bit of a letdown, the kind of special effect that's twenty years behind what the industry is capable of. It's big, but not active, enough.

None of which matters because the viewer is allowed to revel in a typically all-out performance by the film's star, the outrageous Amanda Donohoe. Whether coiling snakishly out of a basket in full evening dress or baring the longest fangs this side of a vampiric Yeti, Donohoe is at once gorgeous, graceful, and smooth as Carrera marble. This is one *baaaad* lady. Russell is lucky to have her and not the other way 'round. Look for her to blow audiences away the first time she's given a decent role in a major U.S. picture.

Three stars. For Donohoe, Russell, and saturated colors.

ERIK THE VIKING - A raft of Monty Python veterans set sail on this seriocomic Viking adventure directed by Terry Jones, and by the end of the picture they and their audience are all at sea.

A running gag (one of the few that works) involves a would-be Viking berserker, son of a berserker, who goes appropriately berserk but at all the wrong times. Apparently he edited the film as well, because it plays like a rough-cut badly in need of a final polish. Sequences that are funny or interesting, like the berserker bit, are cut off in their prime, while those that are distinctly and laboriously unfunny, like the awful singing of the citizens of HyBrazil or

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the use of the Cloak Invisible (which isn't), stretch on forever.

In fact, the sequential nature of the film works against it. Just when the audience might be starting to get interested in a particular sequence it ends with startling abruptness, there is a cut to a black screen, and suddenly we're in another part of the story altogether. It's as disjointed as the chunks of meat the characters are always throwing around. One has the impression of Jones standing before his cast and saying, "Right now, lads. . . be funny!" That never works. The humor has to arise out of the story or it just comes off as a series of disjointed gags. And when the gags don't work, as they didn't in the very similar and even more unfunny pirate opus *Yellowbeard*, what you have is very expensive ennui.

There are a few lovely, all-too-brief little touches; the Horn Resounding, which should have been much louder, the starry approach to the gods' home of Asgard, and a marvelous bit by the inimitable Eartha Kitt, who appears at the beginning of the film as Freya, makes an indelible impression, and never shows up again. Throughout the whole film one seems to see the participants saying to themselves, "Well, that didn't work, but at least it's in the can. Let's try something else and maybe it'll work."

Erik the Viking is an attempt to duplicate the adventure, fantasy, and humor of *Time Bandits*. The shotgun approach doesn't work, the script is badly structured, and the result won't fool anybody. One sits praying for the periodic appearances of John Cleese as the villain.

Two stars.

FANTASIA - "Fully restored!" trumpet the ads for this 50th anniversary re-release of the Disney classic. Well, not quite.

For one thing, the original release version of *Fantasia* ran 135 minutes. Today's terminates at approximately 118. I am guessing that a large portion if not all of the missing 17 minutes involves the animated accompaniment to Debussy's *Clair de Lune*, originally intended to run permanently as part of *Fantasia* but quickly excised. It was saved for inclusion in a later Disney compilation film where it was presented alongside the less highbrow,

more popular (i.e. commercial) version of the song *Blue Bayou*.

Restored is a 20-second cut from release prints of the 50's and 60's which shows the portly Bacchus-like figure in the *Pastoral Symphony* sequence being pushed from behind by his pet unicorn-jackass toward a wine cask he eventually smashes. That is the only restored animation I can detect. However the viewer can't really complain, because as it says in the film's original program book, "From time to time the order and selection of compositions on this program may be changed".

Walt Disney always did know how to cover himself. A great deal has been made of the effort that went into cleaning up the actual film one frame at a time. Unfortunately, for *Fantasia's* last theatrical release some fool thought the original score could be "improved" upon and the music was rescored and re-recorded. For this anniversary release the company wisely decided to go back to the original soundtrack.

Trouble was, in the course of striking the new prints, it seems that someone managed to misspell conductor Leopold Stokowski's name. Instead of adding a correction and apology onto the end of the film, which would have been the sensible thing to do, it was apparently decided to reprint all the first reels at the last minute. The result has been disastrous. On both prints that I viewed the opening Toccata and Fugue segment was in dreadful shape. The quality of the rest of the film varies greatly, with some sections looking truly restored and others, like the opening to the Rite of Spring, in aggravatingly bad condition. A *Lawrence of Arabia* restoration job this ain't.

At least, not according to the prints I saw in the first week of the film's re-release.

That caveat aside, the intensive labor has resulted in much brighter, far more intense imagery, the primary beneficiaries of all the labor being the *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Pastoral Symphony*, and *Dance of the Hours* sequences. Colors are not only sharper than in previous prints, diverse hues invisible for decades now stand out. One notes the lavender bands on the water buckets in the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* and such details as the two pink roses on a grave in *Night on Bald Mountain*, which

reminded me of Michael Whelan's black, gray, white and spots-of-red cover paintings for the Del Rey H.P. Lovecraft paperbacks. The *Pastoral Symphony* segment in particular truly glows. The latter, by the way, retains its two controversial zebra centaureses but the Stepin' Fetchit unicorn caricature is still, understandably, nowhere to be seen.

Fantasia remains a landmark in film history, a great experiment on Walt Disney's part. The cudgeling he received from the critics combined with the indifference of an uncomprehending movie-going public put an end to such experiments for the rest of his life.

A paleontological aside. Subsequent to the film's release, the Disney staff took a lot of flak from professional paleontologists over the depiction of the dinosaurs in the *Rite of Spring* sequence. How absurd, they chortled! Imagine dinosaur young staying with their parents. Adult dinosaurs watching over hatchlings? An active Tyrannosaurus running down fast-moving herbivores? What presumption!

Although the final word on dinosaurian warm-bloodness is far from in, it looks as if the Disney artists may have the last laugh. According to current theories, their depiction of Mesozoic life is much more accurate than was that of their contemporaneous scientific critics. They may even, it turns out, have projected accurately the larger forelimbs of Tyrannosaurus, though the meat-eater in the sequence was intended to represent your generic carnosaur rather than any specific tyrannosaurid.

The *Dance of the Hours* is still a hilarious send-up of classical ballet, and the *Pastoral Symphony* a delight for children of all ages. I never noticed before how much of an homage its Vulcan is to Al Capp. As for the devil Tchernobog in *Night on Bald Mountain*, one can only imagine the reaction on viewing it of 40s-era parents who thought the witch in *Snow White* was too scary for their children. The actual animation of Tchernobog by the legendary Vladimir "Bill" Tytla (who, finding Bela Lugosi an unsatisfactory model, ended up using his own face instead) remains the most powerful animation of the human form on film.

As a child I believed that the figures in the closing *Ave Maria* segment represented a line of decapitated people

Quark

Your freedom to send me mail
ends where my fax begins.

marching along with their glowing one-eyed skulls held impaled on sticks, a concept which intellectually terrified me far more than the preceding devil's sabbath of *Bald Mountain*. It was years later that an adult finally explained that they were shrouded pilgrims carrying candles. Not the most efficacious of Disney designs.

Five stars. But beware the prints.

STARLIGHT EXPRESS - Cross roller derby with a con masquerade and the Disneyland Main Street Electrical parade, add all the rejected tunes from *Phantom of the Opera*, and you've got *Starlight Express*, your average Andrew Lloyd Webber multizillion dollar stage musical extravaganza. If they ever film this one it'll have to be done as an animated film.

The story is a razor-slim nosh about a cross-country race between railroad locomotives, portrayed on stage by costumed roller skaters who zip around like escaped pinballs on a high-tech set that in two hours uses enough electricity to light half of Bulgaria. They wear cute little hat-helmets that indicate the kind of locomotive (or in the case of lesser lights car) they aim to represent. In the instance of "Electro", the electric-powered engine, it makes him resemble a turquoise rendition of the Alien.

The great conceit of this frippery is that an audience will accept human skaters as the talking, singing, thinking embodiments of railroad haulage and thereby sympathize with their artificial emotions. It doesn't work. Despite the cast being outfitted like ambulatory cousins of the Chrysler Building on New Year's Eve the audience never believes it's watching anything but people. Damned agile people, but not transmogrified trains. The story is weak, the songs are forgettable, and the homogenized music makes the score to *Phantom of the Opera* sound like Janacek by

comparison. Even the spectacular set begins to bore after awhile.

But the costumes are great (I kept thinking of what a master fan costumer could do with \$20,000) and the roadshow performers full of energy and enthusiasm. Would that the book and score possessed the same.

Two stars. For the costumes and the renegade basketball player who cavorts and pivots madly as Electro.

THE RESCUERS DOWN UNDER At last the 30s are dead. Finally the powers-that-be at Disney have come to realize that you can do a full-length animated Fantasy without having to bring the story to a grinding halt every ten minutes to prove to the audience that your film is All Singing! All Dancing! There are no extraneous musical numbers in *The Rescuers* to interrupt the story, with the result that the plot rockets right along the way it should in any good film, animated or live-action.

The temptation to avoid sticking in at least one potential pop hit must've been terrific. Methinks I can hear the echoes of the arguments that must have raged in the corporate temple even now.

This sequel to the original Disney *The Rescuers* is far better than its predecessor and as good or better than *The Little Mermaid*. Except for one stilted overhead shot of Manhattan, the blending of computer and hand-drawn cel animation is the best in any film to date.

There are some spectacular scenes of the kind only animation can bring off, from the opening rush across an apocryphal Australian desert to vast airborne panoramas reverently inspired by the "You Can Fly" sequence from *Peter Pan*. The film also makes considerable strides in the difficult and under-rated animation of machinery, in the form of a villainous poacher's back-country off-road vehicle, which is a cross between the clock-gear sequence in the studio's *The Great Mouse Detective* and a monster truck competition.

The film is full of delightful details, from the making of mouse rescuer Miss Bianca's character (as voiced by Eva Gabor) the Hungarian representative to a mouse United Nations, to the brief but effective animation of a fly sidekick (yes, a fly). The conceit of rendering a suave headwaiter as a cockroach shows that today's Disney artists are willing to push a few boundaries, however tame.

The composite Australian backgrounds are lovingly detailed and the joy the artists must have felt in finally having animals besides cats and dogs to draw is evident in every frame.

Both the human and animal characters work and interact beautifully, though there is still a disconcerting tendency to over-reliance on hysterical monologue to generate humor, as in the case of the albatross Wilbur and a dizzy frilled lizard (a character whom the Japanese will love, which someone in Disney's marketing department no doubt pointed out during the film's gestation). The young boy who is the hero of the picture is charming, as are the characters of Miss Bianca and Bernard (the latter essayed again by Bob Newhart). It's nice to see a film in which the hero is neither royalty nor superhuman. Or supermousian.

The score by Bruce Broughton is superb, and George C. Scott, as the villain, uses his voice throughout the film like a malefic cello. My only major gripe is that after a fine bit of editing the picture ends too abruptly, with a major loose end dangling that will disturb thoughtful children. Both problems could have been easily solved to their mutual benefit. And while the golden eagle at the center of the story is magnificent, I'm not sure it was necessary to make it half the size of a Boeing 747. Or a Quetzalcoatlus.

These quibbles aside, *The Rescuers Down Under* is a wonderful film, one that makes the old saw "a film for the whole family" more than a convenient publicity homily.

Preceding the film is a Disney featurette version of *The Prince and the Pauper*, starring the studio's ensemble cast of stock characters with M. Mouse in the dual lead role. It's a considerable improvement on its predecessor, the stilted version of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. There are some great shots, impressive backgrounds, and everyone is in fine form except Pete (aka Black Pete, Pegleg Pete, etc.) who apparently has been spending too much time at Spago and Le Chinois. I was particularly taken with Goofy's performance, in which the character achieves a certain bucolic nobility. Between the featurette and *The Rescuers* is, of all things, an animated intermission.

Four stars. Go and see this on a big screen. ∞

Word Woman

by

Pamela Sargent

Blurbing

Who first thought of using blurbs on book covers? I don't know enough about the history of publishing to say which clever person (or people) decided that books could use more than jacket copy, that words of praise from fellow writers or quotations from advance reviews might be useful in selling books. For years, most Science Fiction novels got along without such armament; Terry Carr, editor of the justly-acclaimed and influential *Ace Specials*, apparently originated the practice within this genre. Publishing *Ace Specials* with comments from other writers attesting to their worth was a way of signaling to readers that these novels were something exceptional. Lurid lines that usually ended with an exclamation point or a question mark ("The alien armada chose Earth as its target!" "Would he save the world, or destroy it?") were replaced by more reasoned commentary.

Faith in the utility of blurbs has grown since then, to the point where it's increasingly difficult to find books without them. Some writers clearly don't need blurbs; Stephen King, Jean Auel, and several others could safely send their creations into bookstores without such ornamentation. A striking cover, large print run, and aggressive sales force will do more for a novel than any number of blurbs. The experienced blurb-reader soon learns to spot those that might be misleading; a phrase such as "awesome in its awfulness" can be transformed into "Awesome!" (exclamation point added) on a

cover if the publisher lacks scruples. (One-word blurbs are not always what they seem.) Books by celebrities are often festooned with quotations from other celebrities, which proves only that the alleged author has a lot of famous friends. (Does anyone doubt that Ivana Trump and the actual author of her upcoming novel will accumulate plenty of blurbs?) Some blurbs are obviously worth more than others, and individual writers will aspire to different sorts of blurbs. A literary writer will rejoice in a comment from John Updike, while a writer of hard Science Fiction will welcome praise from Arthur C. Clarke.

Do such comments sell books? I've had my doubts about that ever since hearing one reader say, "Don't the writers just ask their pals for quotes?" and another assert that he tends to look askance at novels with too many comments, on the grounds that so much praise seems overly defensive. But publishers are willing to go to the expense of sending out photocopied manuscripts and bound galley to acquire blurbs, and writers can feel reassured by the advance approval of their peers. First novelists in particular probably need all the help they can get.

Like most writers, I've had experience with being both a blurber and a blurbee. My first novel was blurbless, which didn't keep it from going into a second printing, but that was back when Science Fiction publishers didn't solicit blurbs as a rule and the average minimum paperback printing was 100,000 copies. At some point (I was always slow to pick up on such things) I noticed that a number of my colleagues were garnering quotations, and

began to think my books could use them.

I don't know if my experience is typical. In all the discussions I've had with fellow writers, I've heard about such sensitive topics as troublesome contract provisions, advances, royalty statements, plans to hire hit men to take out especially obtuse reviewers, writers and editors with substance abuse problems, and details of people's medical and sexual lives, but almost nothing about blurbs. This gives me the feeling that I may be violating a taboo by writing about some of my own experiences publicly. Because of that, I'll name no names, and will protect the identities of both the innocent and guilty by using only female pronouns to refer to the writers and editors I mention. Do not assume that all the editors and writers I allude to are all women, or even that most of them are.

Before my first novel came out, I had edited an anthology for a respected trade paperback publisher. My editor there took it upon herself to decide who might be interested in making advance comments, and the galley she mailed out garnered several to use in publicity. In a way, this was unfortunate. Her solicitude spoiled me; I thought all publishers behaved that way. So I was woefully unprepared when the publisher of one of my early novels sent me an author's questionnaire to fill out.

This form had a space for me to list names and addresses of people who might be willing to read my book and comment upon it. Naively, I listed about twenty-five writers I greatly admired, sent in the questionnaire, and promptly forgot about it. Two writers on the list made comments, and I was happy enough with their praise not to feel too disappointed that more hadn't commented. I have no idea how many galley my editor actually sent out, and for reasons best known to her, the two blurbs I got were never used on the novel anyway.

Some time later, I discussed this whole business with a writer who routinely had many blurbs from some of the most illustrious writers in the field on her books. "People really like your stuff," I said. "If I could get half those comments, I'd be ecstatic." "Well," she said, "I wrote to even more writers who

couldn't comment for one reason or another." "You wrote to them?" I asked. Of course she had, and I was embarrassed at not having grasped this elementary point of procedure.

You should ask them, she told me. If a writer has no time to read the book at that moment, you save yourself and the publisher postage, time, and trouble. (Her other suggestion—that I mail out early copies of my manuscript myself to people willing to read my work—was something I never did. I couldn't afford the costs of photocopying and mailing, for one thing, and it seemed a bit much to ask busy professionals to pore over all that loose paper.) A lot of writers, she pointed out, are swamped with galleys and manuscripts begging for attention; the least you can do is ask if they are interested in looking at your book. This wouldn't guarantee a quotation, but certainly it made more sense to send out six or seven sets of galleys and get four blurbs than to send out twenty-five and get only two responses.

I took her advice, more or less. I say "more or less" because I still feel odd about prevailing upon colleagues to look at my work, and soon discovered that writing such letters has its own pitfalls.

Author A is a writer I much admire. I seize on any excuse to read her books; when her publisher began to send me advance galleys or manuscripts for comment, I perused them avidly, flattered that I was considered worthy of blurbing them. (This brings up one of the paradoxes of blurbing: if a comment from me was considered desirable, why did I still need blurbs from others on my own work?) For years, although I always asked my editors to send A galleys, I couldn't bring myself to write to her and ask her to look at my books.

Finally, I summoned up enough courage to ask her if she could read one set of galleys; she replied that she was overwhelmed with work. Fair enough, I thought, knowing what that was like. I tried again with another novel, but once more, author A was swamped and feeling burned out. I was disappointed, but not depressed, since A rarely commented on any book. I think I tried her one more time with a letter, and made sure she got galleys of everything anyway, hoping that one book

might catch her attention when she wasn't busy.

I got the message when A's comments started appearing on a few other books, praising them lavishly; she simply wasn't interested in reading mine. Were my novels too long, their subject matter uncongenial, or their style off-putting? I wasn't about to ask, because author A had behaved properly; she had never been rude, and had given perfectly reasonable excuses. I would have been out of bounds in asking her why she didn't want to read my books, and at last realized there was no point in trying her again.

Following the advice of my highly-praised colleague by writing letters had resulted in making me feel even more insecure about my work, but that couldn't be helped. A owed me nothing; my comments about her books were freely given, and I regret none of them. In a way, I have to admire her integrity, even though it didn't do me much good.

Writer B is a popular figure in Science Fiction. I never would have dared to ask her for a comment if she hadn't told me, entirely unbidden, how much she liked a couple of my novels. When a new book was wending its way toward publication, I wrote to ask her if she was willing to look at it. "Send it," she replied; "I can't promise anything, but if I have time, I'll read it."

Galleys were sent. She wrote back to say she had no time to read the novel. I could have swallowed that easily if she hadn't gone on to say that she was so taken by one of my recent novels that she planned to use some of my ideas in a book of her own.

I managed to hold my temper. As it happened, writer B redeemed herself by giving me a blurb some time later.

Writer C is a "writer's writer," a critically acclaimed spellbinder with accomplishments most of us can envy. I had been corresponding with her intermittently for several years before asking if she would read an advance copy of one of my novels. "Sure," she said, raising my spirits, "I'll be glad to—just tell your editor to send me galleys."

The galleys were mailed, and I sent a note to C alerting her to that; silence descended. After a month or so, I wrote to C asking if the galleys had arrived; writers learn not to have blind faith in

either editors or the Postal Service. Another silence ensued, with no reply.

Had writer C started reading, then thrown my book across the room in a fit of rage? Had some personal crisis intervened? I didn't dare ask, and still don't know; C hasn't written to me since then. I keep wondering if my book was responsible for this.

Writer D had very much liked one of my early books. Because she is a very prominent writer, I was delighted to hear that she was sending a comment on my work to my editor. I was less thrilled to discover, after my editor left her job in the midst of preparing my book for publication, that she had lost D's letter. No copies of D's comments existed; even D didn't have one, as my new editor found out. This editor prevailed upon D to send another comment, knowing that D was one of those rare people whose praise might actually help me. D, who I suspect was justifiably annoyed at this new infringement on her time, sent another comment, which turned out to be so understated that my editor decided not to use it.

Often publishers don't use blurbs they get because they are sent too late to be included in ads, on dust jackets or inside paperbacks. Sometimes their reasons for not using them are more mysterious, which makes me wonder why they trouble to solicit them, send copies of such letters to an author, then fail to make use of them on the books or in publicity. This was the first time I had heard of a blurb being rejected on editorial grounds.

My editor probably did the right thing, but I feel I've used up any capital I had with D.

Many blurbs, of course, aren't solicited from writers, but are taken instead from reviews of a book. This doesn't do the author of an original paperback much good unless the book's reissued, and only advance reviews from places like Publishers Weekly or Locus are out in time to be used on hardcovers. But a writer can hope that, in the fullness of time, she'll accumulate enough reviews (the most useful ones being lavish praise of her work in general that have appeared in major publications under the bylines of famous writers) to be less dependent on new blurbs from other authors.

Writer E told me: "I'm doing occasional reviews for a major newspaper's book supplement, so I may review your new novel." I was very pleased, since E had liked that book, and I also knew that she wouldn't be crass enough to alert me to her intentions if she hadn't liked it. Any comments would be out in time to be used on my novel's paperback edition; I looked forward to the review.

A copy of the review arrived soon after my novel was out; my heart sank. My colleague had written what amounted to reasoned praise of my novel, with almost no quotable lines—a good review I feared couldn't be used! It didn't help that she had written a highly critical review of another book in that same column that actually had choice lines a publisher could have used in promoting that volume.

Had E unintentionally done me a disservice? Not at all. The incident showed me how infected I had become with the hype of publishing, where anything less than a blurb full of hyperbole ("Knocked me cold and put me six feet under!" "Truly one of the most magnificent sagas of this year, or any year!"—how many of those have you seen lately?) seems like a criticism. E had written a thoughtful review of a novel she liked, and I should have respected her for not wanting to mint more debased coinage.

After I had been writing for a while, various editors began to solicit occasional blurbs from me. (Here's another paradox of publishing; writers, many of whom are notoriously insecure, are often asked to help their competition.) I made a few rules for myself, which must be much like everyone else's. I would try at least to glance at any manuscript or galleys an editor sent, and read the book if I had time. I wouldn't blurb anything I hadn't read in its entirety and loved, would not be moved by any friendship I might have with its author, and would send any comment as soon as possible, since deadlines are usually tight.

One editor in particular bombarded me with novels; for a time, I could expect anywhere from three to nine books a year from her. As it happened, she was publishing some fine books, so I made comments on a few, and usually took the precaution of sending copies of my

blurb to the authors. The editor in question never used any of my comments. As the years passed, new sets of galleys would arrive from her, I'd make a comment, the book would appear, and my blurb would be nowhere in evidence.

I am patient, and also have a file of quotations some of my own editors never used; there were probably good reasons my own comments hadn't appeared. A writer has to learn to accept rejections, bad reviews, crude bastards who make a point of telling you in person why they don't like your work, and stern editorial criticism, but having even blurbs rejected over and over again seemed too much. Did my blurbs lack sparkle? Or was it simply that the editor had accumulated lots of big-name comments and didn't need mine?

It took almost a decade before my exasperation with this editor boiled over. I reached the breaking point when she sent me bound galleys the day before I was to head into the Adirondack Mountains for some boating and fishing, and told me that she needed any comment in a couple of weeks. The author was a favorite of mine, so I figured I could schlep the galleys into the woods. I read them under the pines, wrote out my comment by hand, put it into the stamped, addressed envelope I'd brought along, and hiked into the nearest town to mail my letter before the deadline. Need I add that this editor didn't use that comment?

That did it; she would get no more blurbs from me. I kept that resolution through three succeeding mailings of galleys, but that damned editor was too clever for me. She sent me a novel I couldn't resist, and off went another blurb. If an editor's thoughtless, why take it out on her writers?

That book isn't out yet, but I'm betting she doesn't use this comment, either.

Someone's probably thinking that I've taken all this too seriously. Maybe, but writers often are sensitive to things saner minds ignore; if we weren't, we wouldn't be any good as writers. A reader might get the impression that most of my blurbing experiences have been unfortunate. This isn't so; they've actually been pretty good for the most part. I have, however, come to a few conclusions.

Contrary to what my highly-praised and greatly-blurbed colleague had advised, I found that writing courteous letters to other writers asking if they'd look at my stuff rarely accomplished anything except feeding my insecurities and making me feel like a pest. There were exceptions, writers who had the gift of making me feel I'd done them a great favor by offering to have galleys sent to them, and who wrote comments I'll always treasure. Yet an informal statistical analysis reveals that over half of the writers I wrote to never commented on my work, while about three-quarters of those who contributed blurbs did so without such requests. My feeling is that letters from editors asking for quotes may accomplish more and don't put writers on the spot. (I won't go into the case of one writer I'd never met, who called me up twice practically demanding a quote for her book. I refused, but it made me wonder if my letters, gently and carefully phrased as they were, seemed equally annoying to some.)

I discovered that the best blurbs are much like the best gifts; you may not need them, or may wonder how practical they are, but you cherish them because of the thought and feeling behind them. Most writers mean what they say in any blurb; why would they bother otherwise? The writer, unlike many reviewers, reads the book for no pay, spends time thinking of what to say, and will hardly cast doubt on her discernment and taste by commenting on things she doesn't like. A colleague who makes such an investment of time (one thing most of us in this business lack;

continued on page 69



The Gimlet Eye

by

Jon Gustafson

I recently came across an article entitled "Is Computer-Generated Art Really Art?" It discussed an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art of computer-generated art by somebody named Matt Mullican. The conclusion reached by the author, Frank Rose, of the article was that, yes, computer generated art is art . . . a conclusion I agree with wholeheartedly.

What Rose did not discuss — and what I'm going to talk about in this article — is what kind of art is it? Is it an original, a multiple original, or a reproduction? For that matter, what is a photograph (of a landscape or some of the bizarre images we have been seeing appear in Science Fiction art shows in the past two years or so)? Is it an original or what? I suppose the first thing we should do is set up some definitions so we all know what I'm talking about. An "original" is defined as a one-of-a-kind piece of art. A painting or a drawing is a good example of this, where the artist has created an image that will never—and *can* never — be repeated exactly.

A "multiple original" is one where the original medium on which the artist worked is not what you see up on the wall. A good example of this is an etching, in which the artist works on a metal plate, then "fine art prints" (a phrase often synonymous with "multiple originals") are made from it by running the original medium and the paper through a press together. These multiple originals are then signed and numbered by the artist, making each print unique. After the print run is complete, the plate is destroyed (usually by scoring several lines across the face of it)

thus insuring that no more of the prints can be made.

A "reproduction" (which is often confused with "print" as many people use the two terms interchangeably) is defined as an image created without the original medium ever touching the paper. An example of this would be an offset reproduction where the original piece of art (such as a painting) is photographed, the image transferred to a metal offset plate, then that plate used in an offset press to make the image on paper. These reproductions may also be signed and/or numbered by the artist to make each one unique. While the offset plate and the negative are generally discarded or destroyed, as long as the original piece of art exists, it is possible to recreate the reproductions.

So where does this leave us with photography and computer art? During the 1990 Westercon, I had a long and interesting conversation with Ctein, who is probably best known in Science Fiction as a highly creative (and highly professional) photographer, about whether photographs were—or were not original works of art. It was, as you might well imagine, Ctein's position that photos (of things other than other works of art, of course) are originals. He used as his reasoning the fact that the results that a photographer gets from the negative can vary so much that each must therefore be an original. In fact, Ctein contended, even if a photographer wanted to, he could not get exactly the same results two times in a row.

Now I can understand Ctein's position and even his reasoning; unfortunately, I can't agree with it. One of my main problems is in the definitions that I laid out earlier in this article. With an



original, it is the item the artist actually worked on that hangs in the gallery. With a multiple original, the plate that the artist actually worked on stays in his studio and the image created from that plate hangs in the gallery. The same goes for the reproduction (although with the reproduction, the original may also hang).

So what is the situation with the photographs? Obviously, the negative (which may or may not have been worked on—beyond its initial exposure—by the photographer) is not what you see in the gallery. What you see is an image created from that negative. But what about the argument that each image is different from all other images from the same negative? Well, if you look closely enough, each image taken from an etching plate is different from every other image. This might be due to the different amounts of ink used with each pass through the press, or the slightly differing textures of the paper, or different press pressures. The same can be said for offset reproductions. If you look closely enough, there are always differences. You might have to go to a microscope to find them, but they are there. Therefore, the argument that photos are originals because they differ from others from the same negative is severely flawed. It is a difference of degree, not kind.

That pretty much clinches it, I would think; a photograph that is, what you would see hanging in a gallery — is not an original. So the question now be-

comes: Is the photograph a multiple original or a reproduction? Which it is now seems to hinge on how generous one decides to be. If you decide that the degree of differences between each photo makes them multiple originals, well, that's one interpretation. On the other hand, unlike genuine multiple originals, the negative and the print never touch (except in the case of contact prints) which would put them in the category of a reproduction. Confusing, no? It's part of what makes my life as an art appraiser such a joy.

Which brings us (finally!) to computer-generated art. That it is actually art is not the question; the question is what kind of art is it? In my way of thinking, it is not much different from photography. The "original," in this case, is a computer program stored in the main memory of a computer or on a hard or floppy disk. The graphics were, of course, created by an artist (which seems to put it one step up from a photograph, which depends on much less input from the photographer) and, much like the negative, the "original" is never seen. Unlike the photographic negative,

however, the computer original can never be seen. What hangs in the gallery, once again, is an image created from the computer program. Whether it is photographed from the screen, or is printed out on a dot-matrix or laser printer seems to make little difference. It is either a multiple original or a reproduction and most likely a reproduction.

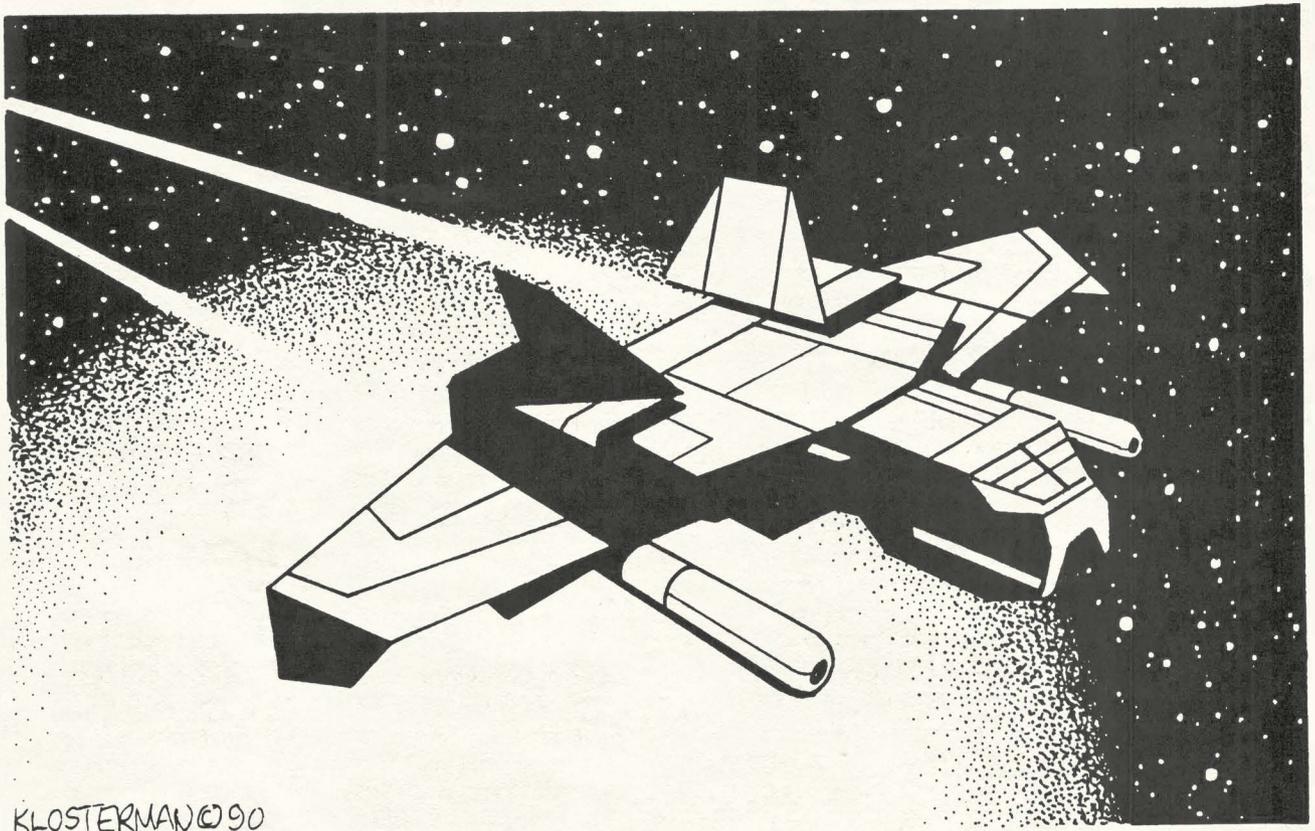
But what if, I hear you cry, the artist makes *one* print from the program and then either changes or destroys it? In that case, the print becomes what is called a "one-off" reproduction which, while not very common in the art world, is not unheard of. This can also happen with the photographic negative. The *number* of prints created is unimportant (except for the buyer, for whom the number can be very important — generally speaking, the fewer prints there are, the more valuable each one becomes) The *process* is what's important.

While each type of art requires input (of some type) from an artist, it is the *result* of that process that creates either an original, a multiple original, or a reproduction (or print). This is not to say, by any means, that the work of

Pablo Picasso is "better" than that of Ansel Adams, or Matt Mullican. The esthetics of this situation are not in question; the processes by which the final result is achieved is.

And this relates directly to what is seen in Science Fiction convention art shows. All too often, the information that the potential buyers see on the bid sheets is, at best, misleading and, at worst, erroneous. The buyers need to educate themselves on what it is that they are actually buying, because too often the artists themselves don't know exactly what it is they are selling. When photographers are selling their prints as "originals," then the buyers need to know what it is that they are really buying. The same goes for those computer artists who are proclaiming their output as originals. I don't mind that these forms are being sold in the con art shows—in fact, I would like to see more of it—but I do mind it if what they sell is improperly labeled.

To sum up—artists, know what it is you are selling; buyers, know what it is you are buying. Then everyone will be happy. ∞



The New Vivisector

by

Darrell Schweitzer

My Career As a Hack Writer

I've got unpublished novels. Doesn't everybody? John Brunner has a whole drawer full of aborted novels. C.J. Cherryh once described how she wrote a novel a year for twenty years before selling any. That would be a closet full. After she became a professional, she managed to sell a couple that lay toward the top of the heap, possibly as far down as Novel #18, but I'd guess the rest will remain there.

So what else is new?

Well, I haven't made huge amount of money in my career so far, but I consider myself fortunate in many ways. I've sold over a hundred stories to places like TWILIGHT ZONE and FEAR and Thomas Monteleone's BORDERLANDS anthology. I've been translated into German, French, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, and even Hebrew. All my fiction books are in print. It is true there are only four of them — THE SHATTERED GODDESS, WE ARE ALL LEGENDS, TOM O'BEDLAM'S NIGHT OUT and THE WHITE ISLE — and that one, in a library reprint edition, only sold thirty-five copies last year, but there they are. As I write, my name is on the cover of the current issue of AMAZING. I am sure there are people in writing workshops out there who would all but kill to get as far as I have. One murder later they'd discover that most of the slope is still before them, but never mind. . . .

The point is that my unpublished novels are hack novels. They were written to order, for the express purpose of making money. They didn't work out. Should anyone grumble, "Schweitzer is

a lousy hack writer," I can only nod in agreement. Readers profess to like my other stuff, but my hack writing has never reached a readership and probably won't.

Let me explain. There are two novels in question. One is called CONAN THE DELIVERER ("Oh, he's become a mid-wife?" someone asked. "No," I replied. "More like a milkman.") and the other is THE MASKS OF ATLANTIS, and was written, ferchriestsake, to go with a calendar. Argh.

I sold the Conan novel on a proposal, in the approved fashion. It was accepted. I started writing. I received one-third of the advance on signing a contract, and another third on turning in the completed manuscript. At this point, the editor sent the manuscript back asking for specific revisions. I made them. Possibly because the publisher's right hand was not watching what the left was doing, I received the final third of the advance. Then the editor informed me that he was not going to publish this book. There it stands. I did the work. I got paid. The editor exercised his judgment, as was his job to do. I only wonder why, if he didn't like it, he didn't kill the project earlier.

A couple years earlier I made an appalling blunder. I wrote an entire 120,000 word novel for free. Oh, yes, I was supposed to get huge amounts of money, and the prospect of such money looked genuinely plausible. The book was to be a "collaboration" with a certain prominent artist, whose previous such "collaboration" made bestseller lists. Everybody was completely honest and above-board, explaining that this was a speculative venture. I was not in any way defrauded or deceived. It

really wasn't a collaboration, though, because aside from some photographs of paintings I was supposed to link the book to, and a couple very vague discussions, I had no input at all from my "collaborator." I wrote it all myself.

But what I learned from this is that a book on the bestseller list doesn't necessarily make money. Those lists are a function of orders. The problem with the artist's previous bestseller was that it got a huge number of returns, and was, in fact, a disaster. The tie-in calendar to the Atlantis book appeared, but the artist's agent never managed to sell the book itself. Again, they treated me entirely fairly, and agreed to turn all rights to the book over to me at the end of 1990, nine years after the project had begun.

So, if I change the names and rewrite it a bit until you don't recognize any scenes from the calendar I have a very long, pretty bad novel. It's lifeless. It rambles. It nakedly recycles large portions of THE SHATTERED GODDESS, which I had written just before beginning THE MASKS OF ATLANTIS.

Why? Was it because I was a cynical hack and did a half-assed job? I don't think so. I gave it my best shot, but just couldn't make the story live. The reason for this bears some examining.

The Conan book isn't very good either. Oh, it has its moments. I particularly like the one in which Conan and a Stygian prince, in the manner of the characters in Gene Wolfe's THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH, have a storytelling session and swap creation myths. There is certainly some striking and scary imagery, and a *lot* about Robert E. Howard's mythical pseudo-Egyptian land of Stygia that you didn't know before. This was to be the definitive Stygian novel.

