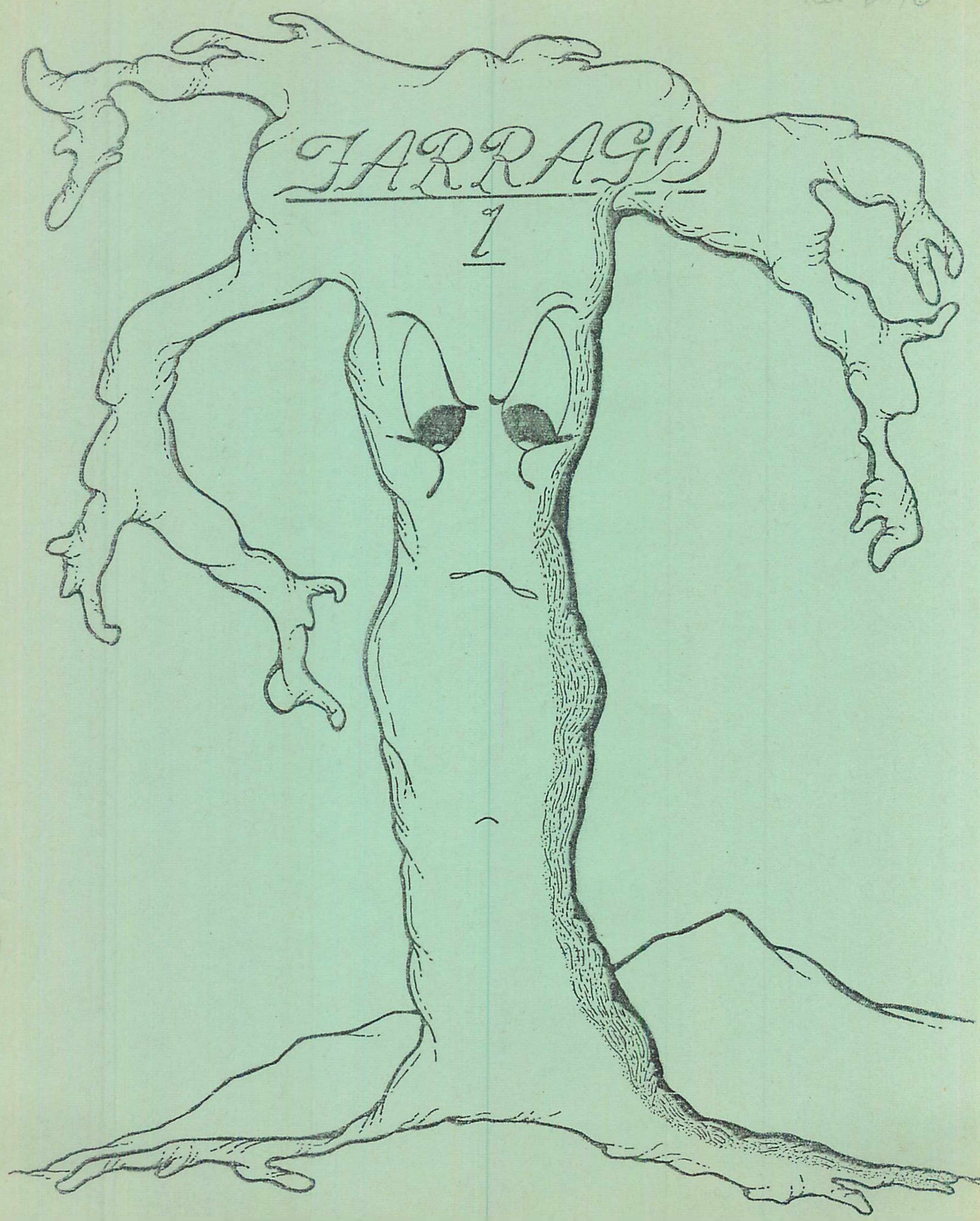


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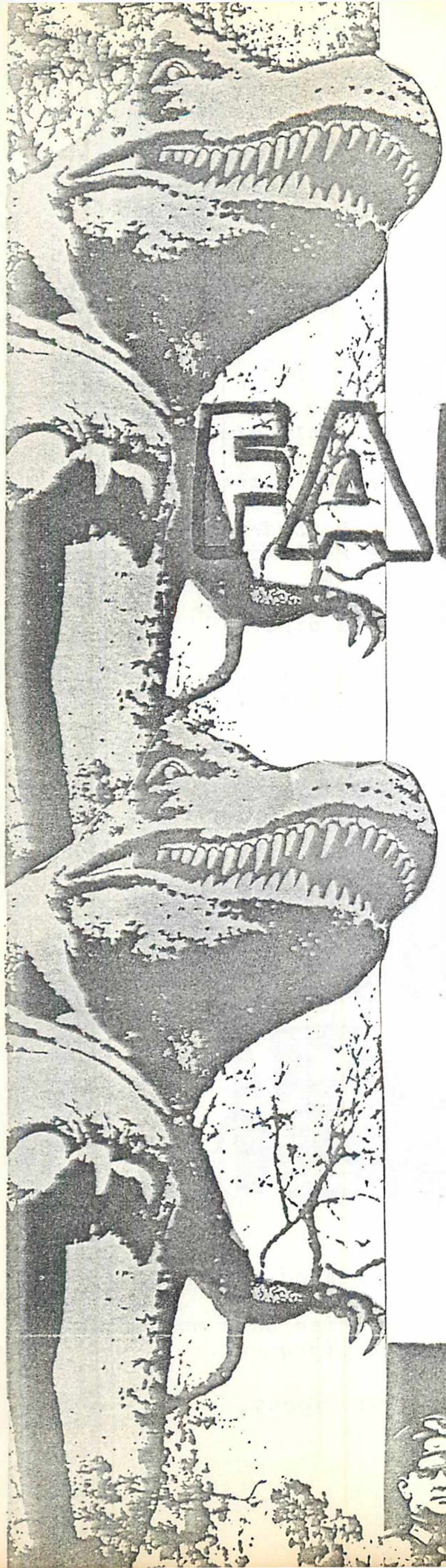
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Donn Brazier  
1455 Fawnvalley Drive  
St. Louis, Mo. 63131

FARRAGO  
NUMBER ONE

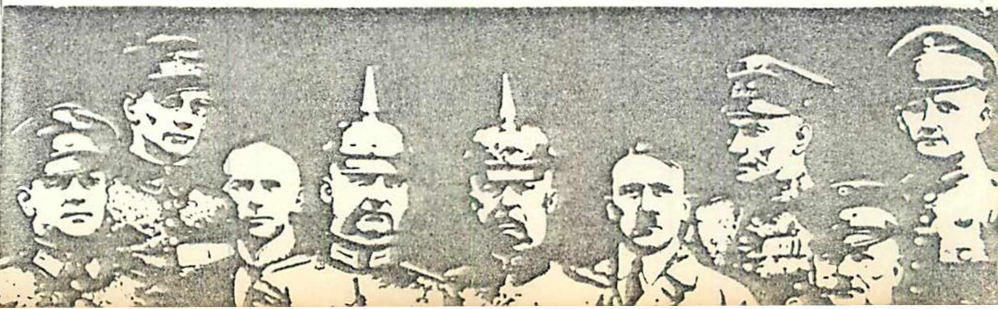
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FRONT COVER