But it didn't work. The character of Conan is a muscle-bound hole in the story with nobody there to fill it. He spends a great deal of time looking at the scenery between swordfights. On a deeper level, he has nothing to do in the story. The plot — a quest into the Stygian land of the dead — really does not require him. The genuine protagonist is a sympathetically-depicted Stygian prince. (Howard's Stygians tended to be the bad guys.) Conan comes along as extra baggage.

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I cannot say that the editor was wrong in refusing to publish this. It certainly would have been a *very strange* Conan novel, not at all like the others in the series, and it probably would not have pleased its intended audience.

What was lacking was that hoariest of artistic intangibles, inspiration. The book wasn't *mine* any more than the Atlantis novel was mine. It was what I suppose I could call *externally motivated*. It hadn't come out of any need I had to write that story. It had instead been generated to fulfill a contract. Had there been no deal, I would not have written it. I can't think of a purer description of hack-writing than that. Next time you go to write a story, ask yourself the following question: If I had all the money I ever needed, and did not have to work in any way, and *would not be paid for this story*, would I still want to write it?

I thought I was going to have some fun with it though. I thought I was going to give good value. But when I actually came to do it, I froze up. The story wasn't *felt*. It was contrived. There were, certainly, additional problems, notably that Conan as he has evolved in the continuing Tor Books series bears little relationship to the Robert E. Howard creation. He is not allowed to change or grow or feel real, human moods. He has become a static, one-dimensional pulp character like Doc Savage or the later Tarzan. Of course I had no business claiming to be a purist while engaged in such a project, but it probably was a mistake for me to have gone back and reread all the Howard Conan stories and tried to emulate *Howard* rather than the later Conan writers. The result doesn't read like Howard anyway, but like Darrell Schweitzer telling a -- sort of -- Conan story. Certainly the series hasn't evolved the way the Arthurian mythos has, so that there are hundreds of different voices telling the same story. Therefore, denied the possibility of doing any "internals," I stuck to externals. The book is all surfaces.

The Atlantis book is even worse, filled with ludicrous incongruities such as mastodons and dinosaurs existing at the same time, a fur-bikini'd heroine carrying a huge broadsword through the jungle while the hero dresses like Buck Rogers and totes a raygun. At times I not-so-subtly parodied this, as

in the restaurant scene — I think of it as an ancient Atlantean Denny's — where there's a whole tyrannosaurus turning on a spit in the middle of the room. A dino-bar! But — Gawd! — there was even a Cute Furry Critter in there; I kid you not; for the benefit of the stuffed toy concessions! I had little feel for these characters or the images depicted in the artist's paintings. So I tried to contrive a plot which would somehow wrap itself around all the prefabricated stuff and keep on going. This was going to be a coffee-table book, and my job was to fill in the words between the pretty pictures.

I did, too. The artist and his agent were pleased with what I produced. But they couldn't sell it, so possibly the editors they submitted it to could tell the difference. I am sure that if I ever rewrite this book into something publishable, I will dispense with every one of those images, with the cute critter, the — excuse me, but I can't help it — broad with the broadsword, the dinosaurs, the mastodons, and all the rest. There were snatches of creative stuff in places where the book got the farthest from what it was supposed to be, and possibly I can salvage some of that.

Colleagues and fans warned me at the time that this was a Really Bad Idea, that it would ruin my reputation and wreck my career. I countered that I didn't expect anyone to take it any more seriously than, say, Joe Haldeman's *ATTAR THE MERMAN* novels or George Alec Effinger's *PLANET OF THE APES* novelizations. The Conan book I didn't expect to be taken any more seriously than a Star Trek novel. There has been a recognized tradition of serious writers doing this sort of thing on the sly, at least as far back as Theodore Sturgeon's novelization of *VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA*. I regarded these jobs as wholly apart from my regular writing, as if, for the money, I'd taken time off to paint a house or deliver pizza. I was certain that I would never mix the two.

Quite possibly, my sheer inability to do this sort of thing saved me from a dire fate. Far better writers than I have *not* always been able to keep the self-generated and externally-generated writing apart. You get hooked. You find yourself economically dependent on novelizations or sharecropping in someone else's

universe or ghosting, and before long your own career vanishes. We can all think of several promising novelists who got swallowed up this way. Many of them are still around, writing novels "in the universe of" somebody VERY FAMOUS.

I can't claim moral superiority to the people who do this sort of thing, even the ones who destroy themselves this way. *I can't do it*. It's as if I hired myself out to deliver pizza and discovered I didn't know how to drive. I learned the important lesson that there are two kinds of writers in this world: creative ones and verbal technicians. The verbal technician is, archetypically, a TV writer, though nowadays as TV marketing and production techniques invade print-fiction, he might be working on series novels for a packager.

The verbal technician has very real skills. He has to deliver the goods or the boss will have to find someone else who can. *Who* does the job in the end hardly matters, any more than it matters which writer wrote a particular TV episode, as long as that episode is up to snuff. The verbal technician has to be able to write *anything* to a certain level of competence. Let's say a producer or packager has sold a series to a network or a publisher. Now it's time to hire writers to write the episodes. But the whole appeal of fiction — or film — the secret of audience enjoyment and consequently what makes the paying customer pay is emotion. The story has to be exciting, funny, sad, or something. It can't just lie there.

You know what they say: *Be sincere whether you mean it or not. Once you've got that down, you can fake anything.*



There are some writers who have both talents. Haldeman and Effinger obviously aren't hacks. They can write their own, unique fiction and both have found a wide audience. But they also had the ability to type out ATTAR or PLANET OF THE APES novels and produce whatever it is that consumers of that particular kind of literary cheese-doodle find nourishing. That is precisely the skill which I find I don't have. As Walter Brennan used to say on some TV western or other, *No brag, just fact*. That's why I never made it as a hack writer and why my hack productions were not even good enough to be published by the standards of such things. The ability to contrive, to put something you didn't create into an acceptable package, is quite different from reaching into your own subconscious and coming up with material which, to you at least, makes a thrilling or funny or sad story, then writing with such conviction that you can touch the emotions of others.

Ever notice that the work of verbal technicians doesn't *really* move you? Well, not very much. Some of it's rather like adequate cafeteria food as opposed to fine cuisine, but we're not likely to get a MORE THAN HUMAN or a CHILDHOOD'S END or a LORD OF THE RINGS from novelizations or packaged series or Darrell Schweitzer writing Conan novels. My inability is a matter of degree. I can't do it at all, but I'm not sure anybody else out there can fully

fake sincerity either. Sure, Robert Silverberg, Randall Garrett, and Harlan Ellison did it on a monthly basis for AMAZING back in the 50s when that magazine was staff-written and the stories were concocted to match already-existing covers, artwork, and even titles.

Silverberg, in an interview I did with him back in 1975 (See AMAZING January 1976) described it this way:

. . . I had considerable contempt for those mass-produced factory magazines, and this of course involved some schizophrenia for me when I started writing for them. I simply separated my head from my fingertips, and . . . produced \$500 worth of junk a month. But . . . by the time I was twenty-eight or so I had outgrown that very dangerous and destructive division of the soul, and had decided; in fact I had no choice but to decide; to write only the kind of fiction I would want to read.

He goes on to describe how, after the collapse of the SF magazine market in the late 50s, he drifted into other things, and rediscovered his self-respect when he found himself a well-regarded popular science writer. Only after that was he able to come back and write NIGHTWINGS and DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH and DYING INSIDE.

Aside from the certain competence of the verbal technician, those assembly-line stories for AMAZING had little to offer. Go look in issues from about 1955 and see for yourself. Maybe you'll come

away understanding why packaged series novels are never as good as individual works by the same writers, why all the subsequent Conan novelists can't even *touch* what Robert E. Howard was doing. Or maybe you have to have been there, and tried it, and gagged. I'm like someone who tried beer because everybody was drinking it, then found I *didn't like* it, couldn't keep it down, and so never became a drunkard. Sometimes circumstance favors you, even if you don't know it at the time.

Hack-writers can't overcome the fact that what they're writing is not theirs. Deep inside, such writers have nothing to say except, "Give me more money." The most successful ones, who can make a lifelong career that way are, I suspect, people who never had anything to say *at all*, and who never would have become writers in the first place if they'd found some better source of income.

Sure, the writer has to eat. Sure, the smart writer is going to sell his or her story to the best-paying magazine or to the publisher who gives the largest advance, but there is a vast and profound difference between marketing what you have created and filling in what someone else has commissioned. It's the difference between poetry and occasional verse.

But sometimes what the writer needs, far more than hack contracts, is an honest job. ∞

Where Was Rap Music When We Needed It?

"I have often thought that if there had been a good rap group around in those days, I might have chosen a career in music instead of politics."

Richard M. Nixon

Fiction

The Last Pig in the World by Scott Edelman

After the last pig in the world disappeared from the lab, we all suspected Susan.

What else could we think? The lab's only avowed vegetarian, she was always badmouthing the cafeteria's soy burgers that allowed people to pretend the world was still as it once was. And that sad look that came into her eyes whenever she peered into the cages! Once I learned that Doctor Vessell had summoned her to his office I figured I would never see her again, that she would be led off the premises in handcuffs while federal agents rushed to ransack her apartment. I felt Dr. Vessell's call made all of our suspicions a certainty. The head of this research facility was not in the habit of acknowledging even with a nod the existence of those without at least two doctorates after their name, so we knew his having one of the grad student lab assistants escorted to his office for a closed door meeting wasn't so he could

discuss whether she enjoyed cleaning out cages.

Dr. Vessell liked to think of his office as secure, but the details of his discussion with Susan had been passed on to me within the hour.

"Your sympathies," said Dr. Vessell by his fish tank, tapping flakes of food into the palm of his hand, "are known to me."

"I've been over my 'sympathies,' as you choose to call them, many times before with the others," said Susan. She kept her hands folded neatly in her lap.

"But not recently," he said, "and not with me." The flakes fell from his hand, and he watched as the fish bobbed up to suck them from the water's skin. "Not since this incident of the pig."

Susan squirmed in the hard wooden chair. She frowned as she stared at the tank. When I heard that, I knew she felt the same way I did about Dr. Vessell's habit of moving a different lab animal into his office each afternoon. He claimed it helped his studies. I thought it the vanity of an old man trying to show off his power.

"We used to worry so much about endangered species," continued Dr. Vessell, allowing the tips of his fingers to graze the surface of the water so the fish nipped at them in their hunt for food. "It's all so laughable. We're *all* endangered species now."

Dr. Vessell finally turned from his fish tank and sat. He stared intently at Susan across the highly polished desk.

"But then, you know all this. You've been working here for the last year, you must know that if we can't find an answer here to the virus that has stricken every creature of the earth, this is the way the world ends. The last generations are currently walking the earth. If we fail, after us . . . nothing. Nothing to ever reproduce again. The world will soon become a barren desert. And yet you've been known to disparage the work we do here. Never outright attempts to stir subversion. But snide comments, that sort of thing."

"I did not take Rufus," said Susan.

Dr. Vessell cleared his throat nervously.

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"Rufus."

"The pig. The last pig in the world. That was his name."

"I see, said the doctor. He slid a folder from his desk drawer and flipped through the pages within. "You were very close, then, to this creature . . . Rufus, weren't you? As you are to them all."

"That's correct."

"You like animals, do you not?"

"Yes, I do."

"Feel a certain special affection for them, yes? Perhaps more than you do for your fellow humans?"

Susan did not reply.

"Surely you can see the necessity for what we do here? For if we fail, there will be no more pigs, or cows, or . . . or anything. The fish, the fowl, the beasts of the earth . . . they will vanish."

"Dr. Vessell, I am a good employee. A loyal employee. Though I have personal opinions that may differ from yours, I keep them that way. Personal. I would do nothing to interfere with the work being done here. But honestly, I . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, I can't see the difference between letting them all die out now, and saving them. Saving them . . . for what? So we can breed back up a million pigs to slaughter again? So America can preserve its backyard barbecue? Have you really thought about what you're doing here? Saving these creatures as a race so man can kill them individually for eternity again . . . somehow that doesn't seem like the kindest thing to do."

The room was silent for a long moment. Dr. Vessell's face was flushed.

"But still," Susan whispered, "I did not steal Rufus."

"Forget the animals," he said, voice shaking. "Forget your vegetarian tendencies. Forget your objections to how we treat them here, and I have to say, we do treat them humanely, regardless of what those animal freedom zealots would have you believe. Forget all of that. There will be no more . . ." Dr. Vessell waved his hands around vaguely. "There will be no more us."

Susan bowed her head.

"I have made my peace with my god. That's all any of us can do now."

"I see," said Dr. Vessell, licking his lips. He seemed drained of all possible response.



"May I go back to work now?" said Susan, standing abruptly.

Dr. Vessell gestured towards the door. As she left his office one of the cleaning crew was wheeling in a cage containing a snake to rotate with the fish that had been there since the day before. Susan looked back for a moment at Dr. Vessell and then nodded sadly.

Though word of the meeting sped through the lab quickly, none of us spoke to her about it. You see, even for all her protestations, we still figured she might have taken the pig.

You see, I knew Susan, even though Dr. Vessell apparently didn't. If I had been him, knowing her as I did then, I

would have relieved her of her duties on the spot. For I had an edge over Dr. Vessell in knowing Susan, as I often watched her while she worked.

Only at work in the animal rooms, weighing, measuring, grooming, medicating, did Susan's eyes really shine, did she seem really at home. Other times, she just seemed resigned to life. She never appeared truly happy if she knew that other people were around. Her whole attitude changed if she knew she was being watched.

She felt for the animals. I could see it in her eyes, how sometimes there was a sadness in them when she looked at a creature restless in its cramped cage. Dr. Vessell had never seen her like that, so it

was possible for him to believe her when she said she would not interfere with the experiments. But for me, it was not a difficult leap of imagination at all to picture her stripping the uncomfortable electrodes from the pig, and somehow smuggling it to a place of freedom.

It wasn't until I overheard her conversation with Marty that I realized how wrong I had been.

"I heard what happened this morning," he'd said. He pointed back over his shoulder towards the director's office with his clipboard.

Sue grunted and continued putting bowls of food into the cages. She snatched a carrot stick from her cart and began to chew it loudly.

"Don't worry," he said nervously. "You and I, we can be truthful together. I won't tell. Whoever snatched that pig deserves a medal, don't you agree?"

Susan jumped up quickly, knocking a plate from her cart.

"Did Dr. Vessell send you?" she asked harshly, her hands on her hips.

"I see what you're thinking," he said, smiling. He licked his lips. "I'm no spy."

He looked around nervously, and then continued in a whisper.

"You know, the Animal Liberation Organization has been postering every wall near this place. It seems as if they've got a new slogan every day."

"So?"

"I'm one of them, Susan."

"I don't believe you. I've never known you to show the slightest interest in what the animals are put through here."

"I couldn't. That's a part of my cover. I can't allow suspicion to be put on myself. You see . . . I'm the one who took Rufus. I'd been planning it for months. He's now living out his days on a secluded farm where no one will ever pester him again."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"I feel I can trust you. I've always felt you were sympathetic to the cause. But now it's time for you to do more than just talk about how all this bothers you. Now I need your help."

"To do what?"

"Taking Rufus was just a test to see if it could be done. Now we want to free them all. And I just learned that Dr. Vessell has reprogrammed the computer locks so that the main doors need two codes to open. I can't work alone any more. We can get the animals out at night . . . together."

"I don't want to be having this conversation."

She knelt and began picking up the fallen vegetables.

"Too bad," said Marty, his eyes bright, his voice full of emotion. "You've gotten away with talking the talk for a long time. Now you have to decide whether you're going to walk the walk. We both know that these animals will spend the rest of their lives tortured in cages if we — if *you* don't do something."

"Leave me alone."

"At least *think* about it," said Marty, suddenly calm again. "Don't think of this as a favor for me. Think of this as a favor you have to do for *them*."

Marty stalked quickly from the room, taking with him my suspicions of Susan. Sue began to cry as soon as he was gone. I'd have comforted her if I could, but I knew doing so would have given away that I'd overheard her conversation with Marty, that I knew the predicament she was wrestling with. And that was something I was not yet ready to do. Sue hadn't stolen Rufus, and so I now needed to see what she would decide.

We all kept our eyes and ears open from then on. Both Sue and Marty were under a constant watch that would have pleased Dr. Vessell, had he known about it.

We didn't have long to wait. The next day, Sue joined Marty in the lunchroom. Sue usually never set foot in the cafeteria. She'd bring her lunch of fresh fruits and vegetables and nibble it throughout the day, turning her nose up at the mock burgers the others cherished. The fact that Sue and Marty sat together was an item of conversation for the rest of the day, as they had a rep



for not getting along; most of the others in the room, I hear, were shocked.

I didn't get the details of their conversation; the entire encounter was held in a hushed whisper.

Did she seem agitated as they sat together? Relieved? Resigned? None of those who had witnessed the meeting could tell. So all I could do was continue to watch and wait. Sue had made some decision, of that I was sure, and it maddened me that I was not privy to it.

I tried to surmise what I could from her eyes during the time she spent caring for those the scientists were trying to save. But I could deduce nothing. To me, she was still the same old Susan. I should have tried to speak to her, tried to get her to tell me her intentions, but that wouldn't have given me the information I needed.

Finally, the night I was waiting for arrived.

I was there late at the lab that night (and in those difficult times, where else would I be?). I had nodded off, and was awakened by Marty and Sue going through the labs and letting the animals out of their cages. Marty smiled as he moved from cage to cage: Sue looked tense. I tried not to be noticed as they herded all of the animals toward the main door.

Marty's hands shook as he punched his security code into the door panel. He began rubbing his hands together as Susan slowly moved to the door herself. As her fingers hovered over the

buttons, one of the chickens moved up beside Marty and pecked at his leg.

Marty looked down at the chicken and licked his lips. When he lifted his head, Sue was staring at his tongue, her finger frozen over the buttons.

"You never intended to free the animals, did you?" she said.

Marty hesitated.

"Don't be ridiculous, Sue, I —"

"You're lying."

"Just punch in the code."

"I won't. Let's just get them back in their cages."

Sighing, Marty pulled a gun from his pocket.

"Do it, Susan. You don't owe this place any loyalty. And besides, there can be plenty of money in it for you."

Susan's hands slowly fell to her side.

"What a fool I've been. To believe that you were a member of the Animal Liberation Organization. You plan on ... eating them."

I could see the tears in Susan's eyes.

"No, not me personally. But there are a lot of people who will pay more money than I've ever seen to have one of the last steaks in the world. Enough money so that I won't have to take orders from fools like Vessell ever again."

"I was going to risk my entire career to help set them free," whispered Susan. "I thought you really were going to help them."

"Punch the code," he said harshly, taking a step closer to her.

"No," she said, closing her eyes. I could tell she was ready to die.

I'd heard enough. I rose up and kicked the gun from Marty's hand with one front hoof, and smacked the other against the back of his skull. He'd have no permanent damage, but he'd sleep for awhile.

Sue looked at me, terrified for a moment, but when our eyes met, she smiled.

We knew we could trust each other.

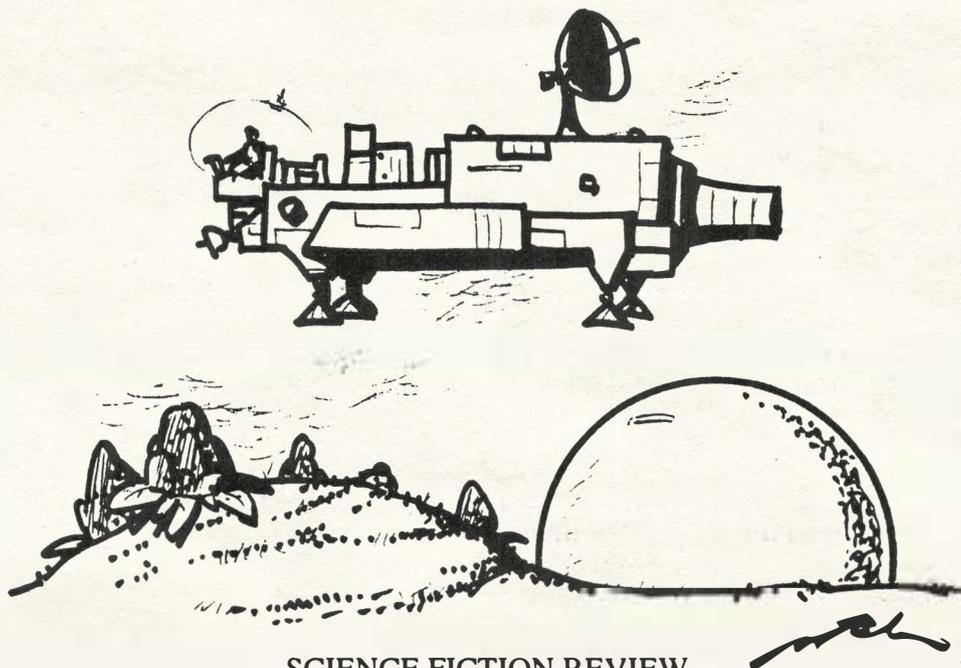
After she punched in her code, it was a simple matter for her to lead us all into Marty's waiting truck. Luckily, he was too greedy to work anything but alone. We eventually came to this place, the location of which I heard about through the grapevine.

I used to mind being the last horse in the world, but I've since gotten somewhat used to that. Sue had helped me find my peace with my maker. As if I didn't have enough to thank her for.

At least now, I am spending my last days my way. Eating grass and running in the sun, instead of being poked at under fluorescent lights. Those scientists wouldn't have been able to do anything anyway. Regardless of what the government has said, I'm sure it was probably a scientist who released this virus in the first place.

If I must be the last horse in the world, at least I won't go out of it wearing a saddle.

∞



Fiction

No Place to Hide

by

James S. Dorr

Heat.

A burst of radiation, actually, signaling the beginning phase of what would grow into a stellar flare, but that's what my sensors translated it as. A warning that the sector my ship had just passed through was becoming dangerous for both ships and life forms.

A token in memory of what I'd once been.

Other memories: A different heat. Laser heat, aimed at my one-man scout by a Spican corsair. Memories of the civil conflict, before all grievances were forgotten in the face of the alien challenge — the new war, against a non-human invader. Except I was no longer human either.

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I'd been killed in the Spican's ambush and, despite our worlds being allied now, that was a memory I'd never lose.

The heat dissipated—all at once—as if it had been something only imagined. The last time I'd been a lot less lucky. I'd been killed in action, but my scout had held together just long enough to be recovered by one of my own side's battle cruisers. The rest had been nightmare.

That heat had remained.

I checked my scanners, fore and aft. The mid-ship visuals. The infra-redders. Loosed the sono-robs from their booms. I even *smelled* the space ahead of me and was rewarded. The trail I picked up was faint, but, to me, could not be mistaken. Goranhau's spoor.

My hunch had paid off. For nearly five years since my recommissioning,

I'd cruised the sectors that life-manned ships preferred to avoid. The dangerous sectors, that robo-merchants would sometimes sneak through, or occasional privateers like mine, whether manned or unmanned. But I'd had a mission beyond the one that FleetCen gave me, ever since I'd scanned the roster of similar semi-independents and learned that Goranhau had been classed as a privateer too.

I'd wondered why. He hadn't volunteered -- none of us had, even back during the civil wars. Even before the colonial navies had reformed under FleetCen's umbrella, the general idea was that those without money or social connections — in other words, ninety percent of those who did the actual fighting — were simply "classed" into

whatever part of the fleet the admirals felt needed help most. Goranhauf, at the time we first met, had been classed as a picket by his own side. He'd been given a single-manned ship, one better gunned as it turned out than mine, and then set to ambush scouts like me.

The visi-comp pinged. The trail was fresher. I took a sonic reading over a wedge of space off my starboard bow, then ordered a full-power magnification of what the visual computer had seen.

A sickle-winged shape, its velvet black finish blending smoothly into the darkness that lay around it. Goranhauf's corsair — then picket, now privateer — in any guise, a shape I'd first seen only when it flashed out at me, guns blazing death, giving me scarcely a chance to return fire before my shattered scout was sent spinning back to my own side.

"Identify!"

Goranhauf's challenge. Again he'd seen me first, reacted first. But we, allegedly, fought for the same cause in this new war.

"FleetCen XX-2," I answered. "Armed and on patrol under letters of marque. Identify back — visual ID. Is that you, Goranhauf?"

Minutes passed. We were that far apart, even as our ships were closing. "Identify — visual," I repeated, knowing he had probably already sent his compliance. "I've trailed you,

Goranhauf, and, if it's you, there's nothing that you can do to hide." As I finished the words, my internal screen flashed into an image of a heavy-faced, black-bearded man.

"This is Goranhauf" — we were still closing — "I . . . geeze, are you really an early double-X? I'd heard that most of them had been destroyed."

"My name is Metler," I replied. "Alan Metler. Perhaps you remember, when you fought for Spica. . . ."

The time lag that separated our messages and replies was getting shorter. Nevertheless, there was still a delay.

"I . . . why would I hide?"

Why would he hide from me? For the same reason that most of the early XX conversions had been destroyed. Pain was the reason, when it came down to it. Searing pain.

I switched on my own visual ID transmitter, knowing that all he'd see was a network of wires and tubing. The pain hadn't stopped when my ship had been rescued, but only started. My combat record had been good enough for me to be given a second chance, so, just as my nerves were flayed from what was left of my body, my brain was revived.

"Because I intend to kill you, Goranhauf, just like you killed me."

"But you survived, Metler. The process worked for you. You're one of the few.

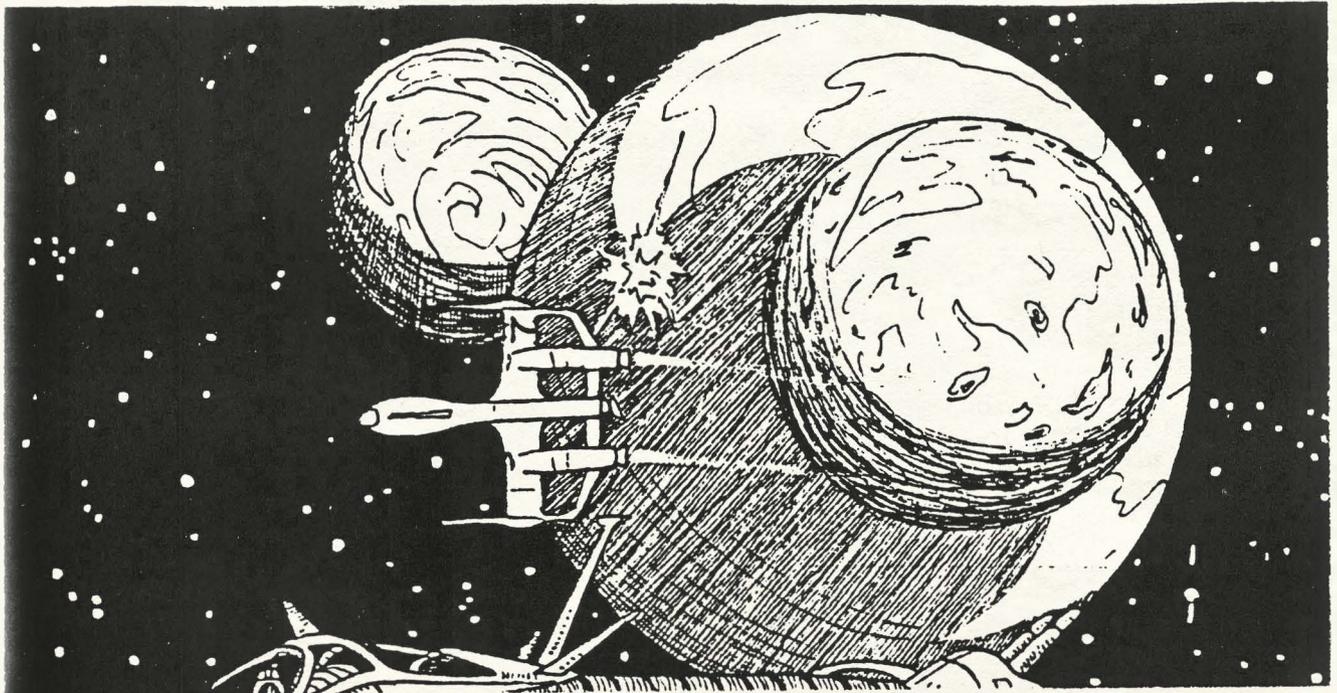
The memory of survival was agony, without cessation. This was survival: Nerves cut from flesh, then spliced into circuits; eyes, ears, tongue, skin, every external part fused with sensors; spinal ganglia, locked in tungsten, laid as vertebrae into a new keel. And, after, the testing in which lay the *real* pain as we became one, my scout ship and I, in movement and will, while most of the others did not survive. The others, who underwent the conversion, as Goranhauf said, had been destroyed — as an act of mercy. But, even with the worst of the failures, mercy came only after they'd been kept and tested long enough for FleetCen to learn how to make today's man-ship conversions easy.

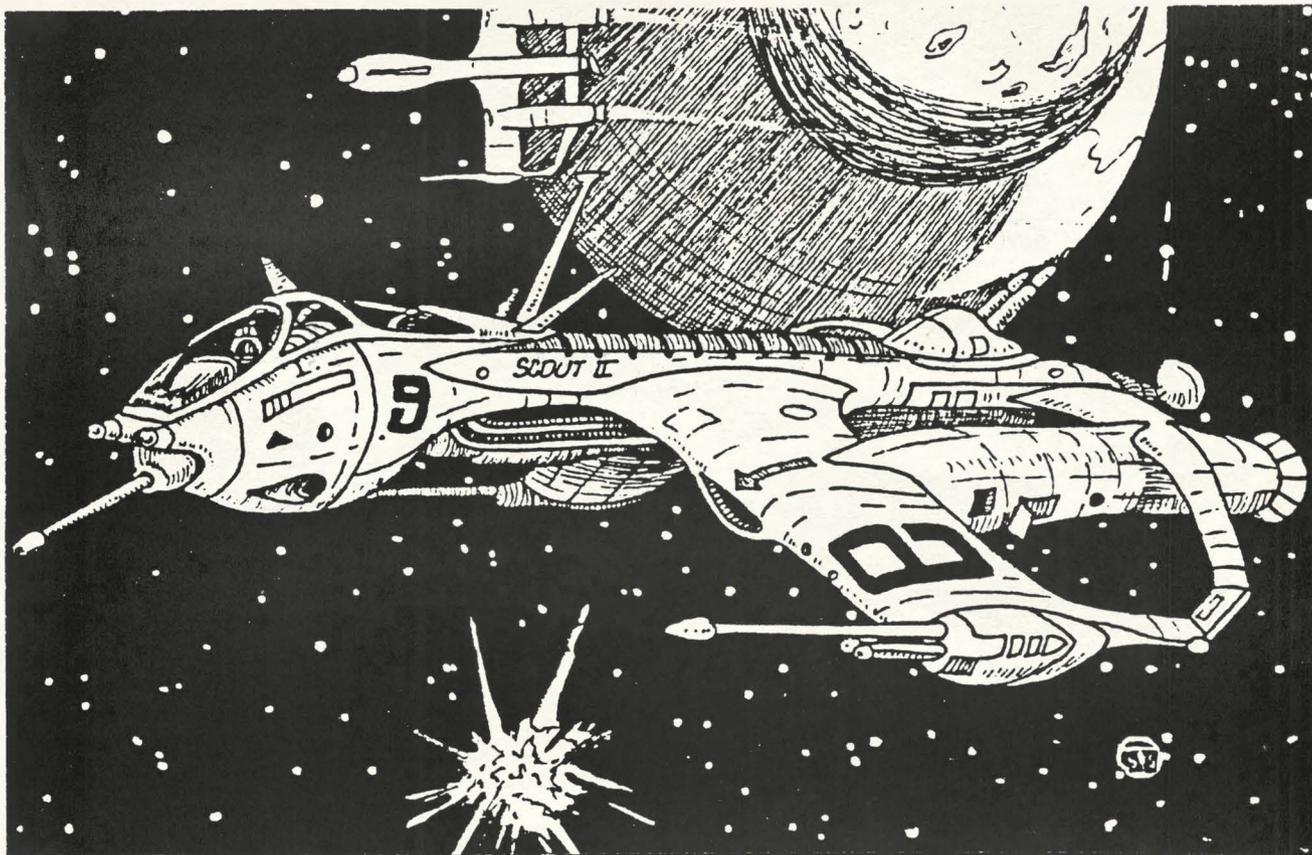
"Yes, Goranhauf," I said. "I survived."

This time I fired first, in the moment he waited to hear my reply. Heat beams and words struck his ship together.

"Metler, for Christ's sake! We're on the same side. We could be partners. We could forget what happened before and work together."

I fired again as our ships flashed by. "You were the one who did this to me, Goranhauf. Made me survive on hatred alone — on what I would do when I finally tracked you. When I was recommissioned, they made me a privateer because they didn't know whether a ship like me could operate in concert with others. They may have





been wise. In any event, they did me a favor by giving me the freedom to search.

He checked speed and circled — instead of running, he intended to meet my challenge. There wasn't time for talk after that, or even for thinking. I'd managed to damage his ship on that first pass, but only lightly, and now he came back with his forward lasers crackling on tight beam.

I fired again — didn't know if I hit him — felt the pain as his first blast struck me. Screamed with the agony, shrieking, silently, out to the stars as I disengaged. This time the holes were burned in my own skin.

"Surrender, Metler," my com-circuits screamed back. Goranhau's ship turned, as if the battle were over already, to finish me off. "I'm a better gunner than you are — even if you're joined with your ship; I always will be. But we should be partners. Metler, listen, I wish you would at least consider. . . ."

I switched my voice receiver off. I thought of the stars. I thought of one star in particular, one that I knew was about to flare. I watched as Goranhau's ship fired again, but this time I took evasive action.

I made him chase me.

I kept him busy, turning, evading, scoring an occasional hit as I drew him with me, doubling back on my earlier course. I began to feel a warmth from the star, then a streak of searing heat arcing out toward our path. I took hits as well — it wouldn't be long until I was crippled. Nevertheless, in spite of the pain, I made sure I kept him busy enough that, with his reliance on his ship's separate warning circuits, he wouldn't guess where the real danger lay until I was ready.

I flew with pain, but I'd felt it before, and enough that was worse that I'd long ago realized that permanent death was something I wanted more than life. Permanent death, but a death with completion — I wanted a death, if it had to come now, that took Goranhau with me.

I made a last distance and course calculation, then hit my retros, sliding into a spiraling turn that took me below him. I watched as he flashed past — even when he'd killed me before, had it not been for the speed of his ambush, I would have proven the better pilot. I listened — *tasted* the chemical flame — as he tried to brake into his own sliding

turn, then desperately fired his stern blister cannon as soon as he realized I'd switched back to full forward thrusting power.

All he could do was to fire and fire again, riddling my body, helpless to stop me. . . .

. . . .

. . . to take the blow as my torn ship rammed . . .

. . . .

. . . to accept my embrace as, together, we swept into agonized brightness. Brightness and darkness. Into the flare. . . .

. . . .

And then brightness again.

My ocular sensors felt different this time — the fixed scanners covered a wider angle. I tested my nerve circuits, flexed my thrusters, realized that the conversion process *was* easier now.

continued on page 70

The Sum of the Parts

by

Joan Marie Verba

Susan Page's eye scanned the room. It was a typical hospital room: sound-absorbent tiles on the ceiling, walls, and floor, a monitor by the bedside, a bedside stand, a bed. Page awakened, head fogged by drugs and shock, right eye moving without her conscious control. She squinted to get the device back in line, and turned both eyes toward her right arm. As she feared, it was gone from the elbow down. In its place was a cybernetic arm. She wriggled its fingers. It worked.

"I see you're awake," said Dr. Halsey, in his Boston accent. The familiar black man hovered over the bed.

Page scratched her nose with her new fingers.

"Good," said Halsey. "I think that's going to work out fine. You can probably leave tomorrow. Just take it easy for a few days, and try not to get shot again for a while."

Page raised her right eyebrow.

"Want me to adjust the eye for you so it won't look around while you're asleep?"

"No, it's OK. Thanks."

"No problem. I'll check back later. Buzz the kitchen when you get hungry." He indicated a panel on the bedside table.

Page nodded to show she had heard.

Halsey walked out, nearly colliding with a man in a business suit.

"OK if I come in?" he asked Halsey.

Halsey glanced at Page. "It's all right with me if it's all right with her."

"In that case . . ." The man stepped inside.

Halsey backed into the corridor, pointing to the man. "You could still stand to lose a little weight, Lt. Futura."

"Muscle. It's all muscle."

Halsey shook his head and walked away.

Futura took out a bag of Potato Snax from inside his suit coat. He tilted it at Page. "Want some?"

"No thanks."

He pulled the fastener at the top and poured out the popcorn-sized potato chips in his hand. "Mending well?"

"S'pose so."

"You know, if the law didn't require us to investigate every shooting, we'd have given up on you by now. I've taken to duplicating my previous reports, and filling in a new date and site of injury."

"Captain tired of sending you here?"

"Hell, no. We've got a pool on you over at the station, picking dates when Collins will shoot you next. The Captain won this one."

"Oh? Put me down in the pool for Saturday."

Futura laughed. Particles of Potato Snax bounced on his tongue. "I thought you'd get a charge out of that. I put money on the slot where it says he doesn't shoot you. I haven't won yet, but some day I might. I'm a sucker for long odds."

Page said nothing. She felt tired. She wriggled her new fingers again.

The policeman put his bag down and took out his book-sized computer notepad. "I already got the place of the shooting from the paramedic that picked you up. Did Collins do or say anything unusual this time?"

"No, he just said, 'Hey, Page, over here,' and shot me."

Futura put the notepad away. "Still going to stick with the Pacifists League?"

"What do *you* think?"

He shook his head. "I still think you ought to get a gun. No one's going to deny you a permit, with your record. He ain't going to give up. The fact that you won't fight back just attracts him. He's that sort of guy."

"It has to start somewhere."

He picked up his snack bag. "I admire your principles, but pacifists just don't get on in a world like this."

"If not here, where?"

He shrugged. "I'll call you if we catch him, but don't count on it."

. . .

The next day, as she sat on a bench in the hospital entryway, waiting for her ride, she heard a patient arguing with a doctor. The sounds came from the near-by emergency wing.

"But I tell you, I just *have* to have a jacked-up arm."

"Sorry, but it will take a police order to get an enhanced prosthesis."

"I'll pay you for it. I'll pay big."

"You're about 20 years too late, friend. We aren't paid by patients anymore, we're paid by the government, in case you hadn't noticed. I'm not about to lose my license by violating their rules."

"Then I'll go elsewhere! I'll go to Russia! They'll take my money!"

"Don't bump your butt on the way out the door."

Page heard a snort. A man stomped out of the emergency wing. His left arm was a cybernetic one, same as hers.

A soft "meep" caught her attention. Mark Ashcroft was outside. Page stood, shouldered her bag, brushed some lint off her khaki pants, and walked to the car. She got in the passenger's side. The engine swished into life and they drove off.

Ashcroft glanced over at her. "Nice arm."

"It'll do."

"What did the police say?"

"Same as always. I ought to get a gun and shoot him."

"Anytime you want, you can borrow mine."

She glared at him.

"Sorry." He smiled. "I respect your beliefs and all, but I don't think that you're obligated to stand around and let this guy shoot you."

"Can you think of a tactic that I haven't tried?"

"What about changing your identity and going someplace else?"

Page shook her head. "People like Collins are all over. If I went somewhere else, I'd have the same problem."

"What do other Pacifist Leaguers do? What does the head of your outfit say?"

"Since we're fairly new, no one has had a problem quite like mine yet. Harassment -- habitual harassment -- yes; multiple shootings, no. You know I've tried everything else: avoiding him, confronting him, talking to him, pairing with someone else, changing residences, going on an extended vacation. . . ." She sighed. "If you think of something else, let me know."

"If it were someone gunning for me, I'd grab my gun and shoot him first."

"That's what makes the murder rate what it is today."

He shrugged. "Got to survive, any way you can." He stopped the car. "Want me to walk you to your room?"

"No, I can make it. Collins probably won't try to shoot me again for a while." She got out of the car. He went to put it in the garage. Page had a car, too, but since an ambulance had brought her to the hospital, hers was still in the garage.

The apartment in which they both lived was a four-storey brick building. She walked up the stairs to her second floor apartment. The bare wooden floor had one area rug in the middle. There was one bookshelf, a rocking chair, couch, television, and a computer on her desk. Her bedroom had the bed and one set of drawers. She wondered how, in a life of 32 years, she had accumulated so little. At least it allowed her to save for retirement, that is, if she should live long enough to do so.

On the wall was a framed wedding portrait of her and her late husband,

killed by crossfire after 14 months of marriage while coming home from the cleaners. Page had joined the Pacifist League even before the funeral. The newspapers picked up the story and published a picture of her as she was taking the oath at the local League headquarters. The day after the funeral Collins shot her for the first time; she lost her leg. The media picked up on that, too, even showing Collins' old mug shot. Collins had plastic surgery before trying again. The police asked the media to stop showing Collins' picture, so that he would not keep changing his features.

She looked again at herself in her wedding dress. "You wouldn't recognize me now, Scott," she said to the image of her husband. She slung her purse strap over a chair and sat on the couch. She cradled her head in the palm of her new hand, thrumming her fingers on her cheek. Flesh-and-blood fingers felt nicer, but she could get used to it, as she had gotten used to her new right eye, her new left leg (below the knee), the reconstructed hip, the artificial ear, the right half-foot, the left breast implant, the prosthetic shoulder socket, the ceramic jaw, and the mechanical left thumb.

. . .

Futura came around again while Page was at work. Page had a job at a local TV station, maintaining the equipment -- cameras, computers, and such, and doing odd jobs around the place. Her employers were understanding about the amount of sick time she had been using, especially since others could fill in while she was out, but Page wondered if and when she would reach the limit of their good will.

The policeman walked in while she was putting up the set on an empty sound stage, making sure that the desks and chairs and props were where the director wanted them. He watched as she worked to screw two metal tubes together to make a tall light pole, and said, "You know, with this sort of job, you ought to put a special strength enhancer on that arm."

Page set the fixture down. "Don't you need a police permit for that sort of thing?"

He cocked his head to one side. "Nah, not with your kind of job. We let construction workers and such put them on all the time. Here, I got the tools in my trunk." Before she could take a breath, he was out the door.

Minutes later, he came back, and put a tool box on one of the tables. "I worked my way through college as a cybernetic repairman. Did this all the time. Still keep the tools around . . . never know when they'll come in handy." Carefully, he took off his suit coat, folded it, and laid it on the back of a chair. He sat and opened the kit. "Here, put your arm down."

She sat across from him and laid her right arm on the table. He took various pieces out of his tool box, laid them next to the girders and gears in the arm to see if they fit, and used his tools to add them to the assembly.

"You know," she said, "if I put my hand around someone's throat with an enhanced arm, I could strangle them in an instant."

He glanced up at her, tongue pressed to the side of his mouth as if it was helping him in the effort. "You don't say."

"I've heard that some cybernetic limbs can crush steel. You wouldn't be enhancing it to that level, would you?"

"If I were, I wouldn't tell you about it."

"If I thought my limbs would kill someone without my conscious participation, I'd get them replaced, you know."

"Nah, I'm not going that far." Still puttering with his tools, he added, "Tell me something. If you wore bullet proof armor, and the bullet ricocheted off it and killed the shooter, would that violate your League oath?"

"Not at all. That would be considered the shooter's fault."

"Ever consider getting some?"

"How do you think I lost my eye?"

"Oh. Yeah, that happened before I was transferred here and got your case." He put his fingers into her arm assembly and twisted something into place. "There. Finished." He closed his tool kit. "Remember what Halsey told you: don't use the cybernetic arm to lift anything you wouldn't lift with your flesh-and-blood arm, or your artificial one could drop off. But you can give one hell of a handshake if you want to."

She flexed her fingers. "I'll remember. Thanks."

He picked up his suit coat and put it back on. "Try putting another of those fixtures together." When she had done so, much faster than before, he added, "Easier, isn't it?"

She nodded.

He pointed. "Try removing that teeny tiny screw with your fingers. You should have the dexterity of a pickpocket, though I don't recommend going into the profession."

She tried it. It came out faster than if she had used a tool to remove it.

"Oh." He took out his computer notepad. "Almost forgot why I came. Our informants tell us that Collins

hasn't changed his features since shooting you last, though I suppose that eye of yours can't be fooled by simple surgery. Of course, he still doesn't stay twenty minutes in any given spot. But if we catch him, we'll let you know."

. . .

It was dark. Collins was there. His arm reached up with his gun, as it had so many times before, aimed point-blank at her. She used her new arm to grab the wrist with the gun. She turned it away from her and squeezed. He dropped the gun. She kept squeezing. She heard the bones crack. He screamed. She laughed. The arm went to his neck. It closed. She could not stop it, did not want to stop it. The veins burst from his skin. He choked on his own blood. The man died, hanging from her clenched fingers, covered with gore.

She sat up in bed with a gasp. The fingers of her right hand were separated, relaxed, as they were on her flesh-and-blood hand. She did have control.

The vidiphone rang. She pulled aside the covers and went to the living room in her nightgown. The picture on the receiver was blank; there was sound only.

"Susan?" said a strained voice.

"What is it, Rita?"

"Can you come over right now? Tom got shot. He's in the hospital, and they say he'll be all right, but I don't know what to do."

"Stay calm, Rita, I'll be right over. Listen, I'm going to hang up and call you again just to be sure this is you. The last time I got a call at 2 a. m. it was Collins and I got shot."

Click.

Page slammed the receiver shut and kicked the desk for good measure. Collins, again. Ready to shoot her, again. Time to make plans, again. She sighed. If she got through this, she planned to write a guidebook for fellow pacifists. Perhaps she should title it, "How to Successfully Avoid the Truly Determined Sociopath." But she had to deal with Collins, first

. . .

She left a message at the police station for Futura, alerting him to Collins'



call. To be certain it was Collins, Page called Rita in the morning to confirm that Rita had not called her the night before, and that Tom was not in the hospital. She hoped that Collins would not start targeting her friends. The crime psychologist she had seen in order to cope with her loss of body parts said that Collins would only be interested in her friends to the extent that he could use them to get to her. So far, the psychologist had been right.

Page checked her car from the apartment before she left it. She had the car made bullet-proof and put in the monitoring system before realizing that Collins never shot her unless she could see him pull the trigger. But it made her feel as if she was doing something to defend herself. The car had one-way reflective glass, too: no one could see in, and if it was too sunny, the glass created a bright sheen, making it too bright to look at comfortably.

She put on the protective vest under her clothes. It was too hot to wear on summer afternoons, but on a cool summer morning, such as this one, it was comfortable enough. It only covered her torso, and a bullet fired close enough with a high-powered gun could get through, but it afforded some protection.

Before she left the building, her eye scanned the street. She often wondered if Collins regretted shooting her eye out, since the scanner could spot him in a crowd, even at a distance. It was partly because of the eye that he had to work harder to get her in his targeting sight now. In fact, the average time between shootings was becoming longer. Her goal was to make that interval infinitely long. Futura often said that Collins was so heavily involved in the underworld that someone ought to kill him one day, but she was not about to stake her life on that possibility.

She got to work without incident. Collins had not yet tried to breach the security system there. She got home safely afterwards, and for two days after that. She was in her garage, unloading groceries from her car to her pushcart, when her artificial ear picked up the sound of metal grating against metal. Cautiously, she peered around the door. The sound came from the direction of the apartment building. She suspected Collins was around the corner, waiting for her to come out laden with the heavy bags.

He had gotten her that way before; this was why she had bought the pushcart. She went back into the car, dialed the emergency number on her car phone, and explained the situation. She knew the police car was approaching when, from behind the shelter of the garage, she saw Collins run to his car. The police gave chase; she took the groceries into her apartment.

The next time she saw him, he was hiding behind a glare-glass partition at a sidewalk automatic teller station. He seemed unaware that her eye could spot him through it. The glass would prevent a bullet from reaching her -- he would have to step out of the station to shoot her. She walked toward it, as if to go past it, but as she reached the edge, her artificial arm snaked in and grabbed the gun. She jerked back; the gun came loose. She tossed it through a storm sewer grate. Collins, apparently in shock, was still there as she turned back to him and grabbed him by the collar, intending to march him to the nearest emergency box and call the police. He struggled violently as she dragged him along; the artificial hand gripped the shirt more tightly. With a savage twist, he lunged forward. The shirt tore loose. She was left holding a large scrap of cloth while he ran, tattered rags on his chest and back. The pedestrians, used to seeing murders in the streets regularly, stared briefly at the strange nonviolent scene and went about their business.

Two weeks and one more failed attempt later, Page was still alive and unshot. Futura came around her workplace and told her that he had won the current pool; the dates had run out. They had started another pool in the office, he said, extending through the next month.

One day, as she stepped out of the building where she worked, something fell on top of her, knocking her down. She looked up and saw that some empty scaffolding had collapsed, trapping her left leg. Collins appeared, running, from behind a corner. Her eye saw every freckle in his face, measured his frame, counted the teeth in his grin.

"Got you again, Page!" he said triumphantly, and shot.

She twisted and put her hand up, as if it would shield her, but the impact hit her back, on the left lower side, below the bullet-proof vest. Collins sprinted

off. She turned and used her artificial arm to move aside the debris that had fallen on her. Her artificial leg ignored the trauma of the rest of her body, and hoisted her to her feet. Ignoring the rivulet of liquid running down her back, she stumbled to the nearest police box and pushed the medical emergency button. She slumped to the sidewalk and managed to stay awake long enough to see the ambulance park beside her.

• • •

"You awake, or is that just your eye scanning the room?"

She came to her senses and focussed on Futura standing above the bed. "I'm awake," she said groggily.

He hefted another dollop of Potato Snax to his mouth. "I don't know whether to congratulate you on your new kidney or go to the funeral for the old one. What do you think?"

"Don't know."

"What now?"

"I'll think about it."

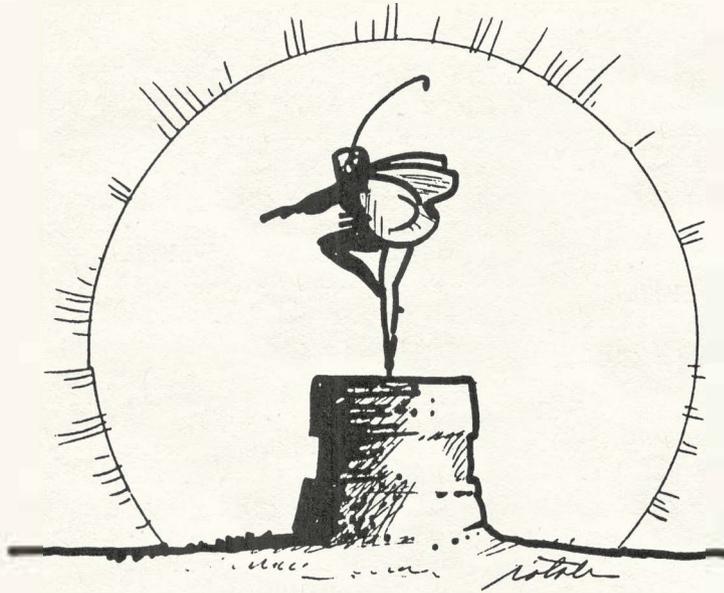
• • •

It was a Thursday. Page checked the street before leaving the indoor part of an indoor/outdoor restaurant. There, sitting at an outdoor table, eating, was Collins. He was facing away from her, he did not seem to know she was there. Or did he? Perhaps she could take him by surprise for once. He might just be shamming, waiting for her to get in range to shoot her again, but then again, he might just be eating lunch. Whichever was the case, it was time for her to take the initiative. She was tired enough of being victimized to accept the risk.

She walked cautiously until she was just behind him. He turned, and with a look of genuine surprise, dropped his fork. He twisted in his seat and began to rise. She slammed him back into his chair. "Time for another talk," she said, easing herself into the chair beside him, keeping an eye on his right hand, his gun hand, which clutched the edge of the table.

"There's nothing to say," he sneered. "I'm not joining your League, and I'm not quitting on you, either. You're a thnk. The world don't need no more thnks."

"I know. You're so obsessed with not being a coward, that you have to



keep shooting me to prove to yourself that you're not the coward you really think you are."

He banged the table with his fist and stood over her. "You shut up! I'm not a thonk! Only little cockroaches like you are thonks!"

She stared up at him coolly, as he sat again, her eye giving her brain the information that he was six-foot-one, 197 pounds, 20 years old. The blond hair was straight, unruly, and had a cowlick in the back. His shoulders were slightly stooped, and he was double-jointed. She was not surprised by his anger; her psychologist had predicted he would react that way if she said that. "You'll be relieved to know," she added, flexing her artificial arm under the table, "that I'm not here to try to talk you into not shooting me this time. I know now that no one can stop you but yourself."

He smiled mockingly. "And I ain't going to stop myself."

"I don't expect that, either. What I do expect is that sometime, soon, you're going to make a mistake. Your luck is going to run out. And I'm not going to sit idly by anymore waiting for you. From now on, you had better watch for me."

"And just what are you going to do?"

"Figure it out."

He looked up and leered. "That's supposed to scare me?"

"No, I'm just telling you: for my

own satisfaction, not yours." She stood. "Bye, now."

When she was at the street corner, he stood and aimed his gun at her. "Got you again, Page!"

She looked on calmly as the gun clicked. Holding up the ammunition clip, she said, "Wonderful what cybernetics can do nowadays, isn't it?"

The passersby looked on curiously at the crazy scene. She went back, unscathed, to the TV station.

• • •

Collins left her alone for a month after that. Futura won the pool again; it had never been so long between attacks before. As the time lengthened, Page kept up her state of alertness until it became instinct. Futura told her that although they knew Collins was still in town, and the warrant for his arrest was still outstanding, the department was putting her case on the back burner. The lieutenant still came around work every once in a while, to check if she had seen Collins lately, but he came by less frequently than before.

She began to catch glimpses of Collins, when she was on the street, out shopping, coming back from work. She avoided him when he was far off, but when he was closer, she would circle around behind him and disarm him. If he was trying to intimidate her by showing his face and doing nothing, she could do the same. She kept Futura informed

of each incident. He told her that the office had started another pool.

She spotted Collins again after a long day at work. He was looking away as she came out, apparently bored with waiting for her. She went inside again, came out the back entrance, and lifted his gun from behind, tossing it, as usual, into a storm grate.

He swung around with a roar, barbed metal shaft in his hand. Her cybernetic arm blocked it almost without her conscious thought, then twisted around and folded it as if it were a cardboard tube. He pulled out a sling; she tripped him with her artificial leg and the missile flew above her head. She bent down to pick out a bulge at his waist; he pressed the nozzle of a mini-spear shaft gun to her left breast. "This is the end, Page," he said, and fired.

The ricochet off her implant threw her backwards. She landed on her buttocks. She sat there, stunned, seeing that the projectile had bounced back to Collins, catching him under the chin. The other end of the shaft protruded from the top of his head.

Futura was the first policeman to respond to her call. He ran up, gun drawn, took a look at Collins, and put the weapon back in his holster. "Looks like I've won the final pool," he said, indicating the body with a nod.

"He *did* shoot me," she said.

He waved her statement away. "Nah, it only counts if he injures you."

She peeked inside her blouse to be sure that nothing was damaged, then turned back to the corpse. "He must have forgotten that he had shot me there before," said Page. "It *was* some time ago, relatively speaking."

"Or else he didn't know that all your implants were armored and enhanced." She turned to him aghast; he added, "Oh. Didn't I tell you that? Authorized by the city precinct. The papers are in your medical files, somewhere."

She shook her head, but smiled.

"Ah, listen, in this business, we need all the living pacifists we can get." Two beat cops ran up; Futura nodded at the corpse. "Why don't you two take charge here; I'll be at the station later to write up a report." He turned to Page. "How about dinner in the meantime? I've got to blow my winnings somehow."

∞

Fiction

PAP

by
Jack Massa

Martin opened the refrigerator door and the food started yelling at him.

"Over here. Milk's the one!"

"No, I'm the real thing."

"We're incredible and edible."

"A breakfast without me is like a—"

"Don't forget the cheese!"

Martin slammed the door and leaned with his back against it, panting in throes of anxiety. He'd been afraid of something like this. Once reality started conforming to his inner thoughts, he had figured it would only be a matter of time before all the TV commercials his subconscious had absorbed all these years began to materialize.

Other people had experienced similar problems. The news had been full of surreal and outrageous reports ever since the start of the PAP.

Martin took deep breaths to steady his nerves. He didn't have time for an anxiety attack this morning. He had to fly to Buenos Aires. He had an important sales presentation to make.

Bracing himself, Martin yanked open the refrigerator, grabbed the car-

ton of milk, then shut the door on the clamoring voices. He poured the milk into a bowl of cereal (luckily *not* the sort that went snap, crackle, and pop) and sat down for some fast, determined munching.

Of course, if reality was shaping itself according to the dictates of his conscious and subconscious mind, he might be able to just imagine himself arriving at the airport on time. Better still, he could envision the presentation accomplished, the account won. People all over the world were supposedly using the PAP to make their wishes come true.

Martin's head quivered with apprehension. The idea of creating his own reality, the awesome power and responsibility it implied, made him nervous. He was not at all comfortable living in the PAP.

PAP, of course, was just a buzzword, an acronym everyone misused. It stood for Participatory Anthropic Principle, a hypothesis in physics which held that the Universe is brought into being by the observer. Picked up and promulgated by the media in the past

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

several weeks, PAP had come to mean not merely this principle, but the state of affairs it was invoked to explain—an increasingly widespread, increasingly weird state of affairs.

Not that it really explained anything. Why were people's half-realized thoughts and daydreams leaping full-blown into the physical world? Why had Consensus Reality suddenly sprung so many leaks?

No one really knew.

Martin sighed and set down his spoon. He didn't have time to worry about it this morning. He grabbed the keys to his Volvo and headed for the garage.

• • •

Racing along the interstate, within a mile of the airport exit, Martin heard a thumping under the hood. The car lurched, its power dwindling, and the hum of the engine was replaced by what sounded like distant, yammering voices.

Muttering expletives, Martin pulled onto the shoulder. With traffic whiz-

zing by, he climbed out and went to open the hood.

Six tiny men stood waist-high in his engine casing, where the spark plugs should have been. They wore black caps and white tee shirts that showed off trim, well-muscled physiques. Instead of dancing, as Martin would have expected, they were waving their arms and shouting in distress.

"Hey! There he is! Let us out of here!"

"Wait," Martin said. "This isn't right."

"Please! Let us out."

"But in the commercial, you don't want to leave," Martin protested. "You're not even tired."

"They made us say that." "Of course we're tired." "We're hot and grimy and tired!" "How'd you like to be stuck dancing in an engine for 12,000 miles?" "C'mon, buddy. Have a heart!"

Martin glanced at his watch, then gazed with regret down the road. He'd miss his plane for sure. But the pitiful cries of the spark-plug men were more than his heart could bear.

Grumbling at his bad luck, Martin slouched around to the back of the Volvo and lifted the trunk lid. He rummaged until he found the brand-new, unopened tool kit. Puncturing the clear plastic wrapping, he took out an adjustable socket wrench and carried it to the front of the car.

"Yay!" the little men called. "Way ta go, Martin!"

Carefully, Martin lowered the wrench over their heads, tightened it around their waists, gently unscrewed them. One by one, the tiny men came loose and scrambled to the ground. Squealing their thanks, they darted away into the tall grass at the roadside..

Martin asked the last of the little guys to wait for just a moment. "This is all very strange," Martin said. "Do you think it's symbolic or something? I mean, my setting you free."

"Of course it's symbolic, Martin man. Be cool now. Everything's gonna be fine."

As the little man dashed away, Martin noticed it was starting to rain.

• • •

His plane was long gone when he arrived at the airport, in a taxi he had

managed to flag down on the highway. Martin booked himself on the next available flight (rerouting through Lima), checked his luggage, and phoned a tow truck to pick up his car. Then he made the call he'd been dreading, to notify his office of the delay and arrange for the presentation to be postponed. Mr. Abbott, Vice President of Sales, came on the line himself to demand an explanation.

Car trouble, Martin apologized. Unavoidable. Mr. Abbott was somewhat less than thrilled.

Chagrined, his suit damp and wrinkled from the rain, Martin sat down in the waiting area and slipped a dollar into an armrest-TV. Scanning the channels, he stopped at the beginning of a newscast.

"PAP investigations continue on Capitol Hill. Tensions mount in the Caribbean. These and other stories from consensus reality coming up in this half-hour."

The newswoman went on to give the usual, newly-instituted disclaimer about all the stories being true in the various reporters' worlds, and presumably in the viewer's world as well, though of course that last part could no longer be taken for granted.

Martin leaned back and listened to the report on the Senate PAP-Phenomena Hearings. Yesterday's witnesses had included a Princeton astrophysicist, who theorized that the PAP was caused by the solar system having drifted into a different kind of space-time. He was followed by a self-styled New Age expert, who proclaimed the PAP "simply a deepening of the metaphysical condition we've lived with all along."

The hearings were losing steam, Martin decided. Not like the exciting early weeks, when public uproar over the PAP had been at its height. Those sessions had seen some real drama, as leading scientists hotly disputed the nature of the PAP. Were the multitudes of realities permanently splitting off, or were they just temporary aberrations that converged again into the mainstream of events? Meantime, a prominent televangelist had held daily rallies outside the Capitol, denouncing the PAP as a revelation of the Anti-Christ. This incitement to hysteria had been nearly equaled by a senior senator

from South Carolina who, calling the idea of creating one's own reality "a threat to everything this nation stands for," had demanded an immediate probe of suspected Soviet or Third World involvement.

But now, it seemed, things were calming down, people adjusting to the PAP. The news report ended with a trailer about a civil libertarian group calling for an end to the Senate hearings. Their spokesman suggested, rather cynically Martin thought, that the real reason for the hearings was the government's concern that the PAP would soon make governments themselves obsolete.

The next report covered the usual threats and counterthreats in the ongoing U.S. naval blockade of Columbia. The situation had been a stalemate, with occasional flare-ups of combat, for almost a year now. Martin listened a few seconds, then reached for the scanner.

• • •

Nine hours later, Martin sat in a window seat on Flight 1090, bound for Lima. With notecards and slides stacked on his tray, he tried to concentrate on preparing for his presentation. Unfortunately, the old lady next to him wouldn't allow it.

Her name was Señora Una Unez, a stout, wrinkled old woman with a pointy beak and frizzy white hair. Since take-off she had prattled away in fractured English on an astounding range of topics. She claimed to be a member of the Ecuadorian ruling class and to have been, in her life, everything from a diplomat at the U.N. to a world-class volleyball player. Martin suspected she was slightly insane.

At the moment, he was being treated to a discussion of her feelings about the PAP. "I like thee PAP. To make your own realitee, I find--How do you say it?—exhillerating. Eet is weesh fulfillment that humans have always dreamed, you agree?"

"Sure," Martin said. "It would be, if you really could make things just the way you wanted them. But the PAP's not like that. It's uncontrollable."

The old lady leaned forward, black eyes flickering in the cabin lights. "Deese control will come, my young friend. We seemply must learn to control

our mental attitudes, keep them positive. You see?"

Martin sighed. "I don't know, Señora. I think I liked it better when things were normal, when they weren't threatening to change all the time."

"So?" she asked. "When was that?"

Just then the pilot's voice crackled over the intercom. "Ladies and Gentlemen, we've just been notified of a military engagement in progress between the United States Navy and Colombian gunboats. We'll be flying over that area shortly. We will remain well within the commercial air corridor, so please rest assured there'll be absolutely no danger."

Despite this promise, a nervous murmuring sprouted among the passengers.

"Deese is not wise," Una Unez said darkly. "Too eezy we go boom!"

Martin shared her assessment. Since the middle of the 1980s, half a dozen passenger planes had been mistakenly shot down in various global hot spots. He felt even less comfortable when the flight attendants came scurrying up the aisles to make sure the passengers were belted in and their trays were in the up-right position.

Tension knotting his stomach, Martin stared out the window into blackness. Then, some distance ahead, flashes of orange appeared, punctuated by the boom of heavy guns. Amid the irregular flashes, Martin picked out the tiny gray forms of ships on the water.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the pilot said, "if you'll look out of the right side of the aircraft, you'll be able to see flares of gunfire. We're currently cruising at an altitude of—Oh-oh."

The plane heaved abruptly, and then the front of the fuselage disappeared with a roar and a burst of flame. Amid shrieking wind and screams of terror, Martin's half of the cabin spun wildly through the night.

• • •

Clutching his flotation cushion, Martin drifted upon a murky, undulating sea. How long it had been since he woke to find himself like this? He couldn't tell. Overhead the sky was starless.

The fact that he was alive at all could only be attributed to the PAP. As the smashed airliner tumbled from the

sky, his subconscious must have reached out and created this reality, in which he was an unlikely survivor.

But what good had it done? It seemed he was doomed to drift on the sea indefinitely—until he either died of thirst or slipped under the waves and drowned.

No, Martin decided. If I can create my own reality, I can *choose* my own reality. Positive mental attitude, that's what's required here. With stout-hearted determination, Martin set his thoughts on what he needed.

Someplace to land, first of all. An island would be nice. Before long the horizon lightened to gray. Along that edge of the world, Martin sighted a low mound outlined against the dawn. Gradually, as the night retreated, the mound drifted nearer.

"All right," Martin said to himself. "Very good." The island was small, a flat, stretch of sand covered with palms and ferns. It looked dimly but undeniably familiar. Where had he seen it before?

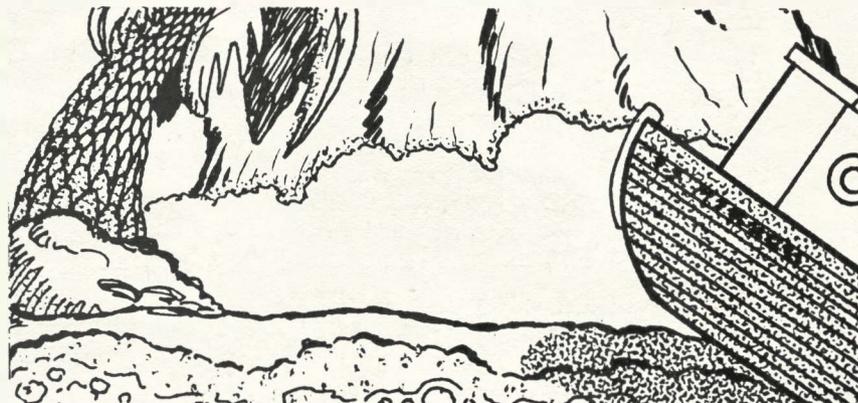
His cushion bore him toward a small lagoon. Martin spotted a circle of grass huts in a clearing just past the shore. Someone there noticed him, and ran among the huts shouting. As Martin drifted closer, he saw that person and others running out to the beach to greet him.

Suddenly, he knew.

All of them were there. Gilligan. The skipper too. The millionaire, and his wife. . . .

As a boy, Martin had watched the show in reruns for years. He had always thought it a rather idyllic life.

The professor and Mary-Ann waded into the shallow water to help him. Martin was thrilled. He had always considered the genial Mary-Ann far more attractive than the vain and selfish Ginger.



Everyone was talking to him at once. Hello!" "Who are you?" "Are you here to rescue us?"

"No, I'm sorry," Martin said. "Just another castaway like yourselves."

The gang seemed disappointed, though not terribly surprised.

This happened to them pretty often, as Martin recalled.

"We'll just have to make the most of things," he said, rather lamely. "My name is Martin."

The professor took charge of introducing everyone. Of course that wasn't necessary, but Martin didn't let on.

Through the trees she could see the neat and cheery huts, the rough-hewn picnic table, and the stone-wheeled bicycle-powered generator the professor had built. It must be the show's second season, he realized. Life on the island would be comfortable.

It wasn't a bad reality to have landed in, all things considered. A good place to rest and collect his thoughts.

Gilligan and the Howells were heading back toward the clearing. Martin smiled at Mary-Ann and asked if she would show him around the island.

The farm girl beamed at being selected, for once, instead of the glamorous Ginger. She took Martin's arm and led him off along the beach.

"How did you get here, Martin?" she asked. "Positive mental attitude," he replied. Martin explained to her about the PAP, and how he was starting to feel it within his conscious control. With a bit more practice, he felt sure he'd be able to create any reality he wished.

"Oh, Martin. Does that mean you'll be able to get us rescued?"

"Sure," Martin said. "Even that will be possible."

Supplanter

by

Kurt Giambastiani

Autumn had finally come to the Berkeley Highlands, bringing a cooling touch to the end of a hot and particularly busy summer. Jacob was glad to see the colors begin to change. Reaching back into his car, he grabbed the clipboard and his black PTR satchel. He placed the satchel on the hood of the car, opened it and produced the small vial of serum that would erase the child's personality, replacing it with a new one. He checked the silver encryptions against the order on the clipboard, making sure that all factors matched. Reassured, Jacob tossed the clipboard back onto the front seat and locked the car.

Walking up the quiet street, he admired the houses of the new well-to-do. The scars of the Drug Wars had faded. The neighborhood had been reclaimed after six years of guerrilla warfare and South American occupation. Life had returned to a more normal regime. Warm light cast soft shadows through the twilight, scenes of home and hearth

behind plasteel panes. *The only thing missing is the squeals of playing children*, he thought. He looked once more at the vial before placing it roughly into the satchel. *And that may never change.*

Jacob strolled up the brick walkway, taking enjoyment in the tangy aroma of its precisely manicured junipers. At the door he ignored the doorbell and knocked instead. Reaching inside his coat, he pulled out his wallet, smiled up at the camera and showed it his ID and D.H.G. Practitioner's cards. He heard the muffled 'clack' of locks opening and took a step back, wallet still in hand.

"Good evening, Ms. Erland," he said to the woman behind the screen. She was a pretty woman with dark, shoulder-length hair; not beautiful, but certainly pretty. "I'm Doctor Jacob McDougal from the Federal Department of Health and Genetics," he continued, showing her the cards. "May I come in?"

"Oh! Certainly, please do." He pulled the screen door open and stepped

inside. The aroma of dinner still lingered in the air, something Italian, he guessed. The clatter of dishes being washed drifted down the hall. She asked for his coat and he glanced around while she put it away. The decor was simple in the Neo-Nippon style that was quite popular: white walls with dark wooden posts and mouldings, it provided an aesthetic atmosphere for the sparseness of furnishings that was common in these hard-hit regions. *Still*, Jacob thought. *You'd think two brains like these two could do better than this.*

"Harold," she called down the hall. "The doctor's here. Can I get you something to drink," she asked, turning again to Jacob.

"No, thank you. I'm fine." A man appeared in the hallway, drying his hands with a dishtowel. Dark, like his wife and good looking, Jacob was surprised to see he was wearing glasses. Most people opted for the surgical re-curving of their myopic vision.

"Harold Erland," the man said, introducing himself with extended

hand. "Thanks for coming on such short notice."

"No problem, Mr. Erland. I'm Jacob McDougal. How long have you two been in Berkeley?" Jacob knew their history--new to the Bay Area, Estrellita, having become sick of designing autos in the Midwest, now taught Fluid Dynamics at the university while her husband, an architect by trade, worked on community rebuilding out of his office here at the house--but he had found that his usually uncomfortable clients quickly relaxed when they began talking about themselves. Estrellita was relating the tale of their trip to the coast when suddenly she stopped.

"Doctor McDougal," she said in a serious tone, "I'm still apprehensive about this procedure. Could we discuss things a bit, first?" Her husband glared at her sharply.

"Certainly," Jacob said. She showed him into the living area and Jacob chose the chair, leaving the small sofa for the couple to share. "What concerns you?"

Harold entered last and picked up where his wife left off. "She's not sure that all this is really necessary," he said with disparaging sarcasm. "She thinks the child is fine the way she is."

The child, Jacob thought. Almost every father called their baby "the child," afraid to get too attached to the native personality before the procedure wiped it clean.

"That's correct," his wife said, standing up for herself. "Why does the government suddenly feel it so necessary to disturb a normal, healthy child like this?" Jacob sighed to himself. He had heard this all before. The mothers always balked at the federal PTR requirements, usually at the last minute.

"This questioning is normal," he began. "Naturally, you want to protect your child from any unneeded discomfort or shock. But Ms. Erland, are you prepared for the risks that go along with raising a non-PTR'ed child?"

Jacob hated having to do this, having to persuade this intelligent and obviously caring woman to authorize a procedure she didn't want. Inwardly cursing the D.H.G. and their regulations, he continued the prescribed lecture.

"Are you willing to chance the presence of the erratic behaviors and emotionalism that often lead to addictivism,

or worse? Eventwo wonderful people like you and your husband can produce the most sociopathic result. Do you remember David Malliard, the serial killer they caught a few years ago?"

"Yes, of course, Doctor," she replied, dismissing the governmental reasoning with a wave of her hand. "But with proper rearing in a good home, I just don't see how a child could turn out so badly."

"This might answer some of those questions," he said. Leaning over, Jacob opened his satchel and pulled out a leaflet. Its glossy cover showed happy, smiling couples, each with their happy, smiling child. Cheerful lettering across the middle read: PTR, The Sensible Choice. He handed it to Estrellita.

"This details the findings of Langston and Goodman, whose rearing studies with twins back in the 90s found that nurturing only influences the personality. It's genetics that determines it." Her husband had assumed an I-told-you-so look, just like so many other fathers had when Jacob was trying to persuade their wives. Eventually they had all acquiesced. Just like she will, Jacob thought.

"With the Personality Termination and Replacement," he went on, "you know where your starting point lies. For instance, you two have chosen a particularly good set of factors: strong motivational forces, a great deal of intuitional reasoning and a steady, mainstream moralism.

"Without PTR, you don't know what you're getting. That's the purpose behind the registration and monitoring of non-PTR'ed children."

"That's right!" Harold blurted. He stood up and began pacing in front of the wood stove. "For Chrissakes, honey! Do you want the feds tracking us for the next twenty or thirty years? Besides, Bob and Lдания PTR'ed Denise and you've seen her. She's a great kid! Two years old and as normal as the next child."

Estrellita remained unconvinced. "But won't she turn out just like any child who has the same coding?" she asked Jacob, squirming a bit in her seat.

"Every child is raised differently; this molds the implanted code uniquely, creating an individual, not a clone." Estrellita relaxed visibly, her last fear

removed, and leaned back into the cushions. Harold came around behind the couch and quietly patted her on the shoulder. Jacob felt a sadness creep over him as the lapse in the conversation lengthened.

"Well," he said, wanting to move things along, "I'll need to see the birth record if I'm to continue." Harold offered to retrieve the disk, and left the room as Jacob pulled the comcon from within his satchel and brought it up onto his lap.

"Is it possible," the woman asked hesitantly. "I mean, can you find out what implants I was given?" Jacob looked up, startled by the question and found that she had moved to the edge of the sofa and was peering over at the console.

A memory welled up suddenly from the far reaches of his youth. For a moment, Estrellita's face was replaced by that of his mother. The night he remembered was wintry, stormy, with the sound of wind and rain overshadowed by the squall of his new brother's temper. Jacob recalled his mother putting the same question to the drenched young medico who was preparing to PTR the baby.