SHERYL  
BIRKHEAD

# FARRAGO

MIXED FODDER -- *Editor*  
H.P. LOVECRAFT vs ALGERNON BLACKWOOD  
-- *Stuart Gilson & Robert E. Blenheim*  
RHAETHAIL -- *Frank L. Balazs, art by*  
*Eric Mayer*  
DODGERS AND DANCERS -- *Richard A. Wilber*  
DISTURBIA -- *Neal Wilgus, photo by*  
*Claire Beck*  
FIRE AND ICE -- *Michael T. Shoemaker, art*  
*by Simon Agree*  
THE CONDUITS OF LUST, THE LOCI OF PAIN...  
-- *Paul Di Filippo, art by Sheryl*  
*Birkhead*  
STRANGER THAN NAKED -- *Eric Lindsay*  
POET -- *Cathryn Gebhart*  
PROTEST -- *Andrew Darlington*  
THE PLAGUE FROM PLUTO -- *Eldon K. Everett,*  
*art by K. Allen Bjorke*  
THE UNIVERSE AND SAM KURTZ -- *Paul Walker,*  
*art overlay by Donn Brazier*  
FAREWELL DREAM -- *Jon Inouye*  
WIVES, STEPFORD AND OTHERWISE --  
*Roger D. Sween*





## MIXED FODDER

+++++

Editor, Donn Brazier



Let us meet some of the people who contributed to FARRAGO #1.

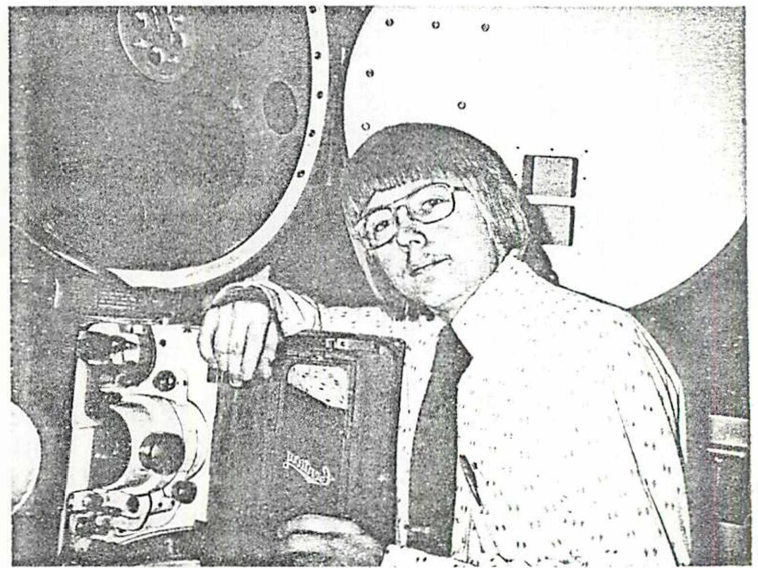
CLAIRE BECK, one of the all-time greats of early fandom, is 56-years old, but one would never know it from his sense of humor and sprightly mind.

He writes this about himself:

*Former stf fan. Honorary member !!!  
FIRST AND A HALF FANDOM !!! Conquered  
the cigarette habit. Also conquered the  
cigar habit and quit chewing tobacco,  
but still smokes a pipe.*

Claire is a stationary engineer who can be reached at P.O. Box 27, Lakeport, California 95453.

ROBERT E. BLENHEIM writes: *I am 28 years old, married, with three wonderful children (the eldest of which, Beverly, age 8, took the photo of me). My money is earned as a film-projectionist at a Twin Theatre in Trenton. I have written 4 novels, 7 books, and a bunch of short stories, none of which has seen print. My main interests (besides writing) are films, concert music, and reading (Bradbury, Lewis Carroll & Algernon Blackwood). The things I despise most are hospitals, Mike Nichols, and mashed potatoes. I don't smoke, drink (much), use drugs...but I'd better stop there. I have made many amateur sound movies, mostly horror films, which have more than a little notoriety. I am also a 5-foot-5 1/2 inch pipsqueak.*



Robert's address is 8 Catalpa Lane, Levittown, PA 19055.