Jacob blinked once, and the memory faded. *The cycle is repeating*, he thought, wondering at the depth and detailing of the implants, wondering if the success of the PTR program was due to the logic upon which it was based, or because of some hidden, self-perpetuating design.

He blinked again, and saw Ms. Erland's puzzlement. He laughed kindly to hide his discomfiture.

"No, I'm sorry," he said in answer to her question. "We don't keep records of implantation specifics. Privacy, you know. I'm afraid I'm not even allowed to tell you if you had an implant." She smiled, somewhat embarrassed, and moved back on the sofa as her husband returned, carrying a small laminated las-disk. Jacob placed the disk into the console's port and the information began streaming down the small greenish screen.

"Hmm, 'Donata.' Pretty name," he said, just as he always did. He had once told a family that 'Cadwallader' was a fine, strong name for a boy. "We seem to be cutting it pretty fine, though." They looked at him, puzzled. "The date, I



mean. She's almost three months old. After three months the risks of implant rejection rise dramatically." Estrellita got another fierce look from her husband and the tension in the room jumped perceptibly. Jacob realized that he had said precisely the wrong thing.

"But I can assure you that there's nothing to worry about in your daughter's case," he said, trying to mollify the situation.

A paper appeared from the top of the console. Jacob reached up and tore it off, handing it and a pen from his pocket to the Erlands. "Just sign at the bottom and we'll get this done," he said, a touch of anxiety creeping into his voice. They took the paper and each signed it in turn. He took the form back, gave them their copy and closed up the console.

"Now, where's Donata?"

Estrellita opened the door to the nursery and Jacob walked in, satchel in hand and console under one arm. The room had that "baby smell" that all nurseries have -- a mixture of baby powder, clean sheets, sour milk and diapers. The wallpaper had rabbits, deer and other cute woodland animals gamboling around the letters of the alphabet. From the crib Jacob could hear an infant education cassette, soothing music and softly-recited facts. He walked over to the crib. Donata Erland lay on her stomach, sleeping with one thumb planted firmly in her mouth. He looked up toward the door.

"Thanks," he whispered. "I'll call you if I need anything." The mother

smiled sheepishly and closed the door. Jacob moved to a bureau near the bed, set up the console, and began taking out the few things he would need. He double-checked the label on the vial containing the PTR serum. Once introduced into the skull's cephalic fluid, the new code would attack those parts of the resident DNA pertaining to personality and intellect, replacing them with the new factors. Affected cells would pass the code on like a virus and, within a year, only the new version would remain.

Donata stirred at the movement outside her crib, stretched and rubbed her eyes on the sheet below her. Pushing herself up with her arms, she looked around for the source of the noise. She saw the console with its lighted display, and then Jacob. She became fearful and started to fret.

"Hush, sweetheart," he said with his winningest smile. "It's going to be okay." But Donata didn't hush. Looking at him, she began pushing herself backward with her arms and proceeded to wail in earnest. *Wonderful, they'll think I'm traumatizing her.*

"Donata," he cajoled, taking out the sedative. "I don't want your mother in here, so hush, dear. It'll all be over in a minute. There's nothing you can do."

To his surprise, the child stopped her furor. He looked up from his work to find Donata wedged in the corner of her crib, lower lip stuck out and trembling, brows furrowed, eyes riveted on him and tears streaming down her cheeks. Jacob returned to filling the syringe. Done with that, he checked his watch, put down the vial and moved over to the crib.

Carefully, he moved her out into the middle of the crib and she rolled onto her back. Jacob reached for her arm to roll her back onto her stomach, but she pulled her arm away from him. Again he noticed her face, tear-filled eyes locked on his.

"I'm sorry pumpkin, but your parents ordered me to do this," he said softly. "I could lose my license if I don't. Besides, we don't know what you might turn out to be." Donata closed her eyes then, and turned her head away from him. Slowly, the infant released her arm to the physician.

Jacob held the arm with trembling fingers, quickly swabbed it and in-

jected the sedative. Donata turned back to him without a whimper and focussed on his face until the drug took effect, putting her back to sleep. Jacob reached out and touched the fine, soft hair that curled about the child's face.

"We don't know what you might be," he whispered.

Jacob stood once more on the porch of the Erland's house. Donata, sleeping a heavily-sedated slumber, lay cradled in her mother's arms, bandages on her temples. Her father reached out silently and touched the child's hand, finally allowing himself to open up to her. Estrellita smiled a sad but unburdened smile.

"She'll sleep about three hours and wake up cranky," Jacob informed them. "Just give her a spoonful of the syrup I left every four to five hours for the next two days."

"Okay," they said. "Thanks."

Jacob waved and walked down the pathway, the smell of juniper strong after the enclosed air of the nursery, reached the street and turned towards his car. Stopping near the curb, he looked back at the Erland's house, so quiet, so proper, so safe. How could she not turn out all right? he asked himself. His hand fumbled in his coat pocket for the unused vial of serum.

Jacob looked at the vial in the streetlight, and read the silver code. Quickly, he uncapped the vial, emptied the serum out into the gutter and tossed the container down a sewer grate. Taking a deep breath of the clear, offshore air, Jacob looked up at the rising moon and continued on towards his car. ∞



Fiction

Virtual Uncertainty

by

J. S. Russell

McSween was sitting on a folding chair by the bed staring at the corpse when I walked in. The coroner had been through and covered her with a blanket, but McSween pulled it back below her knees. She was naked, the pale dead skin almost glowing against the black satin sheet.

She was a little thing, made even smaller by death's quietude. Her hands were folded over her abdomen just above the patch of red, heart-shaped pubic hair. A series of small scars marked the skin on her thighs and around the brown nipples of her slight, boyish chest. Her face was as wide as it was long with thin, cracked lips and a crooked nose. Her forehead and cheeks were pockmarked with acne scars and her upper lip showed the bleached fuzz of facial hair.

Linkposts jutted from beneath her squarish ears and I knew there'd be a throughjack at the base of her neck. A Link-rig dangled from the nighttable beside the bed, still connected to a portable Virtual Access Device that sat on the floor. McSween didn't look at me,

just stared blankly at her face. I cleared my throat.

"I see you," he said, his voice as dead as the girl.

"And I spy with my little eye . . . a stiff!"

"A kinky stiff," he said and reaching over ran a finger across the scarred skin around her breasts. "Cigarette burns."

McSween let his hand linger on her breast a little too long, but I just went over and examined the VAD. It was a state-of-the-art model that I couldn't afford on ten cop's salaries. It was still powered up and jacked into the Linkline, but the screen was dead and the processor wouldn't even run through basic diagnostics. I powered it down then up again, but it was garbage. It would have to be autopsied by Comp-SID, but I was sure they'd find nothing but seared chips and overloads. I glanced back at the body--McSween was rubbing his thumb over the girl's burned thigh -- saw no sign of physical damage. It had to be a flameout.

I sat on the edge of the bed beside the girl's head. I checked the Linkposts and lifted her head to examine the jack, found

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

the connections were all fried, reeking faintly of carbon. I squeezed an eyelid open and saw that the iris had burst violently into the blackened sclera. McSween was tracing the outline of the heart between her legs with his finger.

"Ahhh, Mac. . . ."

"Hurrn?" he said distractedly.

"Ixnay on the iffstay."

"Oh," he said sort of wistfully, "Right. Thanks."

I took a walk around the room, examining the pictures on the walls, mostly reproductions of classic Fishl paintings. "I'd say our Miss Cupid took a little Virtual stroll where she didn't belong," I said.

"Fell asleep in the deadly poppy fields," McSween mused and sniffed tentatively at his finger.

"How's that?"

McSween just shook his head. He stood up and pulled the sheet back over the body. The corpse must have retained a slight charge because it clung tightly to the contours of her form. McSween gently fluffed it and smoothed it out, but the residual static electricity bunched the sheet up again. He gave up and

pulled a glassine evidence envelope out of his coat pocket and handed it to me. He sat back down and stared some more at the covered form.

The envelope contained a corporate picture ID in the name of Aimee Dissault. It identified the dead girl as virtual Design Coordinator for Grundrisse-Rand. Her virtual clearance was alpha/omega: practically unrestricted. She could legally travel almost anywhere on the Link, and was certainly skilled enough to break security anyplace else she might want to go. It was inconceivable that someone with her status could accidentally trip a burn.

I stared at the tiny holo-image imbedded in the corner of the card. She took a lousy picture. I looked back over at the dead shape on the bed.

"I know this name," I said.

"Uh-huh."

I thought for a minute. "Harlan Dissault," I said.

"Uh-huh."

"C.E.O., Grundrisse-Rand U.S."

"Uh-huh."

"Shit."

"Uh-huh."

McSween stood up. He took a last longing glance at the body then walked to the door.

"Where are you going?" I asked. He paused to inspect the ceiling. "Retirement," he said and then was gone.

The department's VAD was at least ten times more powerful than my personal unit, but I preferred Linking through my own gear. I had fine-tuned the jump mechanism to maximize concordance with my synaptic structure. It slowed me down a little in terms of accessing and traversing new Virtual sectors, but gave me an edge in jump-outs that could be the difference between a safe Link-off and a fatal flameout on backburn of the type that apparently killed Aimee Dissault. I've been singled a couple-three times, but never damaged worse than a little short-term memory loss.

McSween got clearance for me to visit the dead girl's datastack in the Grundrisse-Rand archiplex. I could have hacked through the Grundrisse security with a little effort -- personnel datastacks would be designed for relatively easy access -- but having the precise coordinates saved me a bit of work.

The Grundrisse AI had a very traditional picting function. Most of the big Multicorps were as conservative in their Virtual representations as they'd ever been in their physical trappings. I encountered the archiplex pictured as an enormous bank vault with a massive array of safety deposit boxes containing individual datastacks. I jumped-in within a central chamber, at the sealed door to a second high-security vault. I was met there by a fabricant curator, looking much like I'd always imagined Bob Cratchit, prim and stiff in a plain dark suit. He sniffed incessantly and was accompanied by an autonomous security program picting as two 150-pound bull mastiffs. The dogs had conspicuously, absurdly large genitals, which led me to believe that someone in corporate programming had a sense of humor.

I followed Cratchit into the small vault where he pulled out a huge ring of keys, mumbling slightly to himself as he sorted through them. One dog stood immediately behind me, drooling slightly on my shoe. I used the wait to access a program I'd frozen in personal-RAM before the jump. The curator finally found the right key and inserted it into the door of a large box, stepping aside as soon as it was open.

After all these years even I don't really understand Virtual, nor, I think, does anyone else. While the basic fabric of the cyberspace is maintained by thousands of Linked AIs and VADs, it is the human interactions that enable the picts to take on specific appearances.

The general contours of the Grundrisse archiplex were generated according to the algorithms of their AI, but no one else accessing it would see it quite the same way as I did. Where I found safety deposit boxes, someone else might see file drawers; where I saw a couple of ugly watchdogs, another visitor might encounter Burke and Hare.

Or Hope and Crosby.

The stored data was always the same, of course -- otherwise the system would be useless -- but the Virtual world was quite elastic to personality, despite the best efforts to standardize it. The variance in picts was one of the joys of travelling in Virtual and the reason psycho-McLuhanism had become so much the rage among analysts.

Inside the box I found a sheaf of papers and photographs which I only

needed to touch to fully access, but which I nonetheless found myself leafing through as if they were real: old habits are hard to break. The G-R execs must have assumed that I'd be some dumb L.A.V. cop who couldn't read subtleties in Virtual. Page after page of data had huge chunks blacked out or written over. Photographs had been re-touched and airbrushed and in some cases literally (well, Virtually-literally) cut-up.

I reached back toward the open box and heard the dogs growl in unison. They were both crouched and ready to spring. I lowered my hand and simultaneously unfroze the counter-security program I had waiting in RAM. With a look of considerable surprise, Bob Cratchit repticed into a female mastiff in heat. The males responded instantly to her odor and with growls of delight padded toward her. Cratchit briefly spun his new paws on the slick bank floor in panic, then tore-out of the vault and down the data corridor, the aroused males in close pursuit. It took me only a few seconds to circumvent the hidden security codes on the girl's files and I accessed immediately. I jumped-out as I heard two distant howls: one of primal pleasure, the other of distinct discomfort.

I slept for a couple of hours, as usual, after Linkoff. I didn't have to -- it had been a pretty short jump -- but even relatively brief stays in Virtual can leave you feeling like you've driven through a rainy night in a car with busted wipers. Supposedly, it has something to do with a disruption of basic schema hierarchies, but being a typical techie I've never had the patience for that cognitive-psych stuff. They say there's no permanent damage, but then they used to say fibre would help prevent cancer. All I know is that once, jumping-out after 33 continuous real-hours tracking in Virtual, I Linked-off convinced that I was Judy Garland in *A Star is Born*. I've been told that I delivered the "This is Mrs. Norman Maine" line rather convincingly, too.

To be safe I had dumped the accessed data on Dissault into hard-memory before I Linked-off, and although the information was still pretty clear in my mind I Linked into the file to maximize efficiency. Travelling in Virtual changes the way you think: the

linear processing capabilities nurtured by old text and screen-based interactions aren't of much use, you have to think omnidirectionally. It's like the difference between standing under a continuous stream of water that's pouring out of a spigot and being dropped into the middle of a vast swimming pool. The data is all around you, open to processing and analysis in any of an infinite number of ways. I brought my old friend Jim Beam out of the cupboard and, taking a little of his sage advice, began dog-paddling through the volume of data on the dead girl.

As an apostle of history I am always tempted to sort chronologically, believing the past is almost invariably the most reliable predictor of the present, but as a cop I can't help but check one thing first: citizen or player.

My access of the bowdlerized data revealed no criminal record. It didn't figure that a corporate Virtual exec would be dirty in any traceable way. I filtered the censored data and found Dissault was cleaner than a winter day. As I brushed the field I thought I felt a glitch in the picting, but I couldn't pin it down and went on.

I ran a search down the corporate trail and found that Aimee had been working for her daddy's company since she was 13. She was a computer brat, working her way up through the AI/Virtual division very quickly. She displayed an obvious affinity for cyberspace, logging an astonishing amount of Link-time which continued to multiply as she got older.

I switched to personal data and found she had completed Virtual University by the age of 12 and finished her V. Ph. D. only 18 months after that. Her standard test scores were phenomenal, quite nearly perfect. She had published a series of well-regarded articles and treatises as a teenager and had turned-down multiple offers for tenured positions at a number of top physical universities.

There was a visual record of her as well, and I lapsed the images to watch her develop from newborn to woman. Although she was naked in the imaging, Dissault must have been aware that her file could be readily accessed, because starting from the age of 12 secondary sex characteristics were blocked out with black bands, like the eyes in old porno-

graphic photos. In the final image, pictured at age 24 apparently not too long before her death, Dissault looked not much better than she did as a corpse. There was something harsh and cold about her, a visible discomfort with herself or perhaps with her body, though she wasn't strictly unattractive. I also sensed another slight flaw in the picting.

I ran through data on personal relationships, but found very little. Her mother had died of AIDS in HIVe exile when Aimee was three. Unmarried, no children, no indication of long or even short-term romantic relationships. Not even a dog.

I accessed psychographic records and again found nearly textbook scores on MMPI, V-Binet and Rokeach scales.

I checked her physical-medical records, saw a perfectly normal medical history: inoculations, standard childhood maladies, a broken finger at age 6.

And another flaw in the Virtual pict. The file was for shit.

I was about to Link-off when I got nudged by a couple of messages waiting in the mail-queue. I brushed them both, saw they were the autopsy results for the girl and her VAD and merged them into a single file for access.

Just as I figured, both human and machine suffered catastrophic synaptic

burns. I activated the holo-record of the physical autopsy and watched over the M.E.'s shoulder as she lasered open the girl's head. She cut through the skull and neatly bisected the cerebral cortex, kibitzing with her assistant all the while about her dinner plans.

As the retractor brushed against the thalamus I heard her sudden intake of breath. The assistant was leaning over, too, saying "wow" over and over. I stepped around the slab for a better look inside the girl's head and froze the image: Her entire upper limbic system had been liquified, the thalamus and hyperthalamus reduced to a chunky, grey paste that looked like rancid pea soup. A full chemical analysis would take three working days with an expedite stamp on the file.

I had never heard of anything quite like it, and a fast scan through the rest of the report indicated it was new to the M.E. as well. I shelled out of the file and Linked into the pathology archive. I sent a Klone out to search for any similar pathology results and shelled back into the autopsy. The M.E. reported that the damage was too severe for any attempt at synaptic reconstruction. She offered a rough guess as to the extremity of the flameout necessary to account for the damage and suggested



that a backburn of that intensity could undoubtedly be traced in the Link record.

Everybody's a fucking detective.

The VAN autopsy confirmed the physical: complete burn of all chips and integrated circuitry. It also revealed the presence of a number of designer chips. They were burned as well, beyond any possible diagnoses, and the housings were all unmarked. Knowing Dissault's background I had to assume that they were her own handiwork. They could have been just about anything from sex enhancers to Virtual-bodyguards, but I thought I had an idea.

I stored the file and jumped-into the central archiplex for Criminal Records. With a master access code I was able to override basic picting and drop directly into Aimee Dissault's datastack. The record matched her file in the Grundrisse archiplex until I implemented a pixel-by-pixel search and found the patched hole I knew had to exist.

It was a clean job, much more neatly sealed than the datastack at Grundrisse, but then the police file was more readily available to general scrutiny. I pried open the patch and dropped a Canary down the hole to test for traps and alarms. It came back alive so I shot a Mole through the line, but it had been cauterized just beyond the datastack.

I jumped-out and found my Klone waiting for me. There was no record of anyone ever suffering a similar limbic meltdown on a backburn or any Link-related death. I dedifferentiated the Klone and blew a worm back along its trail to eat its trace then swallow itself.

It was time for some old-fashioned *physical* detective work.

The Grundrisse-Rand Building was erected during the brief but unfortunate era of corporate sponsored deconstructivist architecture. There were no right angles visible on the building's exterior and the steel superstructure was deliberately left exposed and unfinished. The entrance was a revolving door hinged on the horizontal axis, and the lobby was a mass of suspended catwalks and zigzagging electric stairs that didn't lead anywhere. The whole place looked like a dyslexic child's tinkertoy and felt like an expressionist wet dream.

McSween had arranged for the visit only by exerting considerable authority

and warned me to be on my best behavior. After three separate security checks I was whisked aboard an elevator -- the floor and walls of the cage were just near enough to perpendicular to induce nausea -- and escorted to Harlan Dissault's suite on the 77th floor.

Dissault's secretary was a pudgy little man who looked like Lou Costello and smelled like an old lady's sitting room. He sat at a huge oak desk and watched me as I made the long walk across the office. His ultralight Link-rig was still attached, and his slightly glassy look told me he had just jumped-out. He ran one final check on my credentials, and, acting like I'd just insulted his mother, pointed to chair in front of a large Link console.

"I'm not tired," I said.

"The *Chairman*," the little man wheezed, "does not see *anyone* in person. He has allotted you five minutes of Link time."

Great, I thought, a jump to an alien space with an unfamiliar rig. I'd have no security or surveillance programs and no sure way to read the veracity of Dissault's picting except for intuition. Cursing, for the millionth time, the justice system that allows the rich to write all the rules, I hooked-up the rig and made the jump.

I found myself standing in the office where I had just sat down. The secretary, not quite so small or fat here, ushered me through a door which didn't exist in the real room and into Dissault's suite.

Harlan Dissault stood with his back to me, gazing out at L.A. through an immense picture window. The city sparkled in the setting sunlight, the letters of the distant Hollywood sign glowing a fiery red. Of course, the actual sign had been razed years ago, and there was maybe one day every three years when the air was clean enough to discern the outline of buildings more than a dozen blocks away.

"It used to look like this, you know." His voice was whipped cream and gristle. "When I was a kid I used to go skateboarding along the beach at Venice. The water was filthy even then, but the ocean breeze was cool and clean and a day seemed to last forever."

He walked over to the north face and pointed down at the street. "I lost

my cherry to a Chinatown whore in a fleabag on the corner of Ord and Hill. Lost my wallet, too."

"Forget it, Jake," I said, but he didn't seem to get the joke.

"I met my wife on a weekend cruise to Catalina and watched her give birth to my little girl in the infirmary in our mansion up in the Palisades."

He walked around the edge of the room to the south-facing window.

"When she tested positive, I brought my wife to the Terminal Island HIVE and watched them drag her screaming and begging into the camp."

"Mr. Dissault," I tried, but he cut me off.

"Grundrisse-Rand is the single largest polluter in Southern California. Has been for over a decade. There's not a politician in California of any import who we don't own."

He finally turned and faced me. He was chiseled granite with stainless steel eyes.

"I am the sixth richest man in North America."

We stared at each other for a while then he turned back to the western vista.

"Was there something you wished to see me about?" he said.

I sighed. "I'm very sorry about your daughter."

"So am I," he said.

He shot me off-Link before the words could echo off the glass.

I knew what I had to do, but I hesitated before making the jump.

Ever since the very early days of electronic data storage there's been a lot of paranoia about the security of Virtual systems and the potential for invasions of privacy by the redoubtable powers-that-be.

It's a healthy paranoia.

The 30th amendment is supposed to guarantee certain inalienable Virtual rights, but then the VCIA isn't supposed to run intelligence operations in-country. There are too many data exchanges across the Link everyday for full monitoring, but the important stuff -- including police records -- is backed-up in a covert, highly illegal data space.

Only the mucky-mucks are supposed to know about it and the system -- it's called Mrs. Jumbo ('cause elephants never forget) -- was designed to be hack-proof. Once stored in it, data

can't be deleted or altered, only visited. The system has been in place since the early expansion of cyberspace. It absorbs information yet goes unnoticed only because it is woven into the very fabric of Virtual. It sits like a benign cancer on the spinal cord of the Link, inseparable from it without paralysis to the host. I know about it for one very simple reason.

I helped to design it.

Trouble is I built the system too damn well. The AIs that support the space are so scrupulous in their self-containment functions that they've found the backdoors into the system that I'd left for myself and sealed them over. I tried unsealing a door once, but no sooner had I cracked it open than an immense Mighty Mouse came streaking down the data corridor towards me, looking pissed. As he started singing "Here I come to save the day," I slammed the door shut and jumped-out, hoist on my own trivially fetishistic petard.

I could still get in through the front door -- my former employers know about me and so far haven't objected to the odd snoop -- but my presence would be recorded. I figure I have a limited account with the data space, only I don't know my balance. I thought about it briefly, decided Dissault's case was interesting enough to take the chance on another withdrawal.

Mrs. Jumbo picts as a hotel check-in desk with a wall of mailboxes that runs to the visible horizon. At least that's how I see it. I've only met one other person who's jumped-in and he saw it as an immense concentration camp barracks, with the data stacked in endless rows of hard, wooden berths.

Of course, he was a Republican.

An added security function denies direct access to the datastacks. An autonomous AI works the desk, evaluating all would-be users and serving up information at its own discretion. Fortunately, today the AI was picting the fabricant clerk as Franklin Pangborn, who's a bit prissy but much easier to deal with than Edward Everett Horton.

Copying data out of Mrs. Jumbo is a strict no-no, so I brushed the file while Pangborn eyed me suspiciously from a short ways down the desk. The uncensored police record confirmed my suspicions. I found an additional

surprise in the classified intelligence reports, but one that made a lot of sense. It told me that Dissault's flameout was indeed no accident and gave me a good idea of where to find the person who had killed her.

I returned the file to the AI just as Pangborn repicted into Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve, and then jumped-out.

I have a theory about humanity: I call it the Galactic Tribunal Theory. I believe that someday, however far in the future, the human race will be called to task before a jury of our interstellar peers. We'll be required to justify our existence to those species well-established in the cosmic order of things. It'll be like *Stairway to Heaven* or *The Story of Mankind* or one of those other old movies with Ronald Coleman defending humanity and Vincent Price or Raymond Massey as prosecuting attorney. Coleman will make an impassioned plea in his impeccable British accent and have the jury just about sold. Then Vinny will stand up and clear his throat. He'll bow slightly to Coleman and leaning against the jury box, the faintest hint of a smile on his thin lips, say one word that damns the species to extinction: Rubbernecking.

Other races, I have to believe, *don't* stop to gawk at traffic accidents.

I don't like people. I like individuals, but on the whole I find humans to be a mostly unappealing lot. I guess that's a good part of the reason I got involved with AIs and have spent so much time in cyberspace.

But even Virtual, when you come right down to it, is simply another human artifact, ineffably tinged by the flaws of its makers. Like all previous media forms and technologies it shapes and reflects the minds of its users in about equal measure.

Guttenberg's second book was a collection of "erotic" poetry.

The third daguerreotype was a portrait of the artist's mistress that might have made a gynecologist blush.

When Bell connected the telephone and told Watson "I need you," it wasn't just to clean up the lab.

Virtual isn't only used for data storage and exchange. Given its scope and emancipatory potential it was inevitable that certain individuals would

access Virtual venues for less socially sanctioned activities.

It's called the Underground.

I've heard it argued that Virtual couldn't exist without something like an Underground, that in fact it is a natural projection of the AIs themselves, a kind of silicon id. This may well be true, without dark there can be no light, and all attempts to purge Underground picts have only led to stasis: a new sector seems to appear for every one wiped, so maybe the AIs are smarter about this than we are. Heaven knows, at least they're less prudish.

Dissault's record in Mrs. Jumbo revealed a series of arrests but no convictions for Underground activities. She was a suspect in the programming of several Underground facilities as well in the distribution of access chips. I had guessed that such was the nature of the unidentified circuitry in her burned VAD. Whether the charges were dropped for lack of evidence or as a result of Harlan's influence wasn't clear. But the fact that she jumped-below, along with those kinky scars McSween was so fond of on her breasts and thighs convinced me that the answer to her death lay Underground. If so, I had no objection to a little id-indulgence of my own.

I mean, I may not like people but I'm not stupid.

The very essence of an Underground of any kind is resistance to authority and rejection of social norms. Virtual isn't any different. Underground sectors tended to appear and disappear, moving randomly through different levels of Virtual. It was never hard to find some Underground pict, but specific scenes were rarely maintained in any single sector for more than a brief period of time. Fashion, regardless of medium, is ever more fleeting than glory.

Fortunately, the casualness of underground denizens and their general disregard for Link propriety make tracing specific pict movements through Virtual relatively easy. As the M.E. had suggested, I attempted a Link-trace on the backburn that fried Dissault. I figured whoever triggered the burn would have covered the trace, but to my pleasant surprise a Klone discovered some matching residual char patterns.

The trace led to a blanked sector, but there I was able to pick up the trail of a wandering pict chain. I tried to reconstruct some aspect of the pict from the trace for the sake of preparedness, but I could barely even follow its winding path. I almost lost it a couple of times, but finally caught up with an extant version in a remote and largely uncharted region of Virtual. I made a last inspection of the defense and weaponry programs I keep floating in RAM and jumped-into the Underground.

My simulation program kicked-in immediately, picting me in the garb appropriate to this Underground. The setting was 18th century and after a few moments I recognized the picting as a representation based on Hogarth. It appeared to be his classic *Gin Lane*, though there was a jumble of recognizable elements from *The Four Stages of Cruelty* and *A Harlot's Progress* as well. The programming was as magnificent as the horror and degradation were appalling.

It's not immediately apparent when one is in Virtual, whether the figures one encounters are simulacra of Linked physicals, or pure Virtual fabricants. I run a constant filtering program to mark who is who, but in this case it proved to be very upsetting, for the atrocities performed by the physicals easily matched and exceeded the exploits of the preset Hogarth decadents.

A lunatic screamed past me catching me in the ribs with a flailing elbow. He had a bellows atop his head and a live child skewered on a staff in his hands. The man was a fabricant, the baby -- a broad grin on its bloody face, it's tiny organ tumescent -- a simulacrum of a physical. I repressed a shudder and walked on through the squalor.

The mutilated corpses of small animals lay strewn about the street or hanged, some still kicking, from signs and streetlamps. Various genders copulated openly in any and all combinations in alleys and doorways and everything stank of blood and semen, urine and

excrement. In the middle of the road the fabricant corpse of a woman with enormous, festering breasts lay atop the splinters of her wooden coffin, one thick plank piercing her abdomen. The simulacrum of a thin man with a sepulchral visage kneeled over her, his face thrust between her decaying thighs. He looked up as I passed and maggots spilled out the corner of his lips. The only thing worse I could imagine was if fabricant and simulacrum had been reversed, but I found a no less upsetting sight a little further down the block.

I tried not to be judgmental: none of this, of course, was "real," and I tried to convince myself that maybe this had some cathartic value, but it was tough. I had been to sleazy undergrounds before, but none as extreme as this. I was thinking I was going to have to look a little deeper into the basis of these places sometime soon, when I was shocked out of my reverie by a woman walking out of the *Gin Royal* tavern.

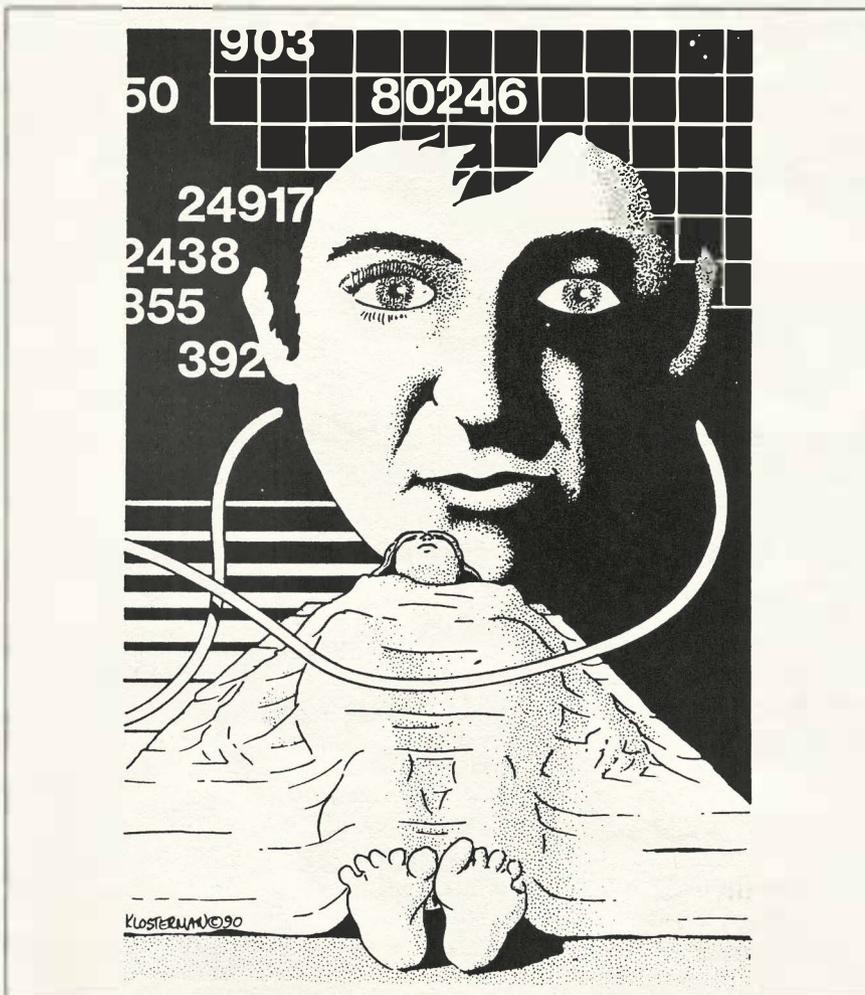
It was Aimee Dissault. Only it wasn't.

I recognized her instantly, though she was filthy and dressed as a whore. A leering fat man followed her out and reached around her, running his hands down her body. She turned around and interlaced her hands behind his neck as he cupped her ass. She leaned in as if to kiss him then brought her knee up sharply into his groin. He fell to the ground writhing in agony as she cackled like a drunk crow. She kicked him repeatedly in the face till his teeth lay scattered about him and her shoe dripped a syrupy crimson.

It must have been more than he wanted, for the simulacrum depicted taking with it even the bloodstains on the ground. Dissault spat grey phlegm at the now empty space on the street and adjusted her skirts.

At least, her fabricant did.

I rebooted the filtering program, but it fed me the same information: Dissault was pure pict, not a Linked-in physical. As she walked down the street I followed her from a distance and accessed a scanning program. I booted it as she squatted to urinate in the middle of the sidewalk. She looked up as if jolted and spotted me in an instant. There was a wild hatred in her eyes as she burned my program before its iterations could converge and I knew she



was no simple Klone or monitor left in place for continuity.

Dissault had done what others have only dreamed of: a full personality replication maintained off-Link. Her physical self didn't even need to be alive to sustain it.

Virtual immortality.

I remembered that other little piece of information about Dissault I had uncovered through Mrs. Jumbo. Intelligence reports indicated that Dissault had been the subject of some irregular surgical procedures. The suggestion was that Harlan Dissault authorized silicon brain implants in his infant daughter in violation of the AMA's cyberethics code. Such implants would go far toward explaining the girl's facility with Virtual and the fact of her present existence.

She started to smile as she walked toward me, the scary obverse of the crocodile's tears. I instinctively backed away, a truly futile gesture in cyberspace. I accessed a disable program but she crashed it before I could even complete the boot-up.

"Oh Mr. Detective," she taunted in a sing-song chant, "Did you come to play?"

I tried to access my other attack programs but she had wiped out my personal-RAM. I tried to jump-out, but she blocked that off as well. She had a mastery of Virtual unlike anyone else who had ever Linked-on. Hell, she was virtual now.

I knew what was coming and I tried to stall, hoping inspiration would strike before Dissault did. No one else on the street seemed at all interested in us.

"It wasn't a murder at all, was it Aimee? It was a suicide."

"Suicide?" she said, "But I'm not dead, am I?"

"You're not alive."

"Who's to say? I don't feel any different than I did before. If anything, I feel better."

I could feel it building around me. The pict was breaking up as the virtual space started to sizzle.

"You burned yourself," I said and knew I had only one chance. I needed a little more time.

"It was fun. That scrawny old body was a terrible limitation to me. I mean, how many people get to act out their death wish and be nostalgic about it after?"

"But why such a major flameout?" I asked. I was almost ready.

"Oh," she said, "There were some funny chips in that nasty head of mine. We couldn't have anybody picking through them. They were starting to fail anyway, so whoosh, I melted it all down. Just like you."

I felt her release the full burn. I smelled ozone and felt the first searing charge in my head. The Hogarth streetscene flickered and nearby simulacra depicted. Micropixels cracked and burst beneath the strain as the very space around me tore like cheap silk and I knew I was a nanosecond too slow.

Then the explosion hit.

• • •

McSween was sitting beside the bed when I came to. His face wore the same blank expression he had showed to the would-be dead girl only days before.

"Feds want to see you," he said.

"I'll bet." My head felt like the inside of an earthquake.

"They think you owe them an AI."

"Shit."

"They're a little curious about the 23 simultaneous flameouts, too."

I closed my eyes. A thousand tiny lobsters danced in my brain, snagging raw nerves in their snapping claws. I thought about the moment before the explosion. Though Dissault disabled my RAM, I was able to spin a Klone out of Virtual materials. I positioned it behind me on the Link and programmed it to bounce-back all incoming data. It was a one-in-a-thousand shot that it wouldn't melt from the overload, but it reflected enough of the burn to mostly protect my physical self. The reflected flameout wiped out Dissault and the Underground and apparently the AI that supported it, leaving me an instant in which to jump-out before the burn bounced-back again and took me with it. If I had been Linked through any VAD other than my own I would have fried.

I opened my eyes, but McSween was gone. I went back to sleep.

I was in the hospital for a week then home on temporary disability. I got grilled by the Feds and IAD and neither was real happy, but they cleared me in the end.

I thought about the 23 people Linked-in to the Underground who died in the flameout and wondered if I should feel guilty. They were all major deviants and illegally played in the Underground at their own risks, but physically they hadn't actually done anything.

Then there was Aimee.

As I lay in bed I tried to figure if anyone could say that I had killed her. I mean, technically speaking she had been dead for two days at the time.

But I just wasn't sure.

I considered the achievement of her replication in Virtual and wondered if Harlan Dissault would repeat the experiment given the price paid by his daughter. It wasn't just her death that was on his head, it was her life. Something awful had driven her to her perverse revelries in that Underground and I guessed her father's literal head-games might explain a lot of it. If he didn't know about it, he was sure-as-shit going to find out.

I suspected it wouldn't come as news, but either way I bet it wouldn't do more than pique the old maggot's curiosity.

Another fucking rubbernecker.

I thought about Aimee and an existence limited to Virtual.

Or maybe unlimited to Virtual. It is, after all, a universe as potentially infinite as our own. And one in which, with a little time, she could have become something like omnipotent.

I thought some more.

It was unlikely that Aimee would have tied her simulacra consciousness to any single AI; the chance of system crash, accidental or otherwise, was too great. She certainly wouldn't have Linked herself exclusively to an Underground AI, they're the most susceptible to physical intervention, as my little jumpto Hogarth-land demonstrated. And if she could replicate herself once in a Virtual environment, why not multiple versions?

I suddenly felt very queasy. It had all been too easy: the obvious flaws in the Grundrisse datastack, the open access to Mrs. Jumbo, the hard-but-not-impossible-to-follow pict trail of the Underground. And the fact that my Klone withstood an off-the-scale backburn, saving me to make my report.

I contacted a hacker snitch and sent him Dissault's synaptic prints with instructions to scan the Undergrounds

for her. I promised him some highly illegal sex chips if he came through. Though my brain still ached I jumped-in to a private, off-Link data space I use as a workshop and fashioned a very special program.

I was hours in my shop and when I finally jumped-out the snitch was waiting for me. He had found her in a lesbian-only Underground, the look on his face telling me not to ask how he managed to sneak-in.

I was dead tired and my brain felt like a turtle baking in its shell, but I was afraid to wait any longer. Dissault might never be so easy to find again and I was afraid to ever attempt another Link-on knowing she was in there, maybe just biding her time for me.

There was no margin for error; if she got any hint I was near she would fry me on the spot. I camped outside the Underground and waited for a jumper. When I sensed a pict forming on jump-in I piggy-backed the simulacrum. As long as I performed no conscious action, my presence couldn't be detected, not even by the physical I had attached to. I hated endangering a citizen without her consent, but I had no choice. Before her pict could stabilize I injected the program.

We spent several interesting hours in the lesbian Underground before we found Dissault. I sensed everything my host felt and did and it was a different perspective to say the least. We finally spotted her in a bar that sported an Early Egyptian motif, having sex on a plush divan. As the two women changed positions and I glimpsed her partner, all doubts concerning what I was about to do evaporated.

She was engaged in furious oral sex with herself. Or was it masturbation?

We ambled up to the bar and the bartender came over, wiping the counter in front of us. She was a gay fabricant, but built like a brick AI. We could see the Dissaults in the mirror over the barmaid's shoulder. They were looking around now, as if they sensed something amiss in the Virtual atmosphere.

It was almost time.

The bartender asked what we wanted. As we started to reply I detached from my host and picted beside her. I heard several screams from the other patrons.

The Dissaults looked at me and smiled like it was feeding time at the zoo. There was no delay this time.

"You asshole," they said and the burn began.

"Boilermaker," my host ordered, tripping the program I planted in her pict.

The reason flameouts are so deadly is that you normally never know when they're going to hit or from which direction. But I knew it was coming this time and I was very ready.

A small plasma sac, looking like a hyper-thyroid amoeba picted between me and Dissault. As the burn detonated it was diverted into the sac which expanded with the surge of energy. Dissault was surprised by it and raised the degree of the burn, but the sac absorbed the additional power. Dissault was laying everything she had into it now, screaming with fury as the air shimmered with the intensity of the blast. Simulacra cowered in the corners, the AI too overloaded to divert processing for jump-outs.

The sac had expanded to occupy most of the bar when it exploded. A thousand smaller amoebas burst from the sac and spread out through the fabric of Virtual. Two of them immediately glommed onto the Dissaults, expanding to envelop them, before beginning to contract. The membranes were cloudy but transparent and I watched the Dissaults battle futilely against the antibody program.

The sacs got smaller and smaller, compacting Dissaults' picts as they shrank, wiping all synaptic traces of her from Virtual memory just as the other amoebas were doing across all levels of the cyberspace.

It was a gamble, of course. If Dissault had integrated herself deeply enough into the AIs all of Virtual would crash with her. But I was betting that she simply hadn't had enough time to accomplish that since her physical death.

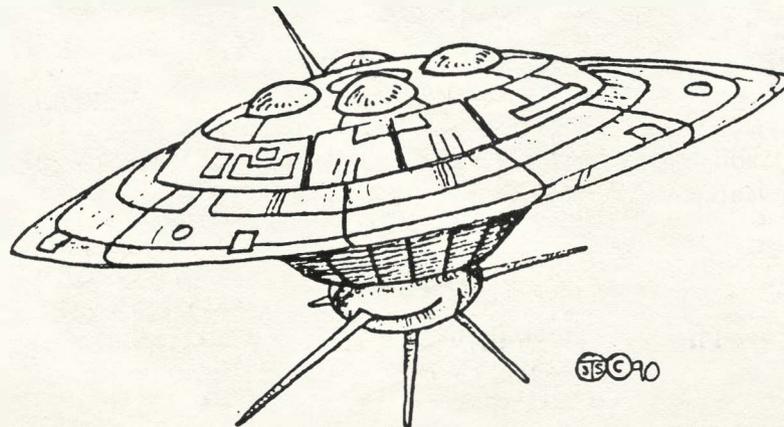
As the last screaming pixel of them popped out of existence and the Underground shuddered but maintained, I knew the bet had paid off. I couldn't be sure that I got every trace of her -- Virtual is a big place to hide -- but I was reasonably confident that even if some synaptic element survived, she would never be able to re-pict.

If she ever did, I would sure as hell find out about it.

As the Underground stabilized, the other patrons were looking at me with less than welcome delight. I bowed with what small elegance I could muster and jumped-out.

The Feds were waiting for me when I Linked-off. They always are.

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Science Update

compiled by
Elton Elliott

Astronomy

In January a group reported in *Nature* that a survey by the Infrared Astronomical Satellite (IRAS) revealed galaxy clumping on a scale too large to be accounted for by the standard version of the cold dark matter model. This survey, which some have hailed as opening the way for Allan Guth's inflationary universe model to work, included many who were supportive of cold, dark matter. (*Scientific American*, March 1991, pg. 27)

Despite resolution problems, the Hubble telescope is still providing astronomers with some interesting information. It has examined massive stars, those most likely to explode into a giant supernova. The next Milky Way star so slated is Eta Carinae, 8000 light-years away. Using the telescope's Wide-Field/Planetary Camera, (with computer software compensating for distortions caused by Hubble's optical flaw) a CalTech team was able to resolve structures just a few tenths of an arc-second across. Observations as early as 1843 showed a shell of matter hurling from the star. The new image shows that the shell — about one-third of a light-year from the stellar core — has a well-defined boundary, which might help explain how Eta Carinae expelled the mass. Also spotted, a network of clumps and filaments farther out from the shell (about half a light-year from the star's center). For the first time scientists will be able to observe the fragmentation of a massive star. (*SCIENCE NEWS*, February 2, 1991, pg. 78)

Astrochemistry

Although stars in local dwarf galaxies and the Milky Way presumably started out with the same chemical compositions and a similar range of masses, the chemistry of these galaxies today shows a striking contrast: Compared with dwarf galaxies, such as the Large Magellanic Cloud, our own gal-

axy features a much higher ratio of oxygen to iron. A study at Johns Hopkins and Cambridge, England has concluded that this is a result of fewer Type I supernovas — which suffuse the interstellar medium with iron-rich gas, thus dictating the chemical compositions of new stars. (*SCIENCE NEWS*, February 2, 1991, pg. 71)

Chemistry

Antimony sulfide is the basic building block of a new family of microporous materials prepared at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. Possible applications include molecular sieve sorbents, catalytic surfaces, ion exchangers. The sulfide frameworks created as a result might also serve as stable hosts for semiconductor particles, as well as possible optical applications. (*SCIENCE* 251, 293, 1991; *CHEMICAL AND ENGINEERING NEWS*, January 21, 1991, page 17)

Cosmology

If indeed dark matter is still valid it may herald the return of Albert Einstein's heretofore discredited theory of the cosmological constant. This constant was added into the theory of general relativity as a mathematical term representing an unknown, repulsive force to counter the gravitational attraction of mass. He later repudiated the theory. Now a group of astrophysicists at the University of Oxford have resurrected Einstein's idea to "show how matter in an expanding universe dominated by cold dark matter could lead to the formation of great walls, great attractors and other huge aggregations of galaxies." (*SCIENCE NEWS*, January 5, 1991)

Space

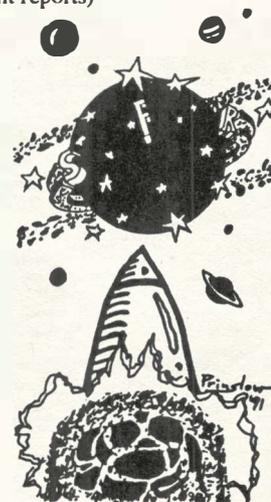
A National Research Council panel has concluded that a smaller, simpler new design for NASA's space station "does not meet the basic research requirements for which it was built." NASA's space

station budget was cut by six billion recently and Congress ordered NASA to build the station in modular stages This new study preempts that direction and makes it more likely that the space station program will be canceled. (*LA Times-Washington Post News Service*, March 15, 1991.)

NASA has named nine scientists to work on its Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) Microwave Observing project. This team will use radio-telescopes "to listen for attempts to communicate with Earth by life elsewhere in the galaxy" (*SN* 5/3/89, p. 296). The research will be conducted at NASA's Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Cal. on October 12, 1992 the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' landing in the West Indies. The 1,000 stars observed will be similar to Sol and within 80 light-years of Earth. At the NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Cal., a second SETI team will manage a broader survey of the whole sky "to detect signals from directions that might be overlooked if the search were limited to nearby [sun-like] stars." (*SCIENCE NEWS*, February 2, 1991, pg. 79.)

Yearly R & D Budget

President Bush's budget for basic scientific research and development for 1992 calls for an \$8.2 billion rise in R&D spending, an 8.2% jump after accounting for an estimated annual inflation rate of 4.3% percent. NASA gets the biggest percentile increase at 18%, with Interior decreasing by 4%. This budget may face opposition as it moves through Congress. The 1990 Congressional Research Service report urged selectivity in the funding of big science projects to avoid across-the-board cuts in R&D support. Since then the Savings and Loan fiasco and the Persian Gulf War have added to budgetary pressures. (*SCIENCE NEWS*, February 9, 1991, pg.87 and independent reports)



Chasing Shadows

by

Charles de Lint

Installment #4

QUEEN OF ANGELS by Greg Bear;
Warner Books, July 1990;
420 pp; Hardcover \$19.95

Greg Bear has never been satisfied writing just one kind of story. He has, of course, turned in some very fine Science Fiction such as EON and the stories that appeared in TANGENTS. He has also written SF that reads like horror--consider BLOOD MUSIC--or which reads like Fantasy as in the duology that included THE INFINITY CONCERTO and THE SERPENT MAGE.

He seems most comfortable working on a grand, sweeping scale, tackling stories on a cosmic or apocalyptic level. QUEEN OF ANGELS shows that he's just as comfortable dealing with the introspective nature of humanity, journeying into "the Country of the Mind" rather than out to the next galaxy.

The novels presents a 21st century utopia in which a mass murder has taken place; the murderer is obviously a well-known poet. The tangled plotlines leading from that event soon embroil a police officer, one of the poet's sycophants who is now disillusioned with his mentor and a psychological researcher who lost his job in yet another government scandal.

The very new science of nanotechnology mixes with psychological research and the sense of a police procedural to provide a novel that is both enlightening and engrossing. Neither story nor character are sacrificed as Bear explores one of Science Fiction's greatest strengths: the ability to use the cutting edge of tech-

nology to project a possible future which in reality reflects the present.

Bear has done a wonderful job in doing so with this latest novel.

KINDERGARTEN by Peter Rushforth
Nonpareil Books, 1989; 192pp;
Trade paperback \$10.95

There are some books that you simply want to get people to read, but they're impossible to describe accurately because it's a mood, a *resonance*, that turns it from being merely a good read into something far more lasting. That's probably why the friend who sent me this reissue of Peter Rushforth's KINDERGARTEN (originally published in England in 1979 where it won the Hawthornden Prize for the year's best work of imaginary literature) sent the book itself, rather than trying to find the words to recommend it to me.

Alas, I can't send all of you copies of the book, so I'm going to have to try to find the words instead.

Fairy tale has much to do with the novel, although it's a contemporary book. It's book-ended by a retelling of "Hansel and Gretel", but the story it bears the most resemblance to is "Fitcher's Bird"-- the one in which the young heroine opens a forbidden door that leads into a room that will rob her of her innocence.

Like that heroine, sixteen-year old Corrie opens a secret door in the school where his father is headmaster to discover a cache of letters and postcards from 1938 dealing with Jewish children being sent over from Germany just before the war. Those children, Corrie knows, all died in the camps on their return to Germany.

Corrie is one of three precocious children living with their father and grandmother. Their mother died in a terrorist attack on an airport in Greece the previous year. This Christmas, the time around which the story revolves, their father is sway from home and they are alone with their grandmother. On the news, daily, are reports of a school full of children being held hostage in West Germany by the same terrorist group that killed their mother.

Corrie has only learned recently that he is Jewish himself. His grandmother was once a famous artist in Germany; she escaped at the beginning of the war but left her entire family behind. She never heard from them again; they all died in the camps. Knowing this, knowing about the children who went back to Germany to also die in the camps, watching the news reports coming from West Germany, Corrie tries to understand the tragedy that seems to underlie the world.

In some ways, tragedy pervades KINDERGARTEN, but it's also one of the most uplifting books I've read in many years. There's no saccharine American television conclusion; there's not even a happy ending per se, since in some ways there isn't really a story. What there is, is understanding. And we, as readers, are allowed to share it with Corrie.

KINDERGARTEN reminded me of both Jonathan Carroll and John Crowley as I read it, although Rushforth's writing is nothing like either of theirs. He has his own voice, but like Carroll and Crowley, he is a gifted stylist who never allows the beauty of his prose to interfere with his ability to tell a story. His characterization is superb; his descriptions, lyric; his understanding of the human heart, piercing.

KINDERGARTEN is a book that rings true and will resonate inside you long after the last page is read and the book has been set aside.

SWEET, SWEET POISON by Kate Wilhelm
St. Martin's Press, 1990; 262 pp;
Hardcover \$16.95

As those of you who read last issue's column have undoubtedly gathered, I'm quite enamoured with Kate Wilhelm's work, no matter in what genre it appears. That's because the quality of her writing and, in particular, her in-

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sights into character are so finely tuned that each new work is simply a joy to read.

This time out we have a mystery involving a poisoned dog, a possible suicide, a fatal bee attack and a man who died in a room filled with gas. What's their connection, if any? That's for the detective team of Charlie Meiklejohn and Constance Leidl to discover.

The pair were first introduced in the novella "The Gorgon Field" in the August 1985 issue of *F&SF* (which later appeared as part of the five-novella collection from St. Martin's, *CHILDREN OF THE WIND*). *SWEET, SWEET POISON* is their fourth novel-length outing and like all the preceding books, it's an engaging puzzler as well as a fascinating character study—not just of the two well-matched, if dissimilar detectives, but also of those with whom they come into contact during the course of the novel.

If you've missed any of the previous books, don't worry. They're all self-contained and this is as good a place as any to give them a try.

TIGANA, by Guy Gavriel Kay;
ROC, 1990; 688pp; Hardcover

Toronto lawyer Guy Gavriel Kay has some excellent credentials in the Fantasy field. He began by helping to edit Tolkien's *THE SILMARILLION*, but that was merely the tip of the iceberg. Soon thereafter he proved his true mettle with the publication of the three volumes of *THE FIONAVAR TAPESTRY*, easily one of the best and most innovative Fantasy trilogies of the eighties.

THE FIONAVAR TAPESTRY mixed Arthurian Matter and Fantasy archetypes with a contemporary viewpoint and a lyric prose style that was an absolute delight on the ear. Coming as it did at a time when every second Fantasy book seemed interchangeable with the one that had preceded it on the stands, Kay's trilogy cut through the field like a brisk wind, reminding readers of the power that Fantasy fiction can possess when written with such heartfelt potency and style.

While *TIGANA* lacks the cutting edge innovation of the trilogy—Kay has chosen to work solely with archetypes for this outing—his stylistic strengths have been in no way diminished.

Set on a peninsula richly garbed in Italian-styled names, the novel tells of the lost kingdom of Tigana and its people. When Tigana was invaded by the sorcerer Brandin, the Prince of Tigana killed Brandin's son. In revenge, Brandin destroyed Tigana, razing the cities, killing every man, woman and child to stand against him. His final act was to remove the memory of the land from the memories of all save the survivors of Tigana. When the name of their homeland is spoken, only those who were born there can hear it.

The novel tells of the intrigues and battles to regain Tigana—both from the tyrant sorcerer who has conquered it and from the lost memory of the rest of the peninsula. The characters are a rich cast of archetypes: the prince without a kingdom, the slave in love with her master, the steadfast companion, the ruler thought to be dead who rises from his grave and the like.

But though they are archetypes, the characters we meet in the pages of *TIGANA* are neither caricatures nor spun into the tale as prototypes through an author's laziness. Kay infuses them all with an individuality and one of the main strengths of the book is how effectively he deals with the characters' complex motivations, be they villain or hero.

The strength of an "oft" told tale" told again is how well it is being retold. By such criteria, Kay has turned in yet another winner because for all the familiarity the well-read reader will have with this sort of a Fantasy tale, he or she will still find a constant sense of surprise and wonder as the story of Tigana's people unfolds in Kay's singing prose.

Admirers of *THE FIONAVAR TAPESTRY* will also enjoy the oblique references to that trilogy in this unrelated work.

SEVENTH HEAVEN by Alice Hoffman
Putnam, 1990; 256pp; Hardcover

Suburbia takes a bad rap, especially from inner city dwellers, but what's often forgotten as we now enter the nineties is that it was once the promised land. Young couples dreamed of moving into one of those subdivisions, each home almost indistinguishable from the next; the status quo was maintained because no one wanted to be different from their neighbour.



Naturally enough, like all utopias, suburbia didn't quite match up to the dream. People lived there and real peoples' lives never quite fit into the neat, tidy order as many would like them to do.

At first glance, Alice Hoffman's eighth novel appears to be a prime example of suburban domestic fiction, exploring the values of its times. Set in 1959-60, it tells how the arrival of divorcee Nora Silk and her two sons to a suburban subdivision changes the lives of all the other residents.

The family is ostracized at the beginning because no one wants to associate with a divorcee. Such a person just isn't fit company for a right-thinking person; some of the taint might rub off. But we soon discover that the other residents of Hemlock Street lead far from perfect lives and in the end it's Nora's presence that helps them all come to grips with their own infidelities and family problems.

What lifts Hoffman's book from becoming just another prose soap opera is firstly, her understanding of human nature. Each of the characters becomes, if not always sympathetic, then at least better understood through her inspired choices of imagery and detail and her deft switching of character viewpoints.

Secondly, she has infused the story with just a touch of Fantasy. Ghosts, telepathy and a kind of voodoo all play a part in the development of the characters and their interaction. The Fantasy element is played low-key, but it's all the more delicious for that almost oblique presence.

Hoffman has played with vaguely mystical elements before—as in *WHITE HORSES* and *ILLUMINATION NIGHT*--but never quite so successfully as she does here.

SEVENTH HEAVEN illuminates the lost world of suburbia, circa 1959-60, with both wit and human understanding, but more importantly, it's a book with great heart.

THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE
by William Gibson & Bruce Sterling
Gollancz, 1990; 383pp;
Hardcover £ 13.95

Imagine a Victorian England gone strange, a timeline where history diverged from that recorded in our own history books. The catalyst is a steam engine-driven computer invented in the mid-nineteenth century. The results range from Lord Byron becoming Prime Minister and the rise of savants as a genuine ruling class, to class riots, an America still divided by a civil war, an earlier rise in Japan's interest in technology and every sort of Science Fictional speculation as to how the world would have been changed by such events.

Most of the story is told from the viewpoint of a savant named Edward Mallory who gets caught up in the struggle between the ruling savants and disgruntled Luddites who wish to tear down the trappings of technology and return to what they consider a simpler and better world. Along the way we get fascinating glimpses into the vast changes of this imaginary timeline as well as any number of very effective polemics from the characters on their varying viewpoints of whether or not these changes are for good or ill.

The wealth of detail and the thoughtfulness of the extrapolation are what we have come to expect from these two authors. William Gibson and Bruce Sterling are a pair of Science Fiction's brightest lights—true leaders at the cutting edge of the field. What they often lack in terms of realism with their characters is easily overshadowed by their logical speculations and the enviable prose with which they present their themes.

This time out, however, the clarity and originality of their work is somewhat marred by the story that provides

the vehicle through which we can explore this fascinating world. While the "Babbage engine" from which the book gets its title and all the ramifications of its presence this early in the world's history is fascinating, Gibson and Sterling's use of the Victorian world itself seems to owe far too great a debt to the work of a trio of California authors: Tim Powers, James P. Blaylock and K.W. Jeter.

The quirkiness of the plot and the situations the characters find themselves in contain too many echoes to such fine books as *THE ANUBIS GATES* and *THE STRESS OF HER REGARD* by Powers, *HOMUNCULUS* and a number of short stories by Blaylock, and Jeter's *INFERNAL DEVICES*. Like those books, *THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE* deals with Dickensian criminal gangs, Victorian poets and madcap inventors. These characters, complete with their quirkiness and grotesqueries, might seem fresh to many, but will be far too familiar to readers acquainted with the work of Powers, et al.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing in and of itself—it's really rather flattering to those authors and their work. Far more depressing is the resolution of Gibson and Sterling's plotline which really is rather a muddle. Had it concluded at the end of the fifth section--the "Fifth Iteration: The All Seeing Eye"—the reader could have inferred a resolution and been pleased with how things worked out in direct ratio to his or her personal level of acceptance for that kind of a conclusion.

But the authors have added close to thirty pages of mocked-up clippings, diary entries and the like in a sixth and final chapter—ostensibly to fill in gaps in the actual narrative, one would assume. Unfortunately, all they do is dilute the strength of the earlier climax and then further complicate matters with a truly obscure ending.

Considering that, singly, Gibson and Sterling are two of the best and most innovative writers in the field, one can only be disappointed in what is a fascinating, but ultimately, flawed collaboration.

MONAD: ESSAYS ON SCIENCE FICTION #1
Writer's Notebook Press/Pulphouse,
Sept. 1990; 91pp;
Trade paperback \$5.00

Those indefatigable folks at Pulp-

house are at it yet again, with still another new ongoing series. This time it's edited by Damon Knight and concentrates on essays devoted to Science Fiction, written by working professionals in the field.

Do we really need another magazine about SF? I don't know, but if this issue's anything to go by for the series as a whole, I think there's something worthwhile happening here.

Ursula K. Le Guin delivers one of her usual openhanded essays on gender in the genre while Bruce Sterling makes a valiant attempt to explain mainstream literary criticism, tongue somewhat in cheek, I'm supposing. There's also material by Brain Aldiss, Thomas Disch, Damon Knight and Tom Whitmore.

RUNE by Christopher Fowler;
Century, 1990; 368pp;
Hardcover £ 13.00

The author of *ROOFWORLD*, one of 1988's best novels (but read the British edition; the U.S. one dropped the last chapter from the book) returns with a novel just as entertaining.

The premise isn't quite as charming as *ROOFWORLD*, which had a whole out-cast society living on London's rooftops, but Fowler's other strengths are apparent once more: the wonderfully quirky characters and the sheer delight in the language of his prose.

For this outing he posits an ancient runic curse being utilized by the head of a corporation to change the world for the better, and incidentally kill off anyone who disagrees with how he means to do so. The runes have been hidden in a shipment of videotapes that were stolen from the corporation's warehouse. These videos contained a prototype of the runes, a primitive form that drives the viewer mad.

As a rash of bizarre suicides hits London, two policemen near retirement and a motley band of private citizens begin to puzzle out the source of the runes and embark on a perilous attempt to stop the corporation head before they become victims themselves.

Fowler's prose is a treasure trove of startling imagery and wonderful descriptive turns of phrase. By turns dark, by turns light, his novels are a perfect blend of the best in contemporary Fan

continued on page 10

Lay of the Land

by

Doug Odell

Between the Antipodes

Long ago, in a less mechanized and technical age, learned men maintained that the world was divided into two habitable zones sundered by the terrible, death-dealing heat of the equator. Visiting the other zone, or antipode, was out of the question, but it was fun to speculate about the people who lived there. Perhaps they walked on their heads, or tunneled into the ground so that they didn't fall off the Earth. By all accounts they were a strange people, and wasn't it nice that they lived on the other side of the impassable tropics?

This attitude, while no longer prevalent among geographers, still manifests itself in the oddest places. Take, for example, Science Fiction. SF readers often treat Fantasy as so much antipodean nonsense. Many think a great gulf of reason and technology separates the one genre from the other. After all, rocket ships don't land in Middle-Earth. Thus, except for the occasional errant SF author (his Fantasy books written for money; his SF works written from the heart) and the

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irritating habit of book stores to lump the two together, the SF reader can safely ignore the strange, mythic other half of the world of wonder.

But what's that streaking across the star-studded spaceways? Get out the laser-cannon, scramble the X-wing fighters--a dragon found a way *between* the antipodes!

DRAGONSDAWN by Anne McCaffrey;
Del Rey 1988; 431 pp;
Hardcover \$18.95

In her best work since DRAGON-FLIGHT, Anne McCaffrey has brought Science Fiction to the thread-scored planet of Pern. Despite the author's protestations to the contrary, the Pern series has been widely perceived as a work of Fantasy. After all, it contains fire-breathing dragons. Further, the culture and its level of technology is comparable to that the European Renaissance, an era closely associated with many Fantasy works.

DRAGONSDAWN does much to alter these misconceptions and broaden the base of the series. McCaffrey's cross

between the antipodes is accomplished by using science as the magic of her universe. The wizard's lightning bolt is replaced by the laser gun. Science Fiction rarely works without use of this "mechanical magic" to differentiate itself from the technology of today (thereby eliminating the sense of wonder and becoming merely a modern novel).

Fantasy "magic" also only works by a system of internally logical rules. Look at Earth's history. Most of the founders of modern science cast horoscopes or delved into the metaphysical, eventually discarding what didn't bring concrete results. Magic, then, is a failed science. A Fantasy writer makes a single supposition: *what if it worked*.

McCaffrey adroitly weaves conventionally incompatible imagery into a truly engrossing work. She starts us on the space ship approaching Pern (scientific enough for you?) A new colony is to be founded, one with a voluntarily lower tech level than the colonists already possess. They want a simpler, agrarian life far from the troubled, sophisticated areas of the galaxy. The colony is well on its way to implementing this plan when the omnivorous Thread begin to fall. What to do? Perhaps the technology was abandoned too quickly, or perhaps it's time to give up rugged independence and ask for help from the Federated Sentient Planets while they can.

Much of the novel is centered on the compromise that must be struck between vision and reality. The answer the colonists arrive at is, of course, the society as depicted in the other Pern books. But the process as depicted is neither simple nor inevitable. It is the result of day-to-day choices of survival, made by intelligent people with a technical background. Each aspect of future Pern life (genetically engineered dragons, Thread, agenothree, the Hold system, etc.) is logically explained. McCaffrey allows no part of her creation to bow to any other god but science. It's nice to see an author inventive enough to bridge the territorial confines of genre and stake out a claim in unexplored territory. Would that more authors left their respective antipodes and braved the jungle of the imagination. The first step is rather easy, actually. It starts out, "I wonder, what if. . . ." ∞



Behind the Shroud

by

Gary Ford

Some Ground Rules

Have you, o gentle but fictitious reader, been wondering what this column is all about?

Me too.

I mean, SFR is a Noble (for our field even Ancient) Cause and all that, and the editor is a Fine Chap whose checks not bounce.

But you may have noticed here in this column oddments other than book reviews creep in, and a different standard(?) of information on book data. Often no publisher or price may be given, though elsewhere in SFR there is an editorial standard on such.

There are reasons. The short version is, I was assigned to the review section and chose to bat cleanup. To glean libraries and bring back news of books you may have missed, or couldn't afford, or had no practical chance of finding or seeing reviewed in the first place. If you and some book deserve each other, don't give up your faith in dat old paperblack magic. Perhaps this silver bulletin will serve to introduce me. . . .

Hence I only give all info on a book if I think you may want to buy it. In all cases I give enough info that you can:

1) look for the book in your local library

2) or in BOOKS IN PRINT if you wish

3) or ask your reference librarian to, or to go on-line and locate the book in libraries state- or nation-wide

4) then spend the buck or so postage for an interlibrary loan—they are much easier and more common than of yore, and some libraries do not even charge you (but many are not averse to some

volunteered hours checking out books to the public or patrolling the book spines for shelving errors. Our local library used 25,000 unpaid hours last year.)

Also I fondly hope to give some emphasis to, or at least not run out of, books of a scientific bent which seem to be important and perhaps overlooked or suffering from undue professional prejudice (occasionally even *due* etc). Please write me if one springs to your mind.

Science, fiction and issues in every review.

Beyond that, I have this urge to leave occasional nuggets of wisdom. Some claim to recognize my style much as they can tell if they have mice.

So much for the slow wind-up. He checks the runners at first through fourth, and the pitch is. . . .

Three times now have I asked the mighty Ed what he really wants from my column, and three times hath he answered, "I want it to be just like listening to one of your more fascinating conversations, only it should make sense."

Verily. Exact quote.

Why you, o Ford, Why you?

And especially now after I've spent every reading moment for over two months, ransacking multiple libraries to answer the questions:

What Happens After You Die? and What Are Flying Saucers?

Bearing in mind that I must make sense, then, the answers are: First, you don't die all at once, in the normal course. Brain cells live up to an hour after the heart stops; in the presence of certain antioxidants, brain cells live a

day or more. Look into Dirk Pearson and Sandy Shaw's stuff if you're curious—and I don't think it too healthy if you are. Second, (and for instance) reincarnation is not a scientific concept, in the sense of Popper, because you can easily see *there is no to prove it doesn't happen* (and be forgotten), so technically speaking the proposition is not falsifiable. Wanta see it again?

Third, if you must read about alleged past life recall, there is more information in ALL IN THE MIND by Ian Wilson (Doubleday, 1982, previously published as MIND OUT OF TIME?) than in about ten average books on the subject. It is largely based on an extraordinary BBC series in which people were regressed to a "past life" live (as it were) and hopefully unrehearsed. If you're like me, Bridey Murphy books usually leave you wondering "why didn't the investigator do. . ." —well, this time he *did!*

One of the better known and apparently stronger cases of evidence for reincarnation (and also cited by Wilson) is the subject (though there are sequels, it seems) of THE CATHARS AND REINCARNATION by Arthur Guirdham. It has had several editions, including currently a paperback (Theosophical Publishing House, 1978, \$5.95; note that publishers *without* moral rigidity do not now, for reasons having to do with taxes and machine tools, maintain a backlist. Shai, Dorsai!).

The tricky part of proving a reincarnation is that you have to know something, or better, many things, that no one else knows so you couldn't have found them out another way (and thus they must be things you couldn't just figure out, say), and then you record them somewhere notarized or otherwise secure (on the men's room wall in the Titanic maybe), and *then* you wait twenty or thirty years for people to stumble over these facts for themselves, say by archaeological digs followed by stubborn professors dying off, and then, and then(!) you reveal your records before unimpeachable witnesses—and people say "Do it again!" and "Have you ever done magic professionally?"

Obviously such proofs tend to be rare. One is alleged in the Guirdham book, and referred to by many other books. Namely, psychiatrist Guirdham's patient the erstwhile Cathar insisted, apparently before a provable date, that

Cathar priests most often wore blue robes; this at a time when the few texts on the subject all said they wore black (at least I'm willing to suppose this without checking them. Aren't you?). Later the World's Greatest Expert dredged yet another ponderous tome on the-Cathar's-and-their-world from his encyclopedic study of records not available to the public, and guess what?

I'm proud of you.

But why not go to the font of wisdom and really suck up the Pierian spring?, I wondered dryly. So, turning to *ANCIENT WISDOM AND SECRET SECTS* in the series *MYSTERIES OF THE UNKNOWN* by the Editors of Time-Life Books (such modesty) we find the Cathars again. But wait? What is this? On page 31, a 15th century painting by the Florentine Fra Angelico. Seven Cathars. Three blue, two peach, one red and one grey-black robe. And in the left, outdoor scene, St. Dominic and faithful sidekick in nice black-black robes, and a Cathar in blue; all have pretty peach under-ropes. Perhaps that peach began as coral five centuries ago, but sure as Fra Angelico sold a lot of stuff to the Dominicans, the blue ruins Dr. Guirdham's proof. One doesn't even have to wonder whether his patient might have been faking: sight of a copy of this painting would be enough.

If you have occasion to cite this later, remember you read it first in SFR.

OK, now the saucers.

Best book on UFOs that I know of: *PASSPORT TO MAGONIA* by Jacques Vallee. As certain of Phil Dick's books virtually contain others as subsets, so this largely contains Vallee's two most recent, *DIMENSIONS* (forward by Whitley Strieber) and *CONFRONTATIONS*. Strieber himself leans on its ideas in his books, of which more anon.

Second best: *THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES* by John Keel. A certifiable trip, well worth postage, and I'm not going to spoil anything by saying more.

DIMENSIONS shares the ideas of *PASSPORT* though it lacks the engrossing catalog of encounters. Its raisin debt is no doubt the interest and market stirred up by Strieber, and why not? If you have read Vallee's *MESSENGERS OF DECEPTION* you may be interested in the "about the author" backflap copy on Strieber's *THE HUNGER*. Connected to intelligence work, huh? A major work on the Tarot? And judging by *TRANSFORMATION*, his

latest, he's into more New Age activities than yogurt is. Something Wicca-d this way comes, faster than you can say Gerd . . . Gurdjef . . . Gurdjief . . . Gurcheef . . . well, a lot faster than that. In fact, the last-mentioned book reminds me more than anything of a Lampoon pastiche of *The Shadow* I read once. By spending years in a Tibetan monastery, the Lamont Cranston figure had gained the power to cloud his own mind.

You might want to read Strieber's earlier book, *COMMUNION* because it is widely known and because the archetypes therein are so strongly and cleanly delineated, as though by a major author of fiction. But consider these quotes from Appendix 2:

"I was aware of the controversial nature of polygraphic results, and so determined to add a test of Mr. Laurendi's effectiveness to the process. Without telling him, I lied in my answers to control questions thirteen and sixteen. In both cases, he detected the lie correctly."

"2. Do you intend to answer truthfully? Yes. (Evaluated true.)"

Notice these small points also. As Strieber sums up an encounter(?) in a Chicago bookstore, the tall man holding a copy of *COMMUNION* becomes a blond; and as he recounts an incident in which a very short pair of muffled, sunglasses-wearing aliens(?) meet Bruce Lee(! now that's a thought—but no, this Lee is an editor for *Morrow*), some of the details which do not fit his mold, disappear. Compare this, from *REPORT ON COMMUNION*, by Ed Conroy:

"CONROY: Did they sound like normal human voices?

LEE: They sounded like Upper East Side Jewish."

Not so odd considering it happened at "Womrath's on Lexington Avenue", or so Lee recalls.

If I had been Strieber, and presuming for the sake of argument he really thought these things were happening to him, at a point near the one-year anniversary of my Dec. 26 overnighter with aliens, and clearly suspecting something of a replay as he was, I would have tied a nice new soap-on-a-rope around one of my extremities, then when "Isis" asked me about it while we were wherever-we-go, I'd give it to her for Christmas. In Strieber's set-up, the results ought to be fascinating.



Quark

Question:

What happens when a Mafia don becomes a deconstructionist?

Answer:

He starts making people offers they can't understand.

Some events in this world are more certain, more "real" than others. For instance, I am not willing to believe that humanoid aliens abduct German citizens overnight and repeatedly, unless you tell me they shake hands each time.

Time for a

Reality Check:

VISUALIZE WORLD PEACE

say those irritating TM bumper stickers. Should they be irritating? Or is it perhaps chagrin over a certain measure of the appearance of world peace?

The only scientific thing to do is form an hypothesis and test it scientifically: print up 100,000 bumper stickers saying, oh,

VISUALIZE ESKIMO NUDITY

and sit back to wait, with statistical significance regimen already prepared, for an agreed period. And don't violate your protocols, as NASA did in deciding there's no life on Mars. My own belief thereis that, had the returned photos shown John Boy Walton peering in the scanning slit (or even several of him, as the test crew managed to do—by running

around the craft during its slow left-to-right scan), NASA would have managed to decide he was "fancy geology".

I'm a little vague on the control group. Perhaps a second period of 100,000 bumper stickers reading

THANK YOU FOR NOT VISUALIZING

or

HAVE A NICE DAZE

If the experiment also requires a large group of meditation cadre, well, I just read that rule-breakers in Japanese prisons are put in solitary and forced to practice Zen meditation.

We could hire some. If you can't trust a Japanese prison inmate to meditate honestly, who can you trust?

Shoot. I'm not going to have space this issue to tell you what flying saucers are. If you want a hilt of what they may sometimes be, look on paged 34-36 of the *second* edition of V. I. Arnold's *CATASTROPHE THEORY*, Springer, 1986.

And Now At Last

An orphan science book. Math book, actually. *MATRIX LOGIC* by August Stern, North-Holland (and thus expensive), 1988.

What we have here is a simple computational method in search of a theory, or better, a framework. Mr. Stern has many evident abilities, but this is one of those books in which the ideas when you finally grok them are simpler than the prose. I wish he—or someone—would write a version for gymnasium students, say, or like those marvelous popularizations of math from Russian.

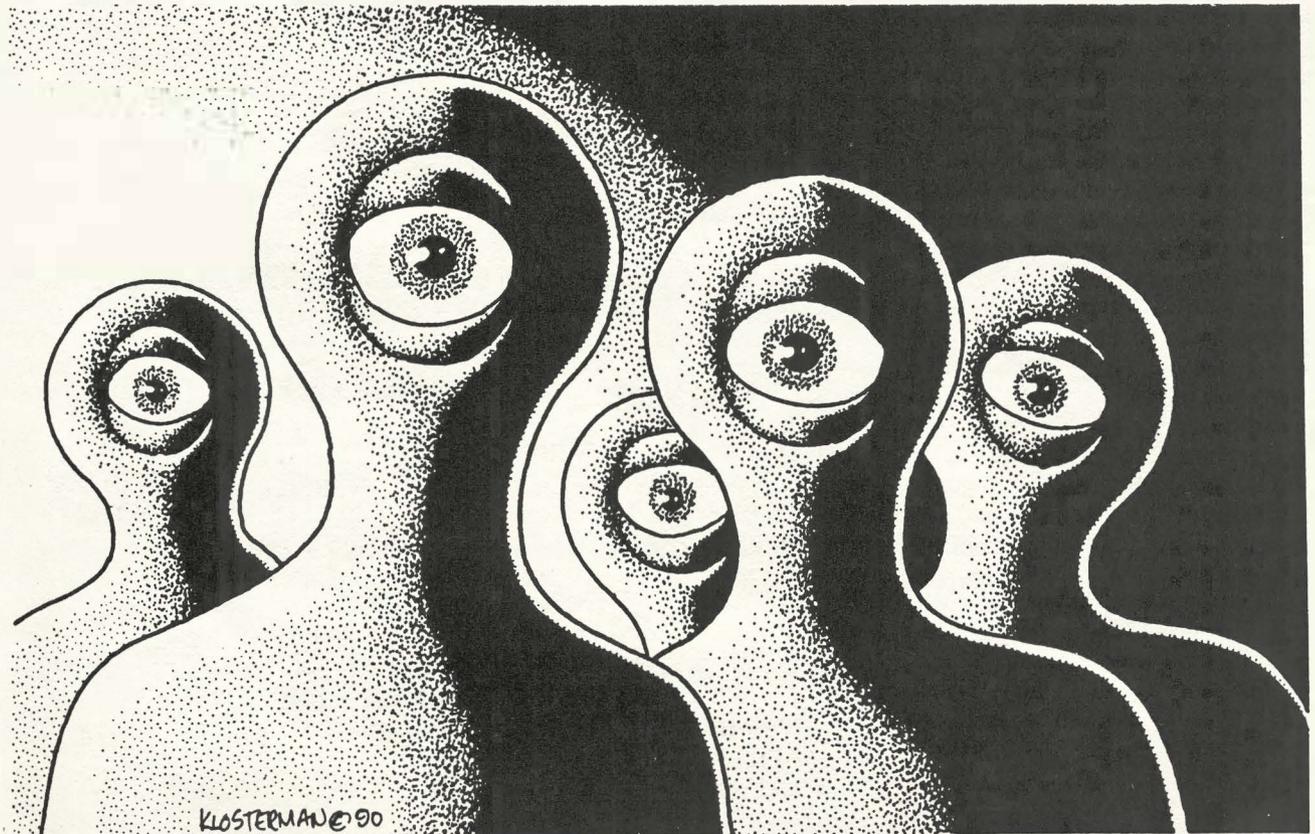
Mr. Stern has found an easy way to get familiar logic operators expressed as, and computed small matrices. All sorts of possibly useful extensions at once are feasible, requiring only the matrix calculations. Bra and ket sound familiar, you physicists? Would you like a nice continuous logic? Quantum logic? Modal logic? How about, it occurs to me, a partly imaginary logic with operators which only do interesting things on virtual particles, or on hidden variables? We gottem, fresh today.

Professors of physics, of logic, of philosophy: chain a grad student to this book today!

Somewhat more next time on chronosynclastic infundibula and the catastrophe cusp, and virtual causality if I can squeeze it in.

Bye for now, buckaroos.

∞



Short Fiction Review

by

Beatrice Gemignani

THE 1990 ANNUAL WORLD'S BEST SF
edited by Donald A. Wolheim;
DAW, 1990; 341 pp;
Paperback \$4.50 (\$5.95 Canada)

Since I'm a relativist, any attempt to determine the "world's best" in a creative field strikes a sour note with me. Nevertheless, these twelve short stories and novelets, first published in 1989, are mostly worth reading. If I spend an inordinate amount of column space on this anthology, believe me, it deserves the attention.

But first, I'll deal with the stories that don't work for me. Gregory Benford's "Alphas" is a flatly fictionalized exercise in speculation related in a cold, distant manner. I recommend it only for readers interested in the wilder regions of advanced astrophysics. An astronaut investigates why some uncommunicative aliens are building a colony on Venus. He encounters a "cosmic string," an anomaly left over from the Big Bang; they're using it to slice into the planet like a cheese-cutter through Brie.

In J. G. Ballard's "WarFever," set in the urban battleground of a near-future Beirut, a young soldier starts a peace campaign. I can't disclose the basic SF concept without giving away too much, but I'll state I didn't buy it on a literal level, and the gritty realism works against taking it all symbolically.

In Judith Moffett's absurd "Not Without Honor," a human colony on Mars receives a first-contact broadcast from aliens imitating "The Mickey Mouse Club." Why? The answer must be read to be disbelieved. Insights concerning the Disney mystique are inter-

esting, but the aliens can't be *that* alien if they can relate to our pop culture.

Robert Silverberg contributes two underplotted tales; their premises are never explained or made plausible. In "A Sleep and a Forgetting," a team monitoring a relay satellite picks up broadcasts in archaic languages. Evidence indicates they come from the past, but many historical details ring false. Are these speakers from an alternate time stream?

"Chiprunner" details how a psychiatrist tries to treat an adolescent computer genius suffering from anorexia. While the former is haunted by dreams of shrinking down to the size of elementary particles, the latter is determined to do just that.

Now for the thumbs-up stories. In "Death Ship" by Barrington J. Bayley, an arrogant physicist in a fascist Europe patriotically volunteers for an experiment in traveling to the future. However, he's really going to alter destiny so his troubled son won't disgrace him. The time travel theme revolves around idempotency, a concept to which I can't do justice in a one-paragraph review. The story is intriguing, even if it lacks *fahvergnugen*.

There's no use pretending Lucius Shepard's "Surrender" isn't heavy on its leftist hands-off-Central-America message, or that the mutants-on-the-loose theme isn't kind of B-movie-like. However, neither can I deny its power and emotion, or the author's mastery of its vivid style. A cynical gringo journalist in Guatemala joins a colleague and a Canadian nurse—the last two have some idealism left—to investigate a jungle agricultural station run by a corrupt Yankee capitalist and a cutthroat native

officer. This SF answer to *THE HEART OF DARKNESS* is for strong stomachs only.

Brian W. Aldiss's atmospheric "North of the Abyss" is ponderous but interesting; don't ask me why it's classified as SF rather than Fantasy. Oscar North is a corporate executive whose humanity has been ground up in the gears of modern international business. On a vacation in Egypt, the ancient gods take him in hand and judge him—but he judges himself most harshly of all.

In Orson Scott Card's "Dogwalker," the perfect crime caper goes cyberpunk. In a near-future Greensboro, North Carolina (Card's home town), a street-smart hustler hires a midget cyborg with amazing powers of deduction. The former needs to find passwords to obtain valuable documents illegally. Their scheme is described in convincing hightech detail, but the story is also strong on human interest. The protagonists progress from living by the "What's in it for me?" philosophy to bonding with each other.

Now for my three favorite stories; please don't ask me to pick one best work. Lisa Tuttle's "In Translation" is an intriguing paradox, a satisfying story about frustration. Jake Bourne is an Everyman obsessed with the inscrutable aliens landing all over the world. Determined to understand and relate to them, he volunteers to live in an alien ship where they observe their human guests' behavior. However, they aloofly refrain from answering his questions; even their human interpreter can't help him. Eventually he resorts to a pathetic attempt to make sense of the situation. This story left me wondering if the human mind can ever grasp one that is alien.

James Morrow's sardonic "Abe Lincoln in McDonald's" is a knockout alternative-history extrapolation on "if the South had won. Lincoln, on the verge of compromising with Jefferson Davis to end the Civil War quickly just before the tide-turning Battle of Gettysburg, travels to 2010. He witnesses the consequences of letting the secessionist states back in the Union on their terms: a hightech nation with Negro slavery. The descendants of his generals are abusive slaveholders, paranoid that their chatels are spreading a viral epidemic known as Blue Nile Fever (which sounds a lot like you-know-what). The ending is a real kicker.

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Brian Stableford's thought-provoking "Magic Bullet" powerfully blends a detective story with "we've created a monster" Science Fiction. Who shot Dr. Morgan Miller, a geneticist dismissed by the scientific community as a reclusive eccentric? Who firebombed his colony of lab mice, a recombinant DNA experiment that failed—or did it? As he lies on his deathbed, the forensic scientist Dr. Lisa Friemann—his lover and therefore a suspect—searches for clues. What she discovers blows her mind, and quite likely a reader's.

SWORDS AGAINST DARKNESS

edited by Andrew J. Offutt; Zebra, 1990 (orig. published 1977); 288 pp; Paperback \$3.95 (\$4.95 Canada)

If you're into sword and sorcery, and bewail the lack of short fiction therein, this anthology might well appeal to you—even though the stories vary widely in direction and quality.

Works in the nice-try department include the poorly constructed "Largarut's Bane" by Raul Garcia Capella. Its only distinction is that the protagonist has, for this subgenre, an unusual occupation—fisherman.

Editor Offutt claims "Nekht Semerkeht" is probably the last story Robert E. Howard wrote. Because it was left incomplete, Offutt finished it. In the beleaguered but defiant Hernando de Guzman, a 16th-century conquistador separated from his companions and wandering amidst a myriad of perils north of the Rio Grande, one might glimpse his creator's state of mind just before Howard gave in to his inner demons. Otherwise, the story is unremarkable. Told more than shown, it concerns de Guzman's stumbling upon a lost Aztec city guarded by the magic of a ruthless and undying wizard from ancient Egypt. The protagonist is convincing, but the plot isn't.

Why is "Pride of the Fleet," set on a colony planet during a hightech future, in this anthology? Presumably because the characters fight with swords—it's "fashionable"; that's all the explanation we get. Author Bruce Jones wrote and drew the "Red Sonja" graphic novel periodicals (we're not supposed to call them comic books). Here Sheffield, a scantily-clad female soldier (what a stretch! must track down a deserter. He

stole a device so secret her superiors won't fill her in on it. This story is in line with male fantasies of bellicose broads in bikinis, not real feminism.

Now for the stories that work. Manly Wade Wellman's entertaining "Straggler from Atlantis" recounts the adventures of Kardios, a survivor of that antediluvian disaster, among a race of giants. They need a normalized human to slip into the well wherein hides their nemesis, an amorphous alien—sort of a cousin to *The Blob*.

Ramsey Campbell's atmospheric "The Sustenance of Hoak" combines S & S with botanical Horror. A mercenary searching for a legendary treasure finds at his destination a town of enervated, apathetic (and pathetic) victims of a godlike tree-creature. The powerful premise is, well, sapped by the cold, turgid style; but the narrative eventually bears fruit.



"The Smile of Oisia" by Geo. (sic) W. Proctor is a colorful, fast-paced, two-fisted Howard-style adventure. An expatriate prince, a second-rate sorceress, and a desert mercenary team up to steal a magic mask, held by a wealthy merchant who sacrifices virgins to gain the Goddess of Fortune's favor. Really, folks, it's better than it sounds.

Poul Anderson's "The Tale of Hauk," about a bedeviled viking who dies mysteriously and then won't stay dead, is weak on substance—a rarity for this author—but strong on style. He employs diction, cadences, and imagery reminiscent of Norse sagas and verses, and in a vocabulary composed almost exclusively of words of Anglo-Saxon origin. The effect is entrancing, making for prose that reads almost like poetry.

"Dragon's Teeth" by David Drake is one of many stories he's written about Vettius, a fourth-century Roman army officer trying to stem the decay of the empire. In a frontier skirmish, he goes mano-a-mano against an oversized freak

who, from our modern viewpoint, seems to be a resurrected Neanderthal. Now Vettius must stop the renegade wizard who's bringing an army of them to life.

My favorite story is another bizarre extrapolation on Roman history, Richard L. Tierney's "The Ring of Set." Simon of Gitta, a wily Egyptian occult scholar, desperately tries to regain a magic ring. If worn by a ruler, it can unleash the powers of the evil god Set—and it falls into, or rather onto, the hands of the emperor Tiberius. Complications include a figure here identified as the emperor's grand-nephew Gaius—i. e. Caligula. This is hearty adventure in the best pulp tradition—full of action, wonder, and vivid characters, with a likeable and courageous protagonist who invites reader identification.

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION #473

October 1990

Edward L. Ferman, Editor/Publisher. Monthly, digest size, colored front cover, 162 pages. Sample: \$2.00. One-year subscription: \$21.00 US, \$26.00 foreign (Canadian subscribers: please remit in US dollars or add 30%) Address: Box 56 Cornwall Conn 06753

This issue is fronted by a splendid Alex Schomberg starship cover. In my review I'll first get out of the way two turkeys, both devoid of Fantasy.

In Bradley Denton's nasty-minded "Jimmy Blackburn Flies a Kite," the eleven-year-old title character gets revenge on the neighborhood bully through an elaborate scheme in which the former kidnaps and abuses an infant. So I wonder, if he's precocious enough to hatch such a plot, why can't he figure out a more constructive solution to his problems?

Bruce Sterling's "Hollywood Kremlin," which has nothing to do with filmmaking in the USSR, pays about as much attention to plot, characterization, and overall point. Amidst the Soviet pull-out from Afghanistan and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, a coterie of smugglers must find fuel for the military aircraft flown by one of their number so he can return it to home base before anyone notices it's missing. The wisecracky tone neutralizes the tension. Instead of action or drama, we get cardboard char-

acters making cynical topical observations couched in American slang—what passes here for real social commentary.

This last concern is served far better in Philip Jose Farmer's poignant "One Down, One to Go." Charlie Roth is a social worker whose job is to persuade welfare recipients to get sterilized in return for government bonuses. He gradually realizes this population control tactic is a failure, and why. The narrative works in vivid insect imagery, fitting in that the protagonist is an amateur entomologist and the Malthusian nightmare he faces has parallels in the arthropod world.

"Invaders" by John Kessel relates in alternative scenes two contrasting invasions: Pizarro's conquest of the Incas and a near-future hostile takeover. Aliens called the Krel—remember the 1956 movie *Forbidden Planet?*--and dressed as The Flash land on Earth to buy merchandise ranging from fine art to cocaine. At first Terrans think they're benefitting from the expenditure. In fact, by flooding the world's markets with easy money the aliens cause economic disaster. The story, replete with in-jokes, is vivid and clever; however, all this doesn't tie together on a conscious or subconscious level. Kessel never makes his point clear--or does he have one?

In Sheri S. Tepper's Horror story "The Gazebo," a household drudge gets back at her sanctimonious husband for foisting on her the care of two impossible orphans. The payoff is clever, but the buildup is too long. The story relies on the awkward technique of withholding until the end information the narrator knew all along.

The title figure in Mike Resnick's "Frankie the Spook" is a computer simulacrum of Sir Francis Bacon created by Marvin Piltch, a silicon jockey who aspires to fame as an author of sleazy bestsellers—a hacker turned hack, you might say. He appeals to Bacon's vanity to persuade him to write works with Marvin's byline; thus Bacon does for Marvin what he allegedly did for you-know-who. This lampoon on big publishing, artistic venality, and public gullibility squarely hits deserving targets.

My favorite story is by the least-known author, judging by the fact that he's the only one--aside from the reviewers--whose name is left off the front cover: "A Down East Storm" by

Hilbert Schenck. Caleb Johnson, a flinty old Maine lobster fisherman, is forced by circumstance to sell most of his beloved private island to a greedy developer, who wants to build on it summer homes for New York yuppies. But Caleb's cagey lawyer gives him an electronic device that transmits negative vibes about the island to potential buyers of individual lots. It edges the developer toward Chapter Eleven, and only Caleb will buy back the property. But just when he thinks he's won. . . . The merits of this work include an appealing underdog protagonist and other carefully delineated characters; a tight, fluid plot with neat twists; an imaginative SF invention put to credible use; and a socially relevant subtext on economic exploitation. The author makes his story locally colorful without being cliché'd or condescending.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE
FICTION MAGAZINE #164
December 1990

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Gardner Dozois, Editor. Lunar monthly, digest size, colored front cover, 192 pages. Sample: \$2.00. One-year subscription: \$34.95 US, \$39.65 foreign (in US funds)

Michael Whelan contributes a lovely fantasy-woman cover. I'll pass over some filler-like short shorts and get to the real stories--but the two weakest are the longest.

The central theme of Judith Moffett's "The Ragged Rock"--can one alter destiny?--has possibilities, but at novella length the narrative is deadly dull. A teenager is in despair (which the author fails to convey) because his best friend was killed in a nuclear plant meltdown. He travels to the radioactive disaster zone to commit suicide; some unconvincing aliens have other plans for him. This story is for readers who can be fascinated by endless logistics concerning a solar-powered-motorbike journey.

Mark W. Tiedemann's novelette "Targets" is--well, imagine a cross between *The Six Million Dollar Man* and the Spanish sequence in *THE SUN ALSO*

RISES. In Pamplona, a seeming prostitute--really a secret agent for an obnoxious megacorporation--hides a defector from a rival company--really a cyborg. The cold minimalism and focus on brutality make for unpleasant reading.

Three other lemons are at least briefer. Cherry Wilder's "A Woman's Ritual" is another abused-woman-gets-revenge story, here tied to Celtic paganism. "Evenings, Mornings, Afternoons" by Bridget McKenna is a lifeless vignette about an old man's obsession with mermaids. Phillip C. Jennings' talky, silly "The Gadarene Dig" is your typical archaeologists-find-giant-serpent-from-outer-space yarn.

"Flood Tide" by Mary Rosenblum is part adventure (exciting), part family drama (dull). During a sailboat race, an oceanologist can't persuade his son to drop out of a perilous one-way space mission, and therefore resorts to a dangerous ploy.

The best three stories are comedies with serious overtones. The most hilarious is Sharon N. Farber's nutty "Space Aliens Saved My Marriage," in which supermarket tabloid stories are real. Several unfold as a housewife discovers a giant meteor is heading for Earth. What really happened to Elvis's allegedly stillborn twin? Inquiring minds will want to read this!

In Connie Willis's witty and imaginative "Cibola," a Denver journalist interviews an eccentric old woman who claims she's descended from Coronado's Indian guide--and like him, she can show the way to the Seven Cities of Gold. The down-to-earth concerns of the protagonist, reporting on (and enduring) urban growth problems, provide an effective counterpoint to the fantastic main theme. Both tie together in the breathtaking finale.

Brian Stableford's sensitive "Bedside Conversations" relates how a gay man finds himself with child--his own twin who didn't develop in their mother's womb, but is doing so now. Will he carry the fetus to term with surgical modification to his own body? Have it transplanted to a surrogate mother, human or mechanical? Or maybe--I'll say no more. The brief narrative encompasses several thought-provoking issues--sexual preference, high tech aids to reproduction, family relationships, and medical ethics. ∞

A Role of the Dice

by
Gene Semar

Hero Games

CHAMPIONS IN 3-D
Editor Rob Dell

The newest addition to the Hero System covers the topic of interdimensional travel and adventures. It covers how to design alternate worlds and includes five fully designed examples and a bunch of outlined possibilities.

The first part covers how to set up an alternate world campaign. It starts with the basic purpose of the scenario and goes into genre conventions like historic breakpoints and time differences. An example of the first is the classic "What if the Nazis won idea. Time differences means the characters could land in a world where time runs slowly enough that it is only A.D. 600 and king Arthur still rules Camelot.

Actually designing an alternate dimension is a matter of deciding what is changed and why it changed. 3-D suggests starting with a "spark," a thought or notion that grabs you and begin the detailing and specific scenario-planning from there. It is basic stuff for an experienced GM, but it never hurts to be reminded of the basics. If sparks start to fade they thoughtfully included a Random Dimension Generator to provide hours of fun.

The fully designed dimensions include the classic "bits" i.e. Dreamzone, the dimension that all sleepers enter occasionally; Nazi World, where the question I asked two paragraphs back gets its really depressing answer; and Back World, a place where the player characters find their evil counterparts in

a world too near their own in style. Horror World and Fantasy World complete the package. Each world comes with a complete adventure (tailored to superhero level) and several plot hooks. Of course you should feel free to tone down the opposition to allow mere mortals to experience the thrills of dimension-hopping without a map.

The last part of 3-D is titled "Short Dimensions" and that's what it is: twenty-six single page background and scenario ideas, ranging from Cartoon World (and well the heros may ask "What's up doc?) to (picked at random) Japanese World, an alternate where Imperial Japan has ruled the Pacific Rim since 1850 -- yes that includes the West coast of North and Central America.

This is a good source not only for ideas on a dimension-hopping campaign but also ideas for adventures in a world almost or totally unlike the mundane world. It could be used for designing new worlds for explorers in an SF adventure -- after all *Star Trek* got away with it (and still does). I'd have to say there are many alternate uses for this book (Ouch, sorry).

R. Talsorian Games, Inc.

NEAR ORBIT

This supplement to *Cyberpunk* covers the New Frontier, from low orbit to the Moon. It's contents include background, environment, equipment, life in space and an adventure to introduce groundhugging punks to this brave new world.

The background ties into the main *Cyberpunk* timeline and describes the

situation as of 2013. It is in a word, tense. Groundside tensions find their way to the colonies and create even more problems given the fragile conditions of life in space. On top of that, Highriders, those either born in space or who have lived there most of their lives, are beginning to wonder why Earth's problems should be their problems.

As to the environment, it's like the chapter teaser says: "In space your most dangerous opponent is yourself". The vital Triad as every clobber knows is Pressure, Gravity and Radiation. The effects both long and short term are well covered. Gravity includes space sickness and psychological problems and solutions to long term physical effects and what happens if you don't take your pills. Pressure, don't leave home without it. Putting bullet holes in a pressure vessel's skin is a death sentence (for good examples review *Outland*). Hulls are just too thin to tolerate the usual trigger-happy activity of typical punks. Radiation is the last but not least deadly. In fact, radiation will kill swiftly and with no warning unless the characters take precautions.

The equipment section covers how to get where you're going (no Beanstalk yet, but they are working on it). Personal equipment covers space suits, tools and "safe" weapons. The various habitats, from workstations to the Crystal Palace (the largest structure in space), are described. Rules and guidelines for space travel and vehicle combat are also in this chapter.



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The chapter on living in space covers the origin and lifestyle of the Highriders. It includes new skills and changes in the character design from Cyberpunk to allow the players to make Highrider characters.

The final chapter is an adventure that will get the characters mixed up in orbital politics and these almost alien children of the stars. It takes up nearly half the total pages of "Near Orbit and will present mystery and thrills in equal measure.

Steve Jackson Games

AERODUEL by Craig Sheely

Now you can get your CAR WARS game off the ground in a big way. The rules cover design and combat for all the flying machines available in the Autoduelling World. That ranges from a 200 pound microlight to a 25 ton airship. The helicopter rules are reprinted here as well. To keep these flying fools in line, jet fighters are included. They are too expensive for anyone but governments and major corporations and their speed and firepower is designed to keep the riff-raff out of very private airspaces.

Designing aircraft is the same in general as designing any vehicle in CAR WARS. You agree on a money limit, pick a body style and fill it with equipment until you run out of money, spaces or hit the weight limit. The obvious differences in airplane designing are wings and their various modifications (for better speed, increased max load, etc.) and propellers of several types. Helicopters, and airships are also straightforward. Only a few obviously car-only or boat-only pieces of equipment from the other CAR WARS products cannot be used to beef up the aircraft. The complications of CAR WARS only come into effect when you go overboard on accessories and exotic weapons, so pick a degree of complexity all the players can live with and stick with it. A bunch of exotic flying machines are covered in less detail in the design section. Things like autogyros, carplanes, free balloons and rocket packs are included here.

Movement rules cover most of the plain and fancy flying tactics any in-

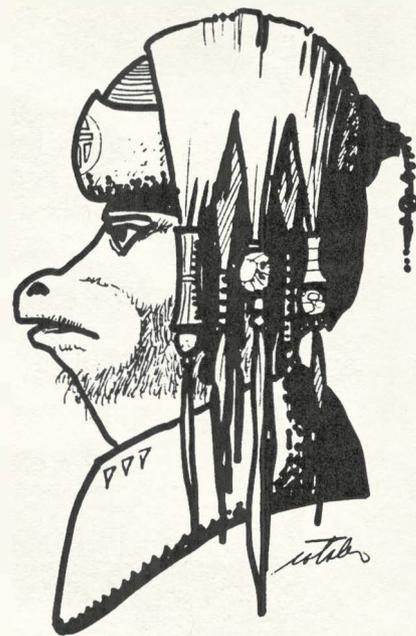
trepid (or crazy) pilot will need to get into his enemy's "six." It also covers some other details like blackout in high-G turns and seeking shelter from the storm. The Crash Tables have a new section just for winged craft: the soon-to-be-infamous Wing Check. A great way to get back on the ground fast! One good change is a change in scale distance when only aircraft are involved. This keeps the planes on the map despite their high speeds. The Air-To-Air Scale is 1/4" = 15'.

Combat has no changes but there are two new styles for air-to-ground attacks: bombing and strafing. Bombing is mostly a grosser form of grenade throwing rules (except for torpedo runs) and strafing is a form of automatic fire, so no major rules changes are needed to accommodate them. Of course the ground targets were not left helpless. In addition to the fairly common universal-traverse turrets already in the rules, full-tilt AA (anti-aircraft) mounts are covered. AA mounts let the ground pounders pour massive amounts of firepower in a short time -- the only way to hit a fast airplane.

The whole package is a boxed set with a rules book, two map sheets depicting an airport terminal area and two sheets of full color counters. I do have one complaint about the counters. Nowhere in the rules can I find any mention of what size counter equals what category of plane. Other than that, Aeroduel is a well assembled supplement.

CAR WARS, A NEW ORIGIN by Chad Irby and Steve Jackson (Fourth Edition)

Somewhere in the dim, antedeluvian past of gaming two men came together to create history . . . or is that overstating the matter? Anyhow, in 1981 Steve Jackson's then new game company released a small game called CAR WARS. It came packaged in a 7" by 4" plastic zip-top bag and consisted of a 24 page rule book, two sheets (8 1/2" by 11" I think) of tables and road sections to cut up, and a small sheet of full color (a really big deal then) counters. To say that it became a very popular game is totally understating the rapid rise and success of CAR WARS from then to now.



The result of that success has been an expansion of CAR WARS via new rules, a flood of supplements and a quarterly magazine.

Some people look at this mass of material and, while they may want to try CAR WARS they are put off by the sheer size. A few who have been playing CAR WARS for years are feeling overloaded as equipment lists expand and rules change extensively. Never fear, your cries have been heard. The Fourth Edition CAR WARS is a return to the basics.

Of course there are changes. The rules are basic versions of the present system and fully upward compatible with the CAR WARS COMPENDIUM and all recent supplements. This new issue is packed in a 9" by 5 3/4" box and contains a 65 page rule book, a master sheet of vehicle records, a map with an arena on one side and a figure eight track on the other side. It is topped off with a sheet of full color counters.

I'm not going to go into detail about the rules. I will say that the game has lost none of it's fun and still delivers the thrills of the original. So if you want to get in on the fun this is the place to start. The nice thing is you don't need to go any further into the details of CAR WARS than this to get the flavor. Of course some different weapons would be nice and what about some other vehicles, like airplanes. . . . Sorry, I got carried away by the possibilities. ∞

Norm's Notes

by

Norm Hartman

Once again we furnish you with a very mixed bag of books for your reading enjoyment. Most of them come under the heading of "journey" novels, or at least of that sub-genre's subdivision, tales of adventures in primitive lands. First on the list, and highly recommended to anyone who has read the first three books in the series, is the latest installment of Jean Auel's Earth's Children saga, *PLAINS OF PASSAGE*. Next, though already reviewed by others in previous issues, is Poul Anderson's journey through time, *THE BOAT OF A MILLION YEARS*. Having read it, I could not resist this chance to tell my readers to buy it, read it, and recommend it to their friends. A sub-set of the journey novel is that of the primitive world adventure (see *CARSON OF VENUS*, in the following review). A reasonable example of this sub-sub-genre is Donald McQuinn's second novel, *WARRIOR*.

In a completely different vein is a pair of books from Karen Haber and her husband, Robert Silverberg, *THE MUTANT SEASON* and *THE MUTANT PRIME*. These are the only books in this collection which are set in the near future, against a highly technological background. Welcome back to the world of main-line hard-core Science Fiction!

Finally, I present you with a book that is completely different from the rest, a book that very emphatically makes me eat my earlier (Norm's Notes, SFR #1) criticisms of the genre known as Magical Realism. This novel is Kate Wilhelm's latest, and certainly one of her best, *CAMBIO BAY*.

• • •

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PLAINS OF PASSAGE by Jean Auel;
Crown Publishers, October 1990;
760 pp; Hardcover \$24.95

An ancient and honorable tradition in the field of speculative fiction is the "journey" book. As old as *THE ODYSSEY*, or older, it is basically the account of a person or group's travels through an unfamiliar landscape, and the wonders that they encounter along the way. This sub-genre includes such disparate literary gems as *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*, *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*, *AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS*, Tolkien's *THE HOBBIT* and *LORD OF THE RINGS*, Alice's *ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND* and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *CARSON OF VENUS* series.

The latest addition to this well-loved group comes from that prominent Oregon author, Jean Auel. Her latest installment of her Earth's Children saga, *PLAINS OF PASSAGE* hews closely to the conventions of the journey story as Ayla, with her faithful companion Tonto . . . I mean, Jondalar travel across the largely unpopulated wastes of prehistoric Eurasia with their horses, Whinny and Racer, and their pet wolf, Wolf. (When your pet is the first of its kind in the entire history of the human race, it is not necessary to be too inventive when it comes to names.)

While not quite up to the high dramatic standard set by *CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR*, the first book in the series, *PLAINS OF PASSAGE* struck me as a definite improvement on Ms. Auel's second and third books, *VALLEY OF THE HORSES* and *THE MAMMOTH HUNTERS*. Let me qualify the preceding statement: *PLAINS OF PASSAGE* is better and worse, both more and less enjoyable than her previous efforts. Worse, because the book

has less of a plot than the others; by its very nature a "journey" book is likely to have a less complex plot than similar non-journey books, travelling in something of a straight line from beginning to end. Many readers will decide that there is simply too much in the way of descriptive passages, too many scenes that do nothing more than to move the characters from one location to another. Still, the scenery is magnificent, the descriptions of teeming masses of wild animals such as we have never seen, and will almost certainly never see for ourselves, are mind-boggling in their strangeness and grandeur. Ms. Auel, in her 'Acknowledgements' at the end of the book, states, ". . . the "travel book," has been both the most difficult and the most interesting (of the four) to read and to write. . . ." I can only stand in awe of the mind that did the research needed to make these novels possible, whether her interpretations of current theories are technically accurate or not. The most stringent quibble that I had was of Ms. Auel's tendency to set up dramatic confrontations and other highly-charged situations, then to defuse them at the end of the book by letting them simply fade away. The problem of Ayla's upbringing by Neanderthals is one such case, and by the end of this book it seems to have mostly evaporated. Of course, it will probably be revived in Book Five, but its lack of resolution in Book Four was a considerable disappointment.

On the other hand the story, what there is of it, is well done, and the writing has improved by all-but imperceptible gradations from the first of the series to the end of this book. This is not meant as a criticism of Ms. Auel as a writer; after four novels, somewhere in the vicinity of a million and a half words, it would be strange indeed if her skills had not been honed to an even sharper edge than when she began. The story, while not skimping on the interpersonal relationships that lend it much of its richness, utilizes less of the wealth of clinical sexual details that many readers of her earlier works found excessive.

A frequently-heard criticism of books such as these is that the multitude of inventions attributed to one or a few people is highly unrealistic. In

reality, these critics would say, such inventions as the spear-thrower, the use of flint and iron pyrites to start fires, the taming of horses and wolves (and rabbits and cave-lions), the grinding of flour to make biscuits, and all of the other pivotal inventions chronicled in these pages would have been discovered by many different people, and these discoveries would have stretched over eons of time. They are probably right, but so what? The events chronicled here could have taken place more or less as described, over a fairly short span of time. Are our own histories of past ages any more correct in their minor details?

Anyway, the main invention detailed in this fourth volume seems to be the discovery of how to make soap (and perhaps mammoth-leather horse shoes). Remember, though, that there are still two volumes yet to come in this series. It seems highly possible that these will reveal even more technological advances, some of them lost to us in the mists of time, either from the minds of Ayla and Jondalar or from those they come in contact with. I have heard rumors that there is a small tribe, somewhere in the higher hills to the south who have discovered how to make and use hang-gliders, and there is always the possibility of inventing the (horse-powered?) paddle-wheeled steamer. . . .

BOAT OF A MILLION YEARS
by Poul Anderson;
TOR, November 1989; 470 pp;
Hardcover \$19.95

This book has been covered earlier for this magazine, so I will only add one comment of my own. Once again we have a masterful work of literature from an experienced, highly skilled writer. This story of the adventures of a small band of immortals, ranging from before the birth of Christ to and beyond the nanotech and space age, is certainly deserving of the highest honors. Buy this one to read, reread, and keep on your shelf of favorites. I'm sure that some day, when storms are raging outside and you have exhausted your stock of unread Science Fiction and Fantasy, you will be glad that you have this excellent book to return to and enjoy.

WARRIOR by Donald E. McQuinn;
Ballantine/Del Rey, November 1990;
683 pp; Trade Paperback \$8.95

According to the cover letter accompanying this advance copy, this is Mr. McQuinn's second novel. I was a bit surprised; it seemed more like a first novel to me. I report on this novel with mixed feelings; I did not really like it all that much, finding flaws of plotting and execution that frequently made me drop it in mid-page, yet it was powerful enough to keep me coming back time after time until I finally finished it. I do not expect to re-read it, however.

This post-holocaust story is set in the Pacific Northwest, the time is some five to ten centuries in the future, and the setting is best described as similar to that found by the earliest explorers and fur trappers who first scouted this area. The technological level is somewhat above that of the Indians, more of a feudal society than a hunter-gatherer culture. This scenario is complicated by a small group of sleepers, armed with a handful of ultra-modern weapons, who wake from cryogenic storage as the story begins.

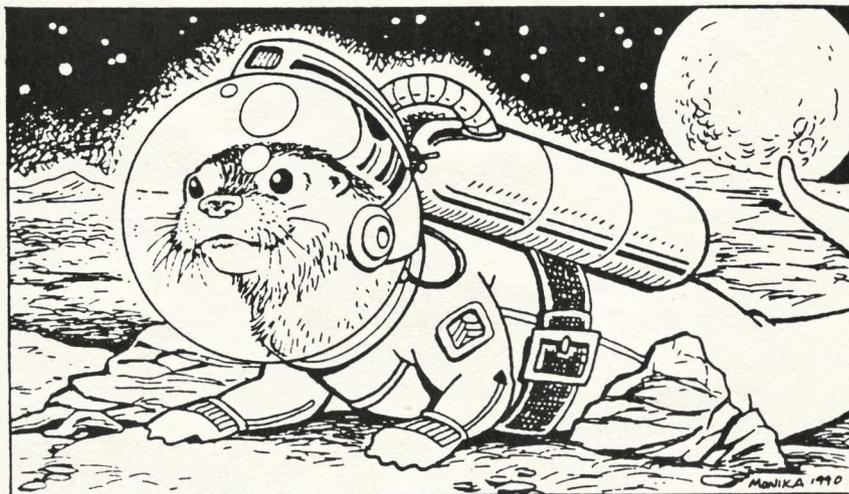
The story suffers from the presence of too many plot lines, with none of the stories really taking precedence over any of the others. The characters are well enough drawn for a story of this kind, but even the central character, one Gan Moondark, is not vivid enough to overshadow the others. The result is a story that is too long, that lacks cohesiveness, that is too easy to put down at the slightest provocation. Yet it draws

the reader back to its pages. At the end, several plots are left unresolved, as though to leave room for at least one sequel. I really cannot recommend **WARRIOR** very highly, but neither can I warn the reader against it. Pick it up, try it if you wish, but don't blame me if it isn't to your personal taste.

THE MUTANT SEASON
by Robert Silverberg & Karen Haber;
Bantam/Spectra, October 1990;
289 pp; Paperback \$4.95.

THE MUTANT PRIME by Karen Haber,
introduction by Robert Silverberg;
Doubleday, October 1990;
241 pp; Hardcover \$19.95;
Trade Paperback \$8.95.

THE MUTANT SEASON and **THE MUTANT PRIME** are the first two volumes of a four book set. **THE MUTANT PRIME** was sent to me for review, but I wasn't able to get started reading it. I found too much of it somewhat incomprehensible without having first read **MUTANT SEASON**. The book sat on my shelf and was ignored for almost a month, until I ran across **The Mutant Season** in paperback form on a nearby newsstand. I quickly bought it, then sat down to read both books in their proper order. I am happy to announce that, taken as a continuing story, the books are very interesting and well worth reading. The story is an old one, a tale of mutants who have lived among us for lo, these many years. Now they have come out of hiding, and face all of the hatreds and repressions common to highly visible minorities all through



Earth's long history. I would guess that even a mis-colored tribe of dinosaurs would have been feared and hated by their more conventional brethren, and it is plain from the most cursory reading of headlines that those same social dinosaurs are with us to this day.

Not that these mutants, distinguished from the rest of humanity by their oddly-colored eyes (golden, no less (shades of Doc Savage!)) and set off by their possession of high intelligence, along with telepathy, telekinesis and other ESP-type talents, are a homogeneous mini-society. They have their own internal schisms and differences of opinions. They also have inborn disadvantages sufficient to offset many of their strengths; for instance, their naturally short life spans are frequently exacerbated by mental disorders which cut many of them down even sooner than normal. Their skills and talents are feared by "normal" folk, even as they are exploited by a hostile society. Most mutants have only a single talent, such as telepathy or levitation; only a special few have double talents. The true multi-talented supermutant (though foreshadowed in Book Two) is still off in the future, and I would expect him/her to make an appearance by the end of Book Four

The hardcover version of *THE MUTANT SEASON* was published in November, 1989 by Doubleday. I would guess that it is still available, in case anyone wants to collect the complete set in hard covers.

This mini-epic is not a classic, and my guess is that by far most of the writing is Karen Haber's, rather than Bob Silverberg's. Still, it is well written and interesting, even though it covers too much well-trodden territory. Get the Book One in this tetralogy (teratology?), and read it and Book Two in their proper order.

CAMBIO BAY by Kate Wilhelm;
St. Martin's Press, March, 1990;
294 pp; Hardcover \$17.95.

Kate Wilhelm's latest novel *CAMBIO BAY* is even stranger than her previous ones. This is not intended as a criticism; by strange I mean strange and wonderful, strange and fantastic, strange and savage, strange and fearful, strange and tender and wise. Building

on a firm foundation of magic and ancient Indian legend, Ms. Wilhelm has served up to us a rich feast of action and imagery, of ordinary people caught up in something that twists and shapes their very souls.

This novel is certainly not Science Fiction, and it would be difficult to make it fit into the conventional limits of the Fantasy genre; I'm afraid that it falls altogether too close for comfort into the classification known as Magical Realism. Yet, it does not really fit comfortably within that category, either; it is too well worked out, its illogicalities too logically crafted. I can only say this of *CAMBIO BAY*; buy it, read it, tell your friends about it. If Pat Murphy's award-winning novel *FALLING WOMAN* was Magical Realism, then so is this, only better done. If Magical Realism is about the intrusion of fantastic and magical elements into the lives of ordinary people, then this book certainly fits that description, but in this book the magic makes sense in its own terms, the Fantasy elements are not simply an emotional mish-mash that is coherent only to one who shares the writer's hang-ups. *CAMBIO BAY* is a

look at life that is at once more magical, yet more real, than reality itself. This is not, perhaps, a book that Jorge Luis Borges would have written, but I think that it is one that he would have thoroughly enjoyed.

Parenthetically, I have listened to Kate explain how she works; one of her primary steps in the writing process is to draw plans and maps of the "stage" her story occupies. The houses and rooms her characters move through are drawn out in exact detail. I would be absolutely fascinated to see her drawings of the floor plans of and landscaping around Miss Luisa's Guest House!

Now, a note to authors and publishers who read this column: If you would like to have your books reviewed here, please send copies (pre-publication copies if possible) to me at the following address:

Norm's Notes
c/o Norman E. Hartman
9867 SW Kable St.
Tigard, OR 97224

∞



Once Over Lightly

by

Gene DeWeese

THE LEGION OF SPACE
by Jack Williamson;
Collier; Paperback \$4.95

Believe it or not, though I've been reading SF since the forties and own not only the 1947 Fantasy Press edition but also the issues of *ASTOUNDING* in which it was serialized, I've never until now actually read *THE LEGION OF SPACE*. As a result, it was all new to me, not just an adventure in nostalgia, and I was thoroughly surprised at what I found.

For the few others who have managed to avoid it all these years, the story itself is simple enough. About a thousand years in the future, a couple members of the once-ruling Ulnar family make a backstabbing deal with the Medusae, an ancient Lovecraftian race from Barnard's Star, in order to once again become rulers of the solar system. The only thing that stands in their way is a super and supersecret weapon known only as AKKA, the details of which are known only to one person, the lovely Aladoree, supposedly under the protection of the Legion. Two of the Ulnars, however, both high up in the Legion, betray her to the Medusae, and it's up to John, the youngest of the Ulnars and the newest recruit to the Legion, to join up with three Legion veterans to save not only Aladoree but the Legion, Earth, and the Solar System. One of the three, as even those who haven't read it know, is the eloquently self-pitying Giles Habibula, who also turns out to be the best lockpicker in the known universe and one of the main reasons they succeed in their quest.

As for the surprises I found— for a start, there was the everpresent purple prose, as for example from page 95:

"... its blood-red rays smote to their very brains, with a stark impact of fateful menace." It's not exactly what I was expecting from the man who, only a few years later, wrote that much more sedate classic, *THE HUMANOIDS*.

For another, I was used to the space operas of Doc Smith (whose *SKYLARK OF VALERON* was running in *ASTOUNDING* about the same time), whose cardboard heroes usually made tremendous scientific discoveries every few pages and ended up being nice, self-effacing masters of the universe without having to work up too much of a sweat. In *LEGION OF SPACE*, on the other hand, there are no inventions at all, and, while the hero of course wins out in the end, he and his comrades are put through hell from virtually first page to last. It's pure adventure, going from one desperate situation to another even more desperate one without letup. The only comparison I can think of would be that well-known cartoon wherein the two emaciated prisoners are chained next to each other on a dungeon wall several feet above the floor, and one turns to the other and says, "Here's my plan." That's essentially where *LEGION* starts, and the next thing you know, the floor rolls back and there's a tank of sharks below, and then the walls start closing in, and a window opens up and someone starts using the two guys for laser pistol target practice.

None of which is meant as a putdown, just as an effort to get across an idea of what the book is like. I thoroughly enjoyed it, partly because of the adventure, partly because I kept wondering just what else could possibly

be done to these guys to get them into even deeper trouble in the next chapter. And partly because, as in some of Arnold Schwarzenegger's movies, the corn was laid on so thick it would be almost impossible not to respond.

This is another in Collier's "Nucleus SF and Fantasy" series, and it shouldn't be missed. As a matter of fact, none of that series should be missed.

LOVECRAFT'S LEGACY
Edited by Robert E. Weinberg
& Martin H. Greenberg
Tor; Hardback \$18.95

For Lovecraft's 100th birthday, here are thirteen new stories, as the jacket says, "in the Lovecraftian tradition." Not all are in HPL's style, however. There is, for instance, Gene Wolfe's "Lord of the Land," a sort of short midwestern version of the movie, *The Hidden*, only here the creature is called the Soul Sucker and it's been around a long time.

Definitely in HPL style is Brian McNaughton's "Meryphillia," which could be called "Romeo and Juliet for Ghouls." These aren't your standard ghouls, particularly the title character, a beautiful girl who died young and is still capable of love and other emotions ghouls are supposed to have left behind.

Mort Castle's "A Secret of the Heart" isn't so much a story as the premise for one, but its style and mood are enough for an enjoyable few minutes.

Graham Masterton involves Shakespeare with the elder gods in "Will," and Chet Williamson, in "From the Papers of Helmut Hecker," brings HPL himself back in the form of — what else? — a cat of Providence.

Ray Garton's "The Other Man" has a slightly disappointing ending, but the trip to that ending is a nicely chilling story of the dangers of out-of-body travel, and it has the grabbiest opening line of the year: "My wife's body was empty again."

There isn't a real disappointment anywhere in the book, and each story has an afterword by the author, mostly their thoughts on HPL, his life and his influence on others. Most interesting of the non-fiction, however, is the introduction by Robert Bloch, in the form of an open letter to HPL, with whom Bloch

actually corresponded in the last few years of his life. It makes you think of what Lovecraft's life might really have been like, and it's likely to inspire you, as it did me, to dig out and probably burrow through L. Sprague deCamp's biography of Lovecraft.

GOLDEN FLEECE by Robert J. Sawyer;
Questar/Popular Library;
Paperback \$4.50

Narrated almost entirely by a "TenthGen" ship's computer named JASON, GOLDEN FLEECE is both a first-contact story and a sort of a space-going Columbo turned inside out. That is, from the first chapter on, you know who the killer is (JASON), and you know how he/it murdered the victim (tricked her into a shuttle and launched the shuttle into the hard radiation surrounding the near-light-speed ramscoop). Through JASON's multitudinous eyes, you follow the ex-husband of the victim as he figures it out for himself and tries to outwit the seemingly omnipotent killer. What you don't know until near the end is the reason for JASON's actions, the reason for some of what happened to the victim out in space before the shuttle was hauled back aboard, and what the aliens, whose message arrived at earth shortly before the launch, are really up to.

The human characters are adequate, but JASON is excellent and his fast-paced and sometimes witty, sometimes naive narration keeps you turning the pages all the way to the end. It's really unfortunate that the whole thing is seriously undermined within a few pages of that end, when the solution to most of the major mysteries proves to be a scientific howler worthy of a fifties "sci fi" movie. This is all the more of a shock because of the seemingly hard-science gloss given to the mechanics of the starship and the translation of the alien message.

So, if you're able to ignore the "solution," read and enjoy. Maybe you'll even be able to find some kind of rationalization for it, although I haven't as yet. In any event, it would be a shame to miss out on JASON's story just because the whole thing turns out to be as impossible as a lot of the old *Star Trek* episodes.

PRIME DIRECTIVE

by Garfield & Judith Reeves-Stevens
read by James Doohan; Simon &
Schuster Audioworks; \$14.95

In this 180-minute adaptation of their own *Star Trek* novel, the authors tell how Captain Kirk lost his command because he supposedly triggered a nuclear war by violating the Prime Directive and interfering in a pre-contact world's affairs. With the crew scattered throughout the galaxy, the *Enterprise* half-destroyed in the war, things look bleak until Spock manages to get the case reopened and the crew reassembled, at which point they set out to find out who or what was *really* responsible for the destruction. No one will be surprised to learn that they succeed, though some may be mildly startled by the identity and nature of the "who or what."

Somewhat reminiscent of the first *Star Trek* movie, PRIME DIRECTIVE pushes all the listener's buttons when it tells of the crew's separation and their emotional reunion, their loyalty and respect for each other, and their reasons for being in Starfleet in the first place. With its action and suspense, however, it would make a considerably better movie, say at least on a par with *Two and Three, Wrath of Khan* and *Search for Spock*.

Stardust by Robert B. Parker;
read by Burt Reynolds; Simon &
Schuster Audioworks; \$14.95.

On audio tape, I've finally decided, is the ideal way to experience the new, post-TV Spenser. At least I enjoyed this one quite a bit more this way than I did a couple other recent ones in book form, possibly because Spenser and Hawk seem to have changed and softened until they're closer to the TV characters than to the ones Parker originally created. (Or maybe I'm just getting lazy.)

This time Spenser is hired to protect Jill Joyce, a highly-paid, high-strung, and highly self-destructive actress whose TV image is early Julie Andrews. Before it's over, Spenser has uncovered the usual quota of secrets, including an ex-husband, a gangster lover, and a down-and-out mother, and seems to have taken on the honorably self-sacrificing task of rehabilitating Ms. Joyce, not unlike the way he did

the young boy in an earlier book. An enjoyable three hours on two tapes, with Reynolds doing a good job with the numerous Spenser one-liners.

Yamoto: A Rage in Heaven
by Ken Kato; Questar/Warner Books;
Hardback \$19.95

This is not a review, just a notice, since I've read only the first and last chapters and the background material in a series of inter-section "data transmissions." And the reason I'm doing it is not so much because this 500 page book looks as if it might be a pretty good space opera (which it does), but because the casual browser in bookstore or library might, as did I, think it was yet another of those seemingly interminable Fantasy series that are clogging the presses lately. The cover, title and format scream "Epic Fantasy!" so loudly that it wasn't until I was stuffing my barely-glanced-at review copy into the back shelf of the bookcase that I noticed that the object under the Oriental warrior/emperor's face on the cover was some kind of spaceship. At that point, I got around to looking at the jacket blurb and then to reading the above-mentioned parts, and now it's not in the stored away shelf but in the always overloaded to-be-further-considered shelf, and I didn't want others to pass up what could be a good bet just because they're as unobservant as I am.



ZONE YELLOW by Keith Laumer;
Baen Books; Paperback \$4.50

When I saw that this was a new Imperium novel, I leaped into it immediately but got bogged down almost as quickly. Rat-like creatures are invading Line Zero Zero, and it's up to Brion Bayard to track them to their cross-time lair and put an end to it. During the cross-time traveling, there are occasional scenes of alien time lines and occasional speculations that are interesting enough to be worth the effort, but beyond that, it is total confusion, a series of dramatic but almost totally disconnected scenes. If, like me, you're nostalgic for the Imperium, go back and read the first two books in the series and don't disillusion yourself by trying this one.

Nightfall by Isaac Asimov
& Robert Silverberg; Doubleday
Foundation; Hardback \$19.95

Virtually everyone knows the story of "Nightfall," Isaac Asimov's classic 1941 short story. The planet Lagash has six suns in its sky, but once every two thousand years, when all the suns but one has set, that one remaining sun is eclipsed by Lagash's unseen satellite. When the eclipse is total, Darkness comes and the Stars come out, driving virtually everyone into an incendiary madness that destroys their civilization overnight.

The original took place entirely within the observatory of the astronomer who had predicted the eclipse. The story opened only four hours before Darkness came and ended as the Stars appeared and Lagash began to burn. All of the background—the astronomical evidence for the existence of the unseen satellite, the archeological evidence of previous civilizations destroyed by fire, the fanatical religious cult that had preserved records from previous cycles but saw only Divine Will at work, the psychological effects of total darkness on people who have never in their lives experienced it—was explained to a skeptical reporter who had come to the observatory to cover the story. And in the end, when Darkness came and the Stars came out, people did indeed go mad, and the reader—this reader, anyway-- got chills up and down his spine.

The first two-thirds of the novel is basically an expansion of the original story, covering more than a year and showing you the development of the background that was only talked about before. For instance, one of the main characters is psychologist Sheerin 501, and his work with people who have been driven mad by an amusement park ride that subjected them to fifteen minutes of darkness is covered at length. Archeologist Siferra 89 is another major character, and her discovery of the first evidence of a world-wide holocaust two thousand years before is one of the opening scenes. The original characters, sometimes with name changes (the planet itself is now Kalgash), are as fully developed as the background, and several new ones are introduced. And even though you know exactly where the story is going, getting there is even more fun than in the original, and the coming of Darkness and the Stars is even more spine-tingling.

The last third of the novel is slightly anticlimactic insofar as spine-tingling goes, but it makes up for that lack in other ways as it follows a few of the survivors of the Darkness until we begin to get a hint—and a possibly surprising hint, at that—of how the next cycle is going to go.

Whether what Gregory Benford did in his sequel to Arthur C. Clarke's *AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT* delighted you or, as it did me, soured you on the whole idea of "updating" classics, be advised that this updating is different. In this combination prequel-expansion-sequel, Silverberg and Asimov have produced 300+ pages that capture the style and spirit of the original almost perfectly, only with more smoothness, better characters, and much more detail. In that way, it is rather like Asimov's own recent additions to his *Foundation* and *Robot* series: very much like the originals, only better and longer.

GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS
by Arthur C. Clarke;
Bantam Spectra; Hardback \$19.95.

Where *IMPERIAL EARTH* was half story and half Clarkeian travelogue of a future earth, *GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS* is half story and half a mixture of surprising facts, fascinating speculations, and intriguing throwaway lines.

The story, mostly set in the years before the 2012 Titanic Centennial, follows two attempts to raise the Titanic, one of which ironically involves encasing it in an artificial iceberg, and the whole affair ends even more ironically in a low key but spine-tingling epilogue set in our solar system's far future, in which, just to give you an idea, "Two planets had gone—one by design, one by accident. . . ."

And on the way to that conclusion, you're treated to countless Clarkeian diversions, some well and touchingly integrated into the story, others simply there. There are, for instance, two methods of dealing one-on-one with a giant squid. There is the mind-boggling Mandelbrot Set, and if you don't know what it is, read the book's appendix immediately. There is the chaos into which the world economic system will inevitably fall at 12:01 a.m. Jan. 1, 2000, unless someone comes up with a program that will convince computers that "00" comes after, not before, "99". There are the passengers' bodies that were perfectly preserved for nearly a century because their sealed stateroom happened to contain a chest of tea. There is a brief tribute to the most famous Science Fiction writer in the world, who really did die on the Titanic. There is even some discussion of sex, non-standard sex at that, including a reference to sexuality evaluation using a "Standard Mapplethorpe Phototest," but even that is handled with dignity and gentility, not the leering vulgarity that has lately become so common in all fields, including SF.

And finally, there is the following quote from Einstein, said to be the favorite of one of the characters, but which in my opinion defines much of the appeal of Clarke's own writing, whether it be far future Sf or present day science:

"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapt in awe, is as good as dead."

It certainly applies to *GHOST FROM THE GRAND BANKS*, in which, without sacrificing any of that air of mystery (or sense of wonder) for which he has always been known, he has developed a set of characters who are genuinely

sympathetic and considerably more touching than any he has ever given us before.

LURID DREAMS by Charle L. Harness;
Avon; Paperback \$3.50

William Reynolds and Alix Schell are a pair of down-on-their-luck doctoral candidates in the early 21st century, where psi is accepted by the workaday world but not by many dog-in-the-manger academics. Reynolds' thesis is the reality of OB (out-of-body experiences), which he can initiate at will and which he can use to travel in time. Alix's is on the symbology in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, on whose life and writings she is an expert. Reynolds' doctoral obstacle is a professor who believes all OB's are frauds, while Alix's is one who is interested only in an in-body experience with Alix and won't vote for her thesis unless she goes to bed with him.

Their problems seem to be over when a rich Poe enthusiast and pro-Confederacy civil war buff named Colonel Birch steps forward and offers to finance their work. Birch is convinced that, if Poe had not opted for a literary life, his bloodthirsty nature, instead of being expressed in his stories, would have been channeled into his real life,

leading him to become the Southern colonel who, by turning Pickett's Charge into a success, would have enabled the South to win. Birch is also convinced that Reynolds, armed with Alix's encyclopedic knowledge of Poe, can OB his way back in time and, at some key point, divert Poe from a wasted and tragic life of letters into a practical and profitable and ultimately heroic military career.

Needless to say, nothing turns out quite the way any of them planned, except possibly for Poe, who is himself apparently quite adept at OB time travel and proves it by carrying on a running dialogue with Reynolds from the 2000s to the 1820s.

Closer to surrealistic Fantasy than Science Fiction, LURID DREAMS nonetheless seems to have a logic of its own, rather like some of Kurt Vonnegut's work—or like some of Harness's own, for that matter, such as KRONO or THE PARADOX MEN. There is virtually no "action" in the conventional sense, but there's more than enough tension and suspense to keep you going from first page to last. And finally, there are pages and pages of fascinating interpretations of Poe's writings, including "proof" that he predicted the year, day and hour of his own death. One note of warning: Pay no attention to the back cover blurb. It's totally misleading and partly just plain

wrong, but don't let that turn you off. The actual story is both more imaginative and more interesting than the blurb would lead you to believe.

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK
HOLMES, VOLUMES 8 AND 9;
Simon & Schuster Audioworks;
\$9.95 each.

Unlike most "old-time" radio dramas, this series holds up well, at least partly because the episodes were co-written by Anthony Boucher as well as because they all star the Holmes-Watson team of Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. These tapes are particularly interesting because they contain not only the original programs and commercials but interviews with people involved with the show who give you an insight into how they were put together.

These two volumes contain "Colonel Warburton's Madness," in which Holmes uses a dog's ears to solve a case; "The Iron Box," about some Leap Year Tontine trickery; "A Scandal in Bohemia," the original Doyle story about Holmes' female adversary, Irene Adler; and "The Second Generation," a specially written sequel for all those who wondered what ever happened to Ms. Adler.

∞



Alien Thoughts

continued from page 9

Nicholas briefly drapes his arm in the hole and is "gifted" with a hole in his palm which grows progressively larger and which leaks a weird, non-human fluid. . . .

Down and down into degradation and desperation and despair sink Nicholas and Nakota as the hole claims more and more of their lives and their selves.

Until Nicholas locks himself into the storage room for long, supernatural days and nights and the fluid from his ruined hand covers him and is changing him and he is being Called. . . .

It's a hell of a read.

But what is most astonishing to me (pardon my awe and chauvinism) is that apparently Kathe Koja is a woman,

which makes her male-viewpoint stream-of-consciousness writing so great because it is so real and acute and accurate.

MEMORIES AND VISIONS—

WOMEN'S FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION,

Edited by Susanna J. Sturgis;

The Crossing Press;

Trade Paperback \$9.95

Talk about alien worlds! To most male readers of SF and Fantasy, most of these 15 stories will be Different in way' unexpected; there is an alien value system embedded in this feminist SF and Fantasy which will likely rattle the mind of most males.

"Womankind" by Rosaria Champagne is bizarre and terrifying as a woman passing-as-a-man casually and blithely snaps off a man's penis and uses it to

break a window. . . . The story becomes surrealistic and loses its credibility, but the first two pages are as wild an opening as I've ever read.

There are several literary-type stories I frankly cannot remember (and refuse to reread), and several well-written woman POV stories of commercial structure which were superior in technique and which could see print in the better-known SF and Fantasy mags/anthologies: "Signs of Life" by Barbara Krasnoff, and "A Token for Celandine" by Laurell K. Hamilton. Especially Hamilton, who has fine skill and a tough twist on magic I like; her story could be and should be the basis for a novel.

Susanna Sturgis is a fine editor. By the way, I love the inverted, wide-open vulva beast on the cover.

∞

Blurbing

continued from page 17

Tennessee Williams once said that the best present anyone can give a writer is a good day's work) is offering a gift beyond price.

The custom of blurbing, it seems has much in common with various superstitious rites. Blurbs are a kind of ritual you go through to appease the gods; they can't hurt you, and they might help. (Jacket photos are another such rite; as one editor told me, a jacket photo can only hurt a writer "who's ugly, or looks mean." I'm not so sure about that; I decided not to have jacket photos on my young adult novels because I didn't want to remind readers that some old person wrote the books. But the subject of jacket photos would require another essay.) There are times when I sympathize with those writers who refuse to write blurbs and want nothing to do with this aspect of publishing, but in the long run, they'll probably be as unpersuasive as those who think we should dispense with such problematic yet comforting rituals as weddings and funerals.

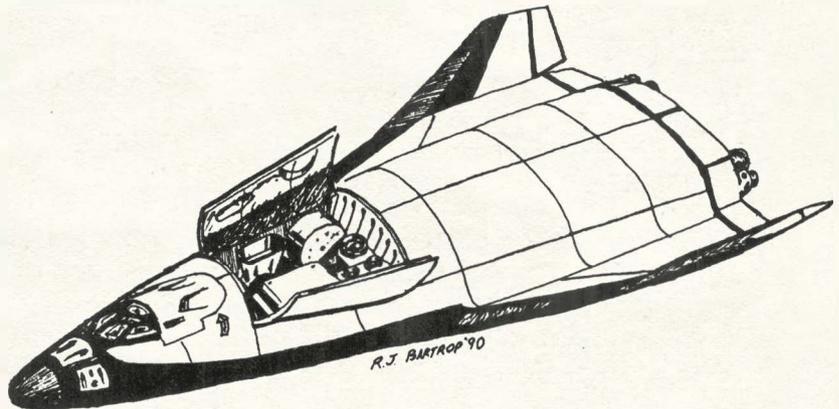
Do blurbs actually accomplish anything? Certainly a heartfelt comment from a writer one admires will buoy an author, but most writers know, deep down, that no amount of outside ap-

proval will equal one's own satisfaction in doing a good piece of work, and no amount of praise can banish self doubt permanently. The work itself has to be enough, and your own satisfaction must be at the core of what you do; without that, you're at the mercy of every passing gust of opinion.

Readers may be guided by blurbs; odds are that, if a book is adorned with many comments from other writers, the book's worth reading, even if it doesn't sell or get good reviews. If good writers occasionally praise bad books, this doesn't make them worse writers; they can be wrong, like everyone else. (I haven't seen too many good writers tout really bad books, and when they do, it's often because they've seized on the one

thing that's good in an otherwise unexceptional volume.)

Blurbs are also a kind of ephemeral recognition that might one day have historical value. (Robert A. Heinlein's praise of *THE MOTE IN GOD'S EYE* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle is a case in point, as are Ursula Le Guin's comments on Vonda McIntyre's *DREAMSNAKE* and Salman Rushdie's first novel, the Fantasy *PRIMUS*.) The best blurb, to my mind, is precise, has something to say, and is given by a writer who's been moved by your words, not your friendship or personality. In the end, no amount of jacket copy or authoritative blurbing can absolve the reader from having to make up his or her own mind about a book's true worth. ∞



Chasing Shadows
continued from page 52

tasy and Horror, perhaps best summed up by a quote from THE KIRKUS REVIEW OF BOOKS which called him a "Peter Pan from Hell".

Don't wait for a U.S. edition on this book.

SISTERS AND STRANGERS
by Emma Tennant; Grafton Books,
1990; 184 pp Hardcover

"When Elsie and I were young. . . ." opens Emma Tennant's new book, setting the appropriate mood of a fairy tale. And it's folk and fairy tales, as well as interpretation of Bible stories, that form the basis of what follows as two young girls, holidaying on the rocky coast of Cornwall, listen to Elsie's grandmother spin the Story of Woman.

It begins with an updated Adam and Eve as it relates their idyllic life in a modern Eden, then follows Eve after the eviction from paradise through what Grandmother Dummer refers to as the seven guises of woman: Virgin, Other Woman, Whore, Madonna, Courtesan, Bluestocking and Witch.

Tennant's prose throughout is gorgeous and busy, spare when necessary, rich with detail when that serves her purposes better. Her story slips back and forth upon itself, but never loses its focus, which is a look at the contradictions and hypocrisies that have dominated women's lives from the distant past all the way up to the present day. While some might dismiss the novel as merely a feminist tract—there isn't much of a traditional storyline and Tennant herself has given the novel a subtitle of "A Moral Tale"—to do so would be folly.

Like Tom Robbins, Tennant is serious and irreverent and she has a gift for the well-turned phrase. That underlying her sometimes witty, sometimes satirical observations, is a very serious discussion of the inequalities which have been foisted upon women since the dawn of time, adds resonance to her prose, rather than detracting from it. And if men, mostly in the form of the ineffectual Adam and the conning Frank Blake (the serpent), are poorly served in these pages, one

should not view this as an attack, but rather an all too realistic portrait of a great percentage of mankind.

For in the end, Tennant proves herself to be concerned with humankind, rather than just women, since the mistreatment of women is just as derogatory towards men as it is to their victims. But then that's the case with not only sexism, but also racism or any -ism.

∞

No Place to Hide
continued from page 29

They'd done it again — FleetCen had built me into a larger, newer vessel, without my even realizing they'd done so. I tried to change course, this time to seek out not just a stellar flare, but a star's center to drive myself into. I felt resistance. I struggled against it. I felt an opening.

My mind fell through.

Goranhauf! I didn't have voice circuits. Yet, at the same time, I didn't need them.

You killed me, Metler. You got what wanted. But FleetCen found us, just like your side's navy found you the last time.

I tried to close my ears to what he said, but couldn't do it. It wasn't a sound. *Then leave me, Goranhauf,* I tried to scream — it wasn't a sound, but something I heard within my own mind. *Even if you've been converted as well. I'll accept that, if you'll accept that I got what I wanted and leave me alone.*

I wish I could, Metler. But you were killed too. FleetCen has our records, the transcripts detailing skills your skills as a pilot and mine as a gunner, and, when they found our ships crushed together, it gave them an idea. We've both been rebuilt. . .

I heard Goranhauf's laughter — it wasn't a sound, but something a lot worse — then heard the laughter rise up to a scream. I joined it with mine as, a moment later, his words continued.

. . . rebuilt, Alan Metler, into the same ship. Welcome aboard what, once it's passed testing, is going to be FleetCen's newest weapon — the first double-X-class two-man destroyer.

∞

Tom Clancy Editorial
continued from page 5

will come home with their heads up.

Like their fathers and grandfathers did 45 years ago, they went away to do something important. They will have stopped an evil force. They will have saved people from something. Certainly they will have liberated one country, and maybe Iraq will have a chance at something better now, because of what they did.

Civilization is bought in blood. We've spilled some of ours, but we've gotten something for it. Maybe something important.

When they come home, it's your job to remember who they are, and whom they worked for. Because of the many reservists who've gone to work for us, there will be a lot of towns with people coming back from a tough, dangerous assignment. And they're coming home winners. We owe them.

How about a few parades? How about the collective "thank you" that was cruelly denied to the last class of American warriors? We give parades to baseball and football teams who win at games. These kids now finishing their job are America's Team. They wear our colors. Can we do any less for them?

The military has learned its lessons from Vietnam. What about the rest of us? ∞

Quark

Marching cadence of the
First Earth Battalion:

Left Brain,
Right Brain!

Another:

Spinoza was there
when we left.
Your right!

Book Reviews

Reviews by Andrew M. Andrews

PRAYERS TO BROKEN STONES
by Dan Simmons; Dark Harvest,
1990; 322 pp; Hardback \$21.95

PRAYERS TO BROKEN STONES — if only the title of Dan Simmons' first collection of short fiction — probably had its genesis in a story included here, "Iverson's Pits," which first appeared in NIGHT VISIONS 5 from Dark Harvest. Simmons tells us that, like the monuments of Gettysburg, perhaps like a great many monuments of the past, there are lessons that were learned, hard truths fought and found, only to lie almost completely forgotten.

The stories in PRAYERS remind us that we may pay dearly, in human suffering, if we forget what the monuments mean. What were Iverson's Pits, if not a reminder of the horrors of a war that should never have been fought? Who was this Civil War Confederate Colonel Alfred Iverson, Jr., commander of the 20th North Carolina Regiment, later brigadier general? And what senseless slaughter by Union soldiers did he lead them to, and what does this mean to a survivor and his boy captive?

"Metastasis" takes a long, hard look at our apathy of the times. Just like in the Dark Ages, when the plague swept most of Europe, we are ignoring signs of moral and physical deterioration all around us.

Also, Simmons grants us "The River Styx Runs Upstream," Simmons' first published story, and examines what transpires when the dreams of resurrection come to life — and how whole communities must learn to live with the

suddenly undead who are not quite what they seem.

Stories which suitably impressed me included "E-Ticket To Namland," explaining all too clearly how the war in southeast Asia hasn't ended, and may well never end, for those who fought it. "Two Minutes Forty-Five Seconds" offers lament and a warning to those who partook of and are responsible for the historic Challenger accident.

To top it off, Simmons reminds us of the genesis of his novel, CARRION COMFORT, the most important Horror novel of this half century. "Carriion Comfort" the novelette is here. As in the novel, Simmons puts it carefully — power and pain exist as weapons to be used by the "mind vampires," the dictators and oppressors of the past who have used others like pawn in an epic chess game. Just as in the novel, it was nearly impossible to believe . . . too far fetched, Simmons perhaps reaching in suitably justifying this milieu . . . but, as in the novel, he succeeds. You can almost believe him.

In PRAYERS, Simmons says we have been prepared with warnings. The past is a tool to shape the present. We are fools to ignore markers on the road. The stones are all that remain to guide us, if we can just open our eyes.

SLOW DANCING THROUGH TIME
stories by Gardner Dozois in collaboration with Jack Dann, Michael Swanwick, Susan Casper & Jack C. Halderman II; Ursus Imprints/Mark V. Ziesing, 1990; 254 pp; Hardback \$22.00

Ah, collaborations. Those strange, sly little things.

Ellison in PARTNERS IN WONDER. Zelazny and Dick in DEUS IRAE. Or any one of a number of Pohl/Kornbluth collaborations that remain classics of the genre.

And then we have SLOW DANCING THROUGH TIME.

Someone who thinks less of his work may jot this down as, perhaps, Dozois' first collection of short stories. But for those who know better, who truly see a giant of the field at work here, who has finally been granted the reputation he has deserved as SF's finest editor with the Hugo recently, then take heed—there are some richly rewarding experiences here in SLOW DANCING.

In his afterword, Dozois reveals a great deal about what went on in collaborating in the past with these authors, and with an "open diary," if you will, showing what future collaboration projects may unfold. He notes that SLOW DANCING is a fair collection of stories. But I think he is understating what I believe is easily in the top five of the finest collaborations of all time.

There is a smoothness and grace, where you simply cannot tell, as, in say, a Silverberg/Haber collaboration (where it is almost jerkily evident) of where one talent leaves off and the other begins. I think "Touring," written by Dozois, Jack Dann, and Michael Swanwick, which reveals a strange nexus in time where the dearly departed of rock and roll wait and play a final "going away" (like in the movie "Cadillac Man," where Robin Williams and the folks at Turgeon Cars sit down at a Chinese meal and toast the company motto, "You'll never get out alive") send-off to the fans and those who miss them (proving that lesser and greater talents can perform a grandiose monad gestalt) Or vampires of the death camps in World War II, who walk the fence of death in feeding off those waiting to die, in "Down Among The Dead Men," a Dozois collaboration with Jack Dann (you'll never forget any Dozois/Dann combination, the Righteous Brothers of SF).

But by far the story I savor the most (and hereby give it my vote for the Nebula Award) is "Slow Dancing With Jesus," with (you guessed it!) Dozois and Dann. What do you call a work of art? — a cute little thing that breaks your heart? — and it's here, in this

story about a teen-age girl who prepares for that night of her life, the high school prom, with some of the most gentle, sensitive, and descriptive writing of any collaboration anywhere.

Keep this in your collection as an outstanding effort. I will.

SPLATTERPUNKS ed. by Paul M. Sammon; St. Martin's Press, 1990; 348 pp; Hardback \$14.95

It's apparent that Paul Sammon knows what he is doing and has done his homework. **SPLATTERPUNKS** is a love tribute to that sorry state of affairs — writing splatterpunk, that goriest of Horror — done with relish and grace.

It's hard to find that in any theme anthology these days.

And while I'm not a great fan of splatter anything, especially punk, I can only recommend **SPLATTERPUNK** highly. I rather enjoyed some of the gross-outs, particularly "Night They Missed The Horror Show" by Joe R. Lansdale (if one miserable dude would have just saw the show, rather than doing what he did) "A Life In the Cinema" by Mick Garris (the real horrors of writing for Hollywood and what they can do to you) "Less Than Zombie" by Douglas E. Winter (reminded me of the movie, *Less Than Zero*, but with the Horror elements that lift the story above just a bunch of spoiled rich wacko kids not having anything better to do than ruin their lives) and "Film At Eleven" by John Skipp (John, hate to tell you this, but I know some real live stories by actual people that make your story more censored, about wife beatings and brutality and what people who suffer through them must do).

I spilled my guts laughing about the last house at the end of the street! and other mean and ugly places, events, and scenarios coming out of Chas. Balun's commentary on splatterfilm, "I Spit In Your Face: Films That Bite." I love the hanky-panky with titles, where every film must carry the warning: **VIEWER WATCHES AT HIS OR HER OWN RISK!**

A rollicking collection. Meant so, delivered so. What more can labeling do?

• • •

Reviews by Steven Sawicki

THE FUGITIVE WORLDS by Bob Shaw; Baen Books, December 1990; 254 pp; Paperback \$4.50

Imagine a hero as dashing as Erroll Flynn whose dialogue, reminiscent of Jack Vance's writing, is colorful and courtly. Finally, imagine being able to recapture that wonderful feeling you had when you first discovered Science Fiction—when ideas and action took precedence over logical discussion and correct science. Well, you don't have to imagine any more. **THE FUGITIVE WORLDS** is all of the above and much, much more.

With this book, Shaw returns to the worlds of Land, Overland and Farland which he first introduced in **THE RAGGED ASTRONAUTS** and **THE WOODEN SPACESHIPS**. Time has passed in these wonderful worlds and Shaw picks up the action with Toller Maraquine II, the grandson of his namesake and protagonist of the first two books. Toller bemoans the lack of adventure that existed in his grandfather's time and is somewhat bored with his duties in the sky service, piloting one of the air ships about the landscape in service of the queen. This soon changes, however as an expedition is mounted to travel from Land to Overland—the expedition making the passage through the thin connecting atmosphere of these sister worlds in balloons—in order to begin a recolonization. The appearance of a fourth planet, inhabited by a vastly superior race which is intent on using this thin envelope of atmosphere between the worlds to grow an artificial intelligence which will transport their entire world to a new galaxy, destroying both Land and Overland in the process, further complicates the plot. Toller stumbles onto the plans and armed only with his sword and courage sets out to defeat them.

This is Science Fiction at its best—fast paced, with emphasis on strange cultures and peopled by individuals who appear totally at home there. If there is less emphasis on human relations and fewer deep emotions, there is a corresponding greater emphasis on movement and situational development. There is also a touch of humor here which goes a long way to dulling

the critical eye of the reader. This is a fun read and one which you'll want to finish in one sitting. It will also raise an intense desire for more—a desire one can only hope Bob Shaw will toil to fill.

SUMMERTIDE by Charles Sheffield; Del Rey, January 1991; 281 pp; Paperback \$4.95 (\$6.50 Canada)

This is a novel of hard-science fiction revolving around the twin planets of Opal and Quake. Both planets are in the same orbit, which produces regular cycles of devastation—a devastation called *Summertide* by those few inhabitants hardy enough to populate the system. And if that weren't bad enough, every 350,000 years there's a grand conjunction of the system's planets which makes *Summertide* even more violent than normal.

Adding to the above, Sheffield includes a long-vanished alien race called the Builders who've left behind mysterious artifacts—structures really—no two of which are similar. Of course, one of these artifacts, *The Umbilical*, is a transportation system connecting Opal and Quake. This artifact also proves to be the draw around which the novel's characters flock.

And what characters they are; Max Perry, burned out administrator of the twin worlds; Hans Rebka, galactic trouble shooter assigned to find out what's wrong with Perry; Professor Darya Lang, the foremost expert on the Builders, who is following a hunch concerning *The Umbilical* and *Summertide*; Louis Nenda, a combination rogue/bounty hunter who serves a strange alien race; Atvar H'sial, the representative of a third alien race who travels with her interpreter underling, yet a different alien; and Julius Graves, Councilor, and searcher for murderers. Why each of these individuals appears at Opal, a planet not known for attracting visitors, within a day of each other sets the framework for the novel's action. It also adds to the problems Hans Rebka, the book's protagonist, must deal with.

Summertide works well on a number of levels. The pure science of Opal and Quake is a joy to discover. The various Builder artifacts are interspersed liberally throughout the book and provide a constant wonder and sense of strange. And the interplay of the diverse charac-

ters—each with something to hide and something to find—provides enough mystery and suspense for two books. Sheffield's ability to blend these into a coherent whole at a pace that literally races along makes for delightful and difficult-to-put-down reading. As a final note it should be mentioned that this is book one of the Heritage Universe. This does not mean that *SUMMERTIDE* ends on a cliffhanger, it does not and I, for one, will be looking forward to book two.

THE LAST RECALL by Charles Ingrid;
Daw Books, January 1991; 336 pp;
Paperback \$3.95 (\$4.95 Canada)

This is the second book in Ingrid's *THE MARKED MAN* series, and like the first, it involves a future Earth tortured by meteor strikes, nuclear weapons and major climatic changes. Like the first also, it focuses on Thomas Blade, one of the Lord Protectors, charged with guarding a small but growing population in what once was southern California. The Protectors are chosen due to their varying psychic abilities—everything from healing, to discerning truth to premonition. This book, like the first consists of Blade's adventures, against overwhelming odds, as he struggles to fulfill his duties.

Ingrid has built a future Earth inhabited almost entirely by mutants—some the result of genetic experiments and some the result of radiation—where the most valuable thing is water. The second most

valuable thing is finding and breeding those who are genetically pure.

Thrown into all of this is the return of three generational starships coming back from a decades long journey. The crews are first manipulated by the Dean, a clone whose purpose was to run the College Vaults which contained a vast storehouse of information and technology. But the vaults have been destroyed and now the Dean is bent on conquest, organizing the Nesters who have shunned organized civilization and have chosen to live on the edges of humanity. Of course, Blade is the major stumbling block in all of their plans.

One should read the first book in this series, although it is conceivable that you could get by without it. Essentially this is fast, entertaining reading with likeable characters who, if not all that deep, are interesting nonetheless.

Review by Francis N. L. Sheppard

FEAR by L. Ron Hubbard;
Bridge Publications, January 14, 1991;
184 pp; Hardcover \$16.95

FEAR by L. Ron Hubbard reminds me of how great a writer Hubbard was in the Golden Age of SF. From the first paragraph to the last you know you are in the hands of a master storyteller. I strongly recommend this book to all of those interested in reading the kind of fiction Hubbard wrote in the Thirties and Forties. It is a taut, suspenseful novel from the classic era of Science Fiction.

Reviews by Colin J. McMillan

THE DREAMING PLACE
by Charles de Lint; illustrated by
Brian Froud; Atheneum Publishers
(Dragonflight), November 1990;
138 pp; Hardcover \$14.95

Reviewing new de Lint novels is almost superfluous by now. There's virtually no one else in the field who's as reliable when it comes to telling a thoughtful, well-paced urban faerie tale.

So why take particular note of *THE DREAMING PLACE*? Answer: because it's a children's book, and a children's book of a kind that's too rare these days to be ignored.

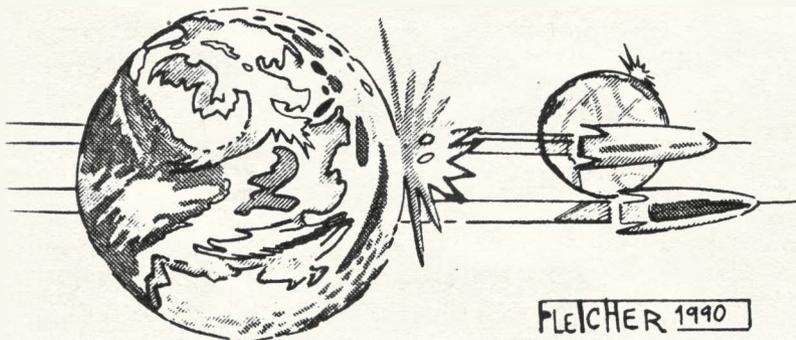
No, it isn't the kind that "transcends the category" so that adults can read it and not know it started out life as a children's book. The relatively short length and straightforward (for de Lint) viewpoints betray the novel's intended audience a little too clearly for that. Rather, the book gives young readers a story that's meant to be confronted on their terms, not a grown-up's story diluted to make it accessible, or a moral onto which a connect-the-dots plot has been grafted.

At the same time, it's a familiar Charles de Lint novel, starting in modern Ottawa and leading eventually into the realms beyond, where Indian and Celtic worldviews intersect. The protagonists may be lively teen-aged cousins, but the characterization and pencil-fine background detail have all the resonances de Lint's adult readers have come to expect.

The point is that *THE DREAMING PLACE* is a book young people will remember and reread, whether they first encounter it by hearing chapters at bedtime, on the shelf at the local library, or as a gift from a favorite grandparent. As such, it's in a very small group indeed, and deserves all the recommendations it can possibly accumulate.

NEVER DEAL WITH A DRAGON
by Robert N. Charrette;
Roc Books, December 1990; 377 pp;
Paperback \$4.50 (\$4.95 Canada)

It's entirely possible to read and enjoy *NEVER DEAL WITH A DRAGON* without having any idea that the *SHADOWRUN* world in which it's set was created for a

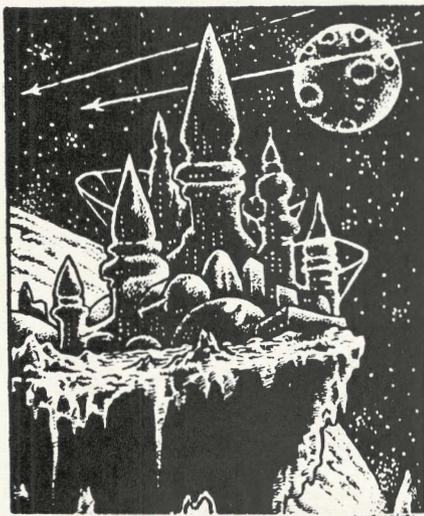


role-playing game. Those who do know of the RPG therefore have no business dismissing the book on the basis of the connection. And if they insist on doing so anyway, they'll miss a competently told, complex dark-future yarn that's good enough to make its flaws irritating rather than fatal.

The good points: Charrette's characters, who are far from being hack-and-slash stereotypes. Corporate casualty Sam Verner's streak of honor is well thought out, and legitimately puts him at odds both with 2050s far-reaching financial empires and the shadow-world dissidents who live outside the system. Verner's elven mentor and partner, Dodger, comes across as theatrical rather than grating. And Charrette concisely gives the book's three major dragons a common aura of arrogance while making each one individually distinctive.

The irritants: occasionally sloppy plotting and research. The mysterious fate of Verner's sister wavers between being a major issue and merely a hook to keep Verner from reverting to corporate obscurity. Dodger's extensive network of contacts is a bit too convenient at times, and deserves more explanation than it gets. And there is no "Eighth Street" in Portland, Oregon, where Charrette puts a rundown mission — an error that could have been fixed with a glance at a local map.

Though it's marked as first in a series, *NEVER DEAL WITH A DRAGON* is basically complete on its own. It isn't a literary masterpiece and doesn't pretend to be. But it's a readable action-adventure, and a good introduc-



tion to the inventive *SHADOWRUN* milieu. Its gaming audience should be justifiably impressed, and its nongaming audience should be pleasantly surprised.

Reviews by Paulette Minare

TRUE TALES OF THE UNKNOWN,
VOL II: THE UNINVITED
edited by Sharon Jarvis; Bantam
Books, November 1989; 239 pp;
Paperback \$3.95, Canada \$4.95

Sharon Jarvis has given us thirteen true tales of the supernatural researched from news clippings, old reference books, recordings made by psychic investigators, and manuscripts by those who experienced the strange phenomena. Formerly a tracer of missing persons, teacher, and reporter, Ms. Jarvis has specialized for the last 20 years in editing Science Fiction, Horror, Fantasy, and the occult.

The story "Dark Shadows" (TV's first "Horror" soap opera) is set in 1984 at a convention. Speaker Dr. Stephen Kaplan, founder of the Vampire Research Center, discussed his contacts with vampire colonies. He outlined a general description of the average modern vampire, and their needs (pp.26-28). An actual female vampire was in attendance.

In chapter IV, in "Chicago's Most Haunted Cemetery", very old and long abandoned, no animal or bird is seen or heard; the experiences of hundreds of witnesses are related. One phenomenon is that of the phantom farmhouse, its description constant, which appears and disappears in various locations beside the road. Disappearing houses fit in with the theory of an interdimensional doorway in the region.

Don't miss "Where Time Stands Still" about an ancient megalithic structure in New Hampshire, called America's Stonehenge. Its huge rock structures mark important astrological events of a pre-Christian religion. The stones are powerfully charged with natural energies.

Other chilling chapters deal with poltergeists and demonic possession (and what was done about them); UFOs; descriptions of closeup encounters with Bigfoot in Pennsylvania; a miracle-working monk who lived in



a cave in New Mexico; a natural healer; and other topics.

The book gives locations of each of these phenomena. Page IX lists people and organizations you can contact by sending a stamped, addressed envelope.

You'll want to keep this book in your library. What great vacation explorations one could take! In company, of course, and in broad daylight.

HEAR THE CHILDREN CALLING
by Clare McNally;

Onyx, July 1990; 349 pp;
Paperback \$4.95 (\$5.95 Canada)

Neolamane, a drug discovered by Dr. Lincoln Adams, induces pregnancy in sterile women. As an unexpected side effect, the babies are born with the ability to communicate telepathically. They can use telekinesis, the moving of objects with mind power, to animate their stuffed toy animals.

Dr. Adams, envisioning great wealth and power, opens the self-contained LaMane Center, enclosed and isolated in a mountain area of New Mexico. With the help of paid agents, many of them medical students, he manages to kidnap several of the Neolamane babies at the tender age of three years by faking their deaths. These children are brought to the LaMane Center where they learn to expand and control their powers. Here they accept foster parents, their memories suppressed by brainwashing. Punishment keeps them in line, and Outsiders are avoided as evil.

Six years after the abductions, the children remember bits of their past and unintentionally (at first) telepathically contact their natural parents.

The book dwells mainly on the efforts of the different sets of parents to locate their children and bring them home, after discovering they are alive. I would have enjoyed seeing the story more concerned with Dr. Adams' discovery and development of Neolamane, and the problems connected with its testing; the birth of his Neolamane-gifted son, Gregory, whom he sired by using an 18-year-old runaway; how he tricked this young girl and then destroyed her; how Dr. Adams with Gregory at his side misused the abducted children; how they were controlled by fear; how their powers were developed.

Glare McNally's idea for the book is a good one, with great potential. One other book is listed by this author: *SOMEONE COME AND PLAY*.

THE CHANTING by Beverly T. Haaf; Popular Library; Jan. 1991; 263 pp Paperback \$4.95 (\$5.95 Canada)

After an unhappy marriage Janet Fairweather relocates and finds a job in New Jersey. She is drawn to a neighboring house, the residence of a former child psychologist, Dr. Herman Renner, and his fashion-plate wife. Her sister Rose, a cronelike figure garbed in black, the antithesis of Muriel Renner, makes her home with them. Rose seldom speaks, for she has retreated into fantasy.

Janet becomes obsessed not only with the reclusive Renner household

but also with a mute foster child who lives nearby; she and Gina have the ability to communicate telepathically. Gina loves to play in the Renner yard, although Rose mumbles a warning of danger to children: "All gone. They were with us, then they were all gone." (p. 148). In the enigmatic Renner house, Janet sees ghostly children in the upper gallery and hears a whispered chant with threatening overtones.

Aided by her new love interest, Janet discovers the Renners have a dark past. In Germany during World War II, Dr. Renner secretly performed medical experiments on young children who had lost their families. Dr. Renner had to flee Germany, but not before blowing up the nursery, children included.

Good and evil seem to trade places at the whim of certain characters and/or the plot. For instance, the ghostly children who suffered at Dr. Renner's hands and had reason to hate, seem to love him, but then they kill him en masse. Strangely, their spirits did not hover near the scene of their violent deaths as usual, but followed Dr. Renner to haunt his American home, where their spirit bodies were inexplicably made whole simply by inhabiting that particular house.

The explanations for some of the changes and events did not seem quite strong enough to be credible. However, you can enjoy the tale to pass your time

in front of the fire on a frosty winter evening.

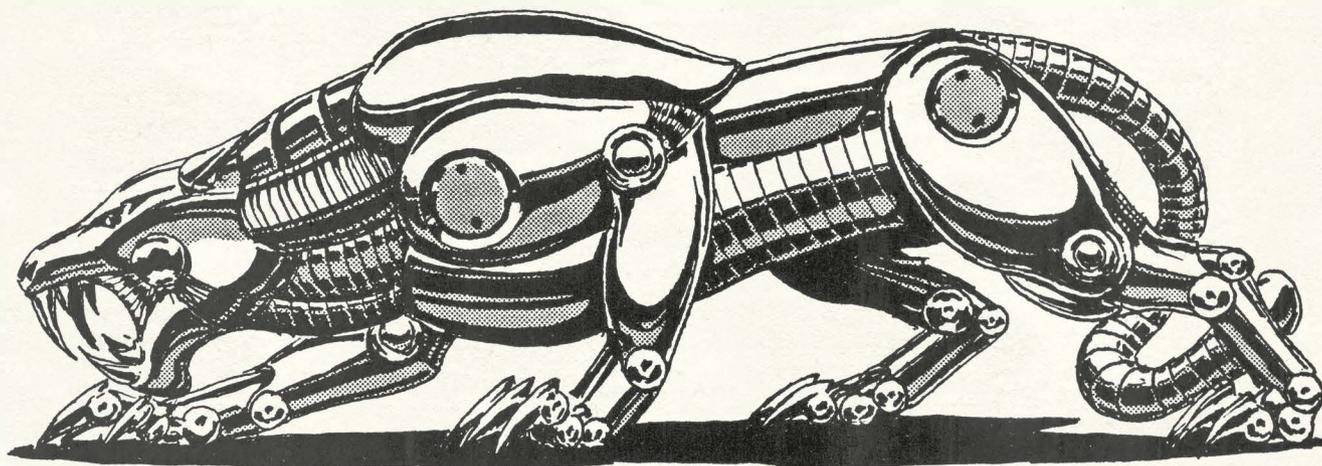
Reviews by Derek Vanderpool

CRUSADE by James Lowder; TSR Books, January 1991; 313 pp; Paperback \$4.95

If you enjoy riveting heroic fantasy adventure set in a highly detailed world, then check out *CRUSADE* by James Lowder. It's part three of a trilogy, the latest novel set in TSR's adventure world called *FORGOTTEN REALMS*, and is a real page-turner.

THE FORGOTTEN REALMS ATLAS by Karen Wynne Fonstad; TSR 1990; 176 pp; Large-size Paperback \$15.95

Also from TSR: This is what an atlas of a Fantasy world should look like. Plenty of three-color maps, including towns, castles, keeps, dungeons, as well as the countryside, along with voluminous details regarding the world of *Forgotten Realms*. A handy guide and great companion volume to any of the novels. I enjoyed thumbing through it, and at that time I hadn't read any of the books. It's a great way to learn about the *Forgotten Realms*, and might even whet your appetite enough--as it did mine--to read the novels. I cannot think of any higher praise for any companion work. ∞



R. J. BARTROP '90



continued from page 6

restaurant (yes, everything you've heard about the Yellow Peril is true — I once *knew* a Chinese-American fan who admitted she was a member of the aforesaid Peril, and even confessed to being *inscrutable!*) in a suburb of Washington D.C. to hash out the week's conspiratorial activities. Such revelations as this one are actually *encouraged* by the Masters Who Are Not To Be Named, because they will not be believed and therefore spin our Web of Deceit all that much thicker. We also make periodic "leaks" to WEEKLY WORLD NEWS of particularly sensitive material which we want discredited.

As for Nr. Stewart, well, he possibly Knows Too Much. He will soon be made an offer: either join us, or expect a visit from our Deros, who are just yearning for the chance to do something awful to somebody . . . they having been largely unemployed ever since Shaver's brain was carried off in a cannister to Yuggoth.

Other matters: The quote attributed to Sprague de Camp about attending a catastrophe was not uttered by him. It's his sort of wit & wisdom, but not authentic, alas.

Dick, you've misinterpreted my remark about the editor and Shaver. He

didn't want to *channel* Shaver, just republish his books, thinking they would be the biggest thing — commercially — since Seth. After all, if COMMUNION is a bestseller, why not I REMEMBER LEMURIA? But the idea of channelling Shaver is a fine one. Want to go into business together? I am, after all, an accomplished medium, as would have been told in an amusing anecdote Elton seems to have cut from the end of my present column. I once contacted Moe Howard of Three Stooges fame on a ouija board, getting clear, concise, properly-spelled messages when other would-be channellers were drawing long strings of consonants. This is because I alone had grasped the secret of this venerable Occult Art: push the pointer. . . .

REG: *The argument most used to prove the existence and validity of a given supernaturality (New Word) is that it must be true because mankind has believed it for so many thousands of years! It has stood the test of time!*

I must confess, too, that I have never seen a flying saucer. I thought I saw something promising when the first UFO scare/exploitation/hysteria was in full bloom, but it turned out to be light reflecting off the wings and body of a seagull. I have been a skeptic ever since.

Also, confession #2 today, I have never had a decent psi or psychic experience (For once and all, Alter-Ego is a literary and fun device. He doesn't really exist.)

"We know better, though, don't we, Geis?"

Now, cut that out!

Where was I? Once, years ago, in semisleep, I distinctly heard a male voice call, "Dick! in my head, but wasn't alarmed. I accepted it as a momentary brain glitch, a minor electrochemical misfire or malfunction. It only happened once.

Don't make fun of the Secret Masters! Don't tempt their wrath! Look at me, once hale and hearty, brimming with health and talent, and now, horrors, a feeble, mind-raddled old man, weak of eye and unsteady of gait. They' Il get you, Darrell. It usually takes them a while—fifty years or so—but they always get those who even dare to think their Names!

Rima Saret: Dear Mr. Geis and Mr. Ego:

Thank you for your columns in SFR; I get a kick out of reading the back-and-forths between you two.

. . . I found Elton Elliott's editorial interesting, though I disagree with him over whether the US should intervene in the Persian Gulf crisis (which hasn't happened yet as I write this letter, but might well take place by the time anyone reads it). I believe there are causes worth fighting and dying for, but cheap oil isn't one of them—and protecting/restoring reactionary, repressive authoritarian regimes in the Middle East (or anywhere else) isn't another.

If I might comment on the situation from another angle, allow me to quote Lynne Randall, a feminist at the Women's Health Center in Atlanta, who made this statement concerning American service women in Operation Desert Shield in the November NEWSWEEK (page 37):

" . . . women may lose their lives defending a sexist societv. It's like blacks losing their lives defending South Africa."

Dean Wesley Smith: Thank you for your informative "Pings and Pongs" article on the tasks facing a book publisher. As a writer, I welcome the chance to find out more about what goes on behind the scenes in publishing companies.

However, my curiosity has been somewhat stymied by that fact that though you're more than willing to share this information with readers, apparently many if not most publishers aren't. I once wrote a major publishing house a letter in which I asked what I thought were innocuous questions—such as how many copies the company sells of a typical novel, which elements turn up more or less consistently in its most popular works, which recent titles sold*best. The publishing house replied that these matters are confidential and implied it was improper for me to ask such questions.

What's more, I've found it difficult to arrive at the truth about the publishing industry when all it wants to show the world—including readers and writers—is its best face. It seems that the bigger the company, the more reluctant it is to disclose and discuss

itself. Most of what I know about the industry comes from the small press scene, the publishing fringe, and outsiders, some of whom used to be inside. I'm sure there are plenty of readers/writers who, like me, are eager to learn more about Big Publishing; but Big Publishing doesn't want to teach us.

Darrell Schweitzer: Your installment of "The New Vivisector" in SFR #3 is interesting, and I really dig the part about the ultimate NATIONAL ENQUIRER headline. However, this essay would have been better had you approached pseudoscience/occultism/New Age doctrines from a nobler attitude—eg., concern for victims of ripoffs, and warnings to potential targets of such frauds—rather than the condescending manner in which you categorically denounce all those who commit the terrible sin of disagreeing with your conviction that conventional science holds all the answers. Instead of restricting your anger to the ideas under discussion, you get personal and extend it to their proponents—hardly a way to win them over.

You lump all those who investigate or are otherwise interested in nontraditional means of understanding the universe with crackpots and flim-flam artists—to cite those you denounce in this article: Ray Palmer, Richard Shaver, and L. Ron Hubbard (you do the same to Whitley Strieber, but I'll leave him out of my response because I haven't read COMMUNION, and I don't believe in judging authors works I haven't read). Mr. Schweitzer, I don't think you're being fair. This is another case of someone evaluating a whole segment of society or culture in terms of its worst examples, as in mainstream critics judging Science Fiction and Fantasy by considering superhero comic books and cheap monster flicks.

In particular, I must take issue with two of your specific contentions. One is, in your own words: "It is, I think, enormously limiting and, yes, *damaging* for a writer to believe in the fantastic elements he or she writes about" (emphasis yours). Aside from the obvious (I hope) fact that it's difficult and often impossible for a critic to know exactly what a given writer believes, and a conviction an author

held during one phase of his life might not be held at the time he wrote a particular work, your assumption does not concur with my actual experience.

During the past two years I've written three short stories concerning reincarnation and karma, two non-standard (in our culture) spiritual concepts in which I believe. And each of these stories has been published (I won't take up space with the listings, but I can provide proof should you or anyone else ask for it). I can't say the same about my Fantasy stories that concern ideas in which I do not believe. And in response to the idea implicit throughout your essay that a person who embraces any so-called fantastic concept must necessarily embrace all of them, allow me to note that I emphatically do not believe in some, such as astrology; and I'm just plain not interested in others, such as UFO's.

Having faith in a fantastic concept gives a writer an edge in that he's more than likely knowledgeable about the subject. He's thought it through, so there's less possibility of plot holes—and more possibility of innovative twists and variations on the theme. He's enthusiastic about it, and therefore in a good position to convey to the reader his interest, his passion, his sense of wonder.

Moving on to a second point of contention, you easily assume that when an author writes about a fantastic subject in which he believes, he's doing it solely for the purpose of propaganda, namely to spread this belief. You cite cases in which this happened, but I contend that just because some true-believer writers have tried to proselytize through their fiction doesn't mean all of them do.

I'm extremely wary about claiming what any author's purpose is unless I've got evidence good enough to stand up in court, which usually means his own statement of intent. And I can assure you I've *never* written a piece of fiction in order to propagandize my spiritual beliefs.

In the case of the three aforementioned stories, my purpose was to entertain the reader. I also had in mind the idea that it would be great if I could help make him think, but not necessarily about reincarnation and karma;

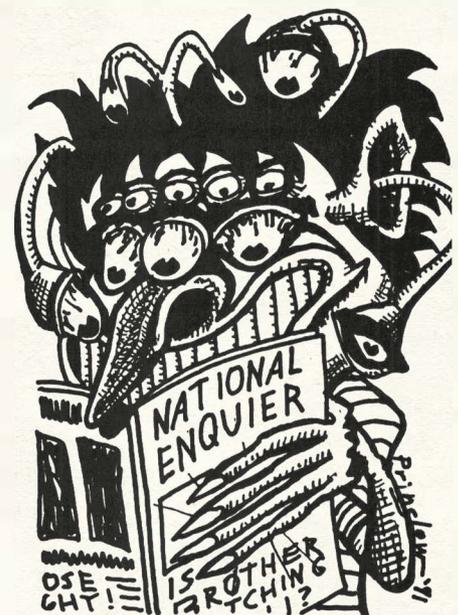
there are other elements in these works. Those of us who aren't hard-headed rationalists are much less single-minded than you give us credit for.

Therefore, I can't buy your contention that "... a writer of any sort of fantastic fiction *needs to be skeptical* so that the story decisions will be made on *artistic* rather than doctrinaire grounds" (again, emphasis yours). If his purpose isn't indoctrination, he can make those decisions on the proper grounds regardless of his attitude toward the subject.

If I want to spread my beliefs, I'll write an opinion piece. If I want to tell a rattling good yarn, or try to, I'll write a story. The fact that one or more of the themes happens to be an idea in which I believe, but most other people don't, shouldn't really matter, and so far hasn't. None of the editors who bought my stories about reincarnation and karma knew that I hold with these concepts, and I doubt that they—or my readers—would care. Whatever happened to the New Criticism?

Back to REG and AE: I'm looking forward to upcoming issues of SFR. Keep up the good work!

REG: *The Gulf War may be over by the time this is read. If it isn't won by us by the end of April, we are sinking into deep camel guano. Hopefully our*



allies will chicken out and force Bush to stop. (Written 1-31-91)

Sometimes retired editors and publishers write confessionals and actually get them published; the really good ones have to be self-published and self-promoted. The mainline publishing industry, especially in New York, refuses to give paper and ink to a turncoat or traitor who tells all about the ugly, rotten, unfair, dirty, slimy bookkeeping, distributing, editing, agenting and publishing which goes on, often in the most well known and prestigious of publishing companies. In short, editors and publishers are proportionately no worse than politicians, lawyers and TV/movie producers. Well, not much worse.

I personally see and grant your point that sincere belief in a supernatural or metaphysical reality can lend an element of fictional reality or truth to a story. But a writer unconsciously insecure, who is afraid what he/she believes may be a bunch of self-delusional crap can also try to preach to the readership in an attempt to convince himself one more time.

And how many of the finest supernatural, or metaphysically based stories or novels were written by True Believers? That might be a good area for research.

ETE: Ms. Saret, in reference to the Gulf War at no time did I advocate any of the causes you mentioned. My concern has always been focused on the removal of a dangerous madman from the international stage. A dictator who used his power to gas minority dissidents (the Kurds), bomb a non-combatant nation (Israel), invade and torture the citizens of neighboring nations (Iran and Kuwait), and order the violent abuse of wildlife (the oil spill in the Persian Gulf).

For more comments on the Persian Gulf War see the guest editorial.

Thank you for your kind comments about SFR. Speaking for the staff, we'll continue to edit and publish an interesting and thought-provoking magazine, one in which all opinions are welcome, including--especially--those with which we don't always agree.

Ken Solonika: There was a two part article in the Summer and Autumn

1990 issues of SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW titled, "The New Vivisector" by Darrell Schweitzer. This article, stressing skepticism, included several slanted statements about Dianetics and L. Ron Hubbard.

My letter does not demand or ask for belief or disbelief. I've heard various things about Dianetics and Mr. Hubbard and simply examined the facts myself. I've found Dianetics to work, to help myself and others.

No amount of "pseudos" or "quasis," no amount of criticism, scoffing, "authority" opinion or attacks on Mr. Hubbard's character will ever alter whether Dianetics brings results. And no amount of rumors, hearsay or eager interpretation of a subject for you will ever replace first hand experience.

Mr. Hubbard's own recommendation is to question, evaluate and thoroughly test for yourself the source materials of a subject, and use what works to help improve life.

So find out what's really there and decide for yourself. And let others do that too.

REG: Hey, if you're happy, I'm happy for you. Since Dianetics is a mind therapy system, a mind-set changing program, usually sought, tried, used, believed in by those who are in emotional turmoil or emotional need, it doesn't seem to me likely that those people are willing or able to do a rational, objective investigation and

evaluation of the "science" involved before they get involved. When people in emotional pain need answers and help, inner parameters decide which possible source of succor is turned to. Why Dianetics and not a variation of Hinduism, or Jungian psychiatry, or old reliable Jesus Christ? Perhaps only an obscure gene can tell.

ETE: Ideally SFR should be a place where we can debate all matters of interest of SF and those in the SF community, as long as opinions don't devolve into libel.

John Costello: I was delighted to receive the complementary copies of issue No. 3, having earlier received and cashed the check for the Lem interview translation, however I must point out, as pleasurable as I find my name in Prisonerish type only slightly smaller than the characters for Lem's name itself, that honor properly, as well as the index listing, belongs to Konstantin Vasilievich Dushenko (as a Russian he would accept K. V. Dushenko to accomodate it on the page), his translator and interviewer. I have never met Stanislas Lem, unfortunately, and not reading Polish have had to content myself with Michael Kandel's superb renderings into English as well as translations of other works into Russian. As a translator — as much as I agree with Lem's comments on the subject — I am willing



-ALLEN K. '90

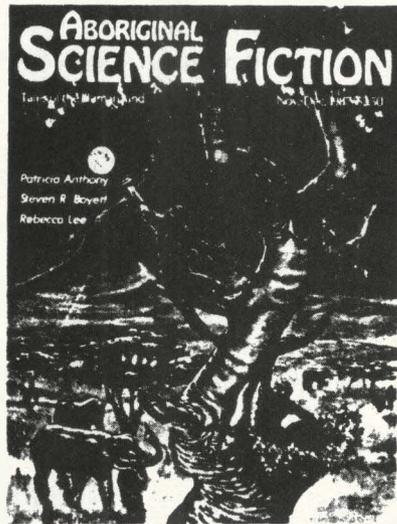
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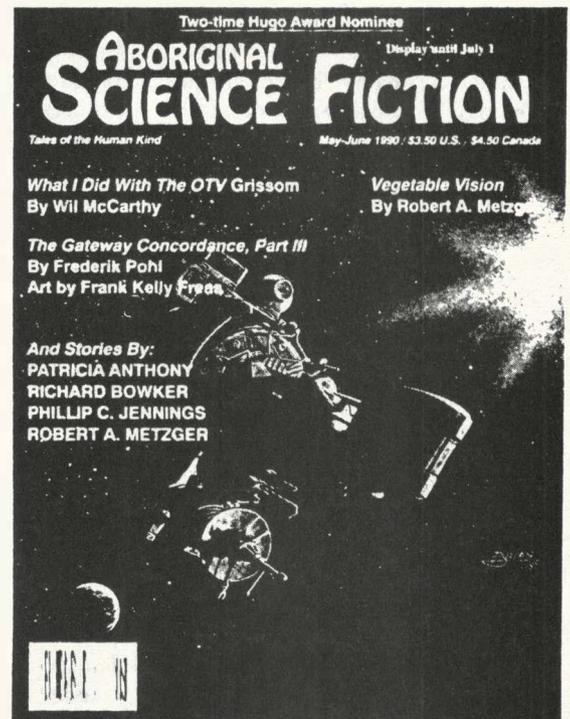
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to accept-- properly I must insist on -- a "translated by J. H. Costello" in small print at the end of the article.

Alas, I must point out that one glitch entered the translation which reversed the meaning of Lem's answer to Dushenko's second last question.

. . . He said "I do not possess an imagination which can function outside my tongue, alinguistically, wordlessly." The rest of his statement amplifies that and the actual meaning remains clear, but the dropped negation is jarring. The fault is entirely mine. *Mea Culpa*.

Other comments: Alexis Gililand should remember that STARSHIP TROOPERS was written before Vietnam. It's likely the war Heinlein had in mind was the Korean 'police action,' another war (an alleged police action') the country had already done its best to put out its collective consciousness by the time the book was written.

ETE: *Mea Culpa, as well. Changes noted, and will be placed in any further issues of SFR (where pertinent) as well as in any index we prepare.*

Re "Police Actions:" I suspect that the Persian Gulf War's outcome will cause many--on both sides of the issue--to look differently at the use of force. I don't think force will become the centerpiece of American Foreign policy. At least I hope it won't. The use of military force should always be a last resort.

Vincent W. Burch: You have an excellent magazine here. I really enjoy all three aspects of it. And, in only three issues, I've already seen some lively debate starting up in the LOCs.

I was fascinated by the nanotech articles in the first issue. While I was reading them, though, I thought of another application. The articles discussed nanites that could be introduced into the human body to perform various monitoring and reconstruction tasks. All of these require extensive overall systems development. It should be possible to implement a specific, limited, application much more quickly.

It's easier to destroy than to build. That law of entropy applies in design engineering and in biology, just as it does in sociology. Why not design a nanite which has the sole function of seeking out and physically destroying

a specific pathogen (like, maybe, HIV?), or at least neutralizing it and safely eliminating it from the body?

Grant Fjermedal expressed concern about nanite population control. In this application, a control suggests itself. I picture a counting rod with a given number (say, a couple dozen) of stops. It starts in the middle, and moves one stop to the right every time the nanite recognizes the pathogen. Every time a fellow "pathocide" is recognized the rod moves one stop to the left. If the rod moves all the way to the right, the pathocide reproduces; all the way to the left, it self-destructs. If the numbers are managed properly, the final populations should be pathogens 0, pathocides 1. This lone pathocide would act as a sentinel against re-infection.

In the second issue, the spaceflight articles were marvelous. I especially liked the way the story "Suicide by UFO" fit into the issue's theme. I was disheartened to see how, in the interval between his writing and my reading, politics-as-usual had shattered so many of the hopes expressed in Vince Kohler's article. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. have found new ways to expend their resources, primarily in the Baltic and Persian Gulf regions. And, I was irked by his casual dismissal of libertarianism as a fad of SF. More and more people, both inside and outside the SF community, are realizing that government must be seriously questioned and severely limited.

I loved Darrell Schweitzer's two-part essay on skepticism vs. credulity. I second his motion for greater skepticism among the SF community. While I may be a bit more open to the possibility of psi and sasquatches, I remain unconvinced by the "evidence" so far presented. Too many readers (and writers) of SF are losing the ability to distinguish between science, magic, and religion.

ETE: *When it comes to nanotech I often find myself dazzled by the possibilities. Thanks for bringing another notion to our attention.*

As for spaceflight and the Baltics and the Persian Gulf--without arguing as to merit, I'll just point out that it's more difficult to build than it is to destroy.

As a political philosophy I like lib-

ertarianism, and I agree that government has become too entrenched. It's just that in my experience the Libertarian Party is too often a fancy debating society instead of a political party dedicated to electing candidates to public office. Which after all is what political parties are for, isn't it?

Now, if that's the case, what about the future? How will new computer-based technologies, like on-line user networks, Hypertext, Hypermedia and Fact Forum change politics and political parties? Sounds like a good article for a future issue of SFR. Any writers out there interested?

I agree that many in the SF community have trouble distinguishing science, magic and religion. In fact, one subscriber has already quit because he disliked what he perceived as an anti-religious bias on the part of Richard E. Geis. A bias which he felt extended to the entire magazine. Well, he's mistaken. When it comes to religion, reason, and faith, Mr. Geis' views are not necessarily those of the entire staff.

My main concern about confusing science, magic and religion has to do with the many potent future technologies, like nanotech, that are just on the horizon of possibility. It is crucial that, when these socially-altering technologies appear, we take care not to be deluded by clever tricks. For the present, it is also important that we watch out for charlatans who use their money to try and insinuate themselves into our midst and promote their religious/philosophical views. Religion and faith are highly personal matters and one person's folly is another's faith. Time will tell who is right. ∞

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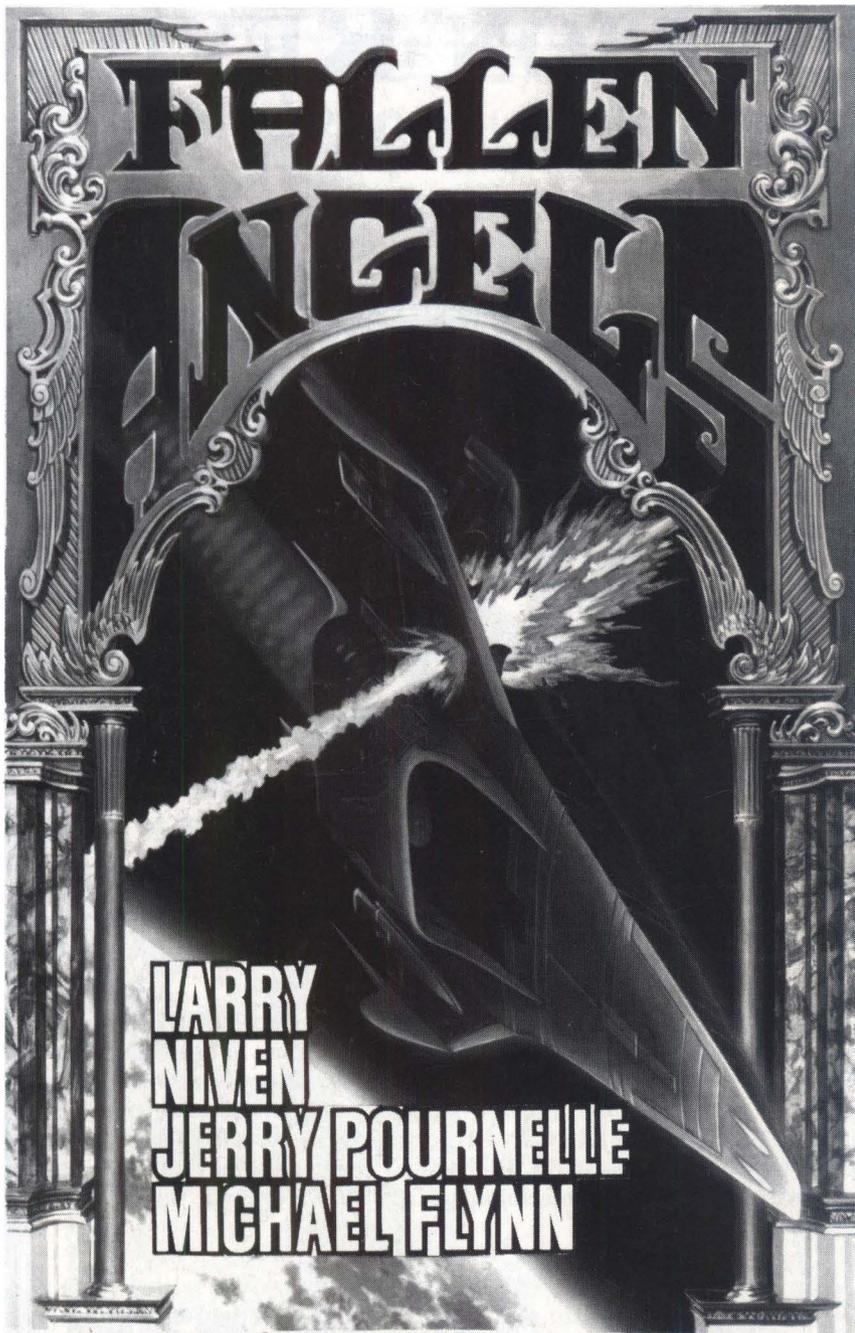
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