PAUL DI FILIPPO writes: I was born 10/29/54. I wrote my first story at the age of nine; something about a flying robot if memory serves. At the age of ten, I wrote a MAN FROM UNCLE story which is still extant. I never quite stopped after that. Around this time I became hooked on SF. The barbs sunk deep. I stumbled into the rabbit-hole of Fandom in '73 by attending Torcon II. The place is just as Carrol described it. I would like to write for my living and live for my writing. My three favorite things are literature, humor, and Nature in all Her manifestations. Presently, I think, I am limping towards glory.



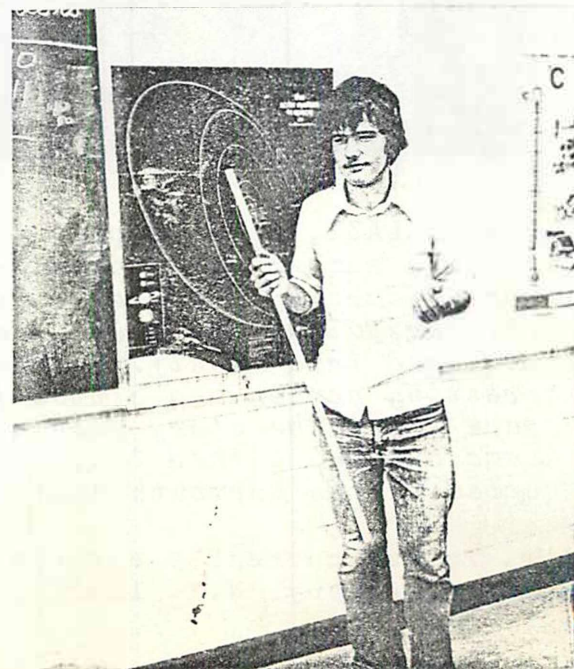
Paul lives at 124 Old River Rd.,  
Lincoln, R.I. 02865

ERIC LINDSAY of 6 Hillcrest Ave., Faulconbridge, NSW 2776, Australia writes: Have you noticed that when mundanes ask about you they tend to expect the sort of information in a resume? Occupation, religion, marital status, and all that sort of thing. This places you for them, as part of a status group, and tells them how they should react to you. If there is anything that I can consider important about me, and thus to me, it is the search for a meaning in life, and lacking success in this, the search itself takes precedence. To a person in this mind all those other things are unimportant and indeed almost meaningless. Perhaps, by persistence, if not by ability, I can gather to myself the wisdom of the ages (altho this did the spinz little good). Whatever you have from me was done for me; they were notes of things that interested me at the time. If by deviating slightly from straight notes into something that could be called a review or an article, then more than one person may be served, but this is a secondary consideration.



Two-year old  
passport photo

STUART GILSON of 745 Townsend Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3T 2V5 has this to say: I'm not really what one might term ambitious; life is, for me, reeking in opportunities for self-fulfillment, and just by nature I've always repressed any lofty aspirations. What little spare time remains after my studies is usually devoted to fanac, reading, book collecting, and playing with a local stage band in which I double on piano and trumpet. This last prompted by my fondness for jazz, or for that matter, music in general. To briefly, if inaccurately, sum up my character: idealist, fatalist, perfectionist, semi-agnostic, long-term pessimist, short-term optimist, nostalgia buff, seeker of





imagination, psychic enthusiast, book lover, and student of humanity. Presently, I intend to eventually get my doctorate in physics and look forward to a life of teaching and research in both my profession and myself.



JON INOUE, 12319 Aneta St., Culver City, CA 90230 asks: Who am I? I could start out by saying that I'm a person. But that is not specific enough. I am of the homo sapien class. This means that I am subject to every whim, fancy, and feat of imagination capable to man. I am writing and working hard to become established. I look forward to the day when the soft, sweet smell of a paperback appears. The book will smile and so will I. And then another...another. I can stand up and say, I'm a pro.

But there is something above everything else. And that is typing here at these keys. A minute before, I walked across a parking lot at 1:00 in the morning. The stars shone. When I look at them I get

that weird feeling, a pull towards them-- a desire to tell about them. And don't we all? So that's why I write, and what I would like to achieve. There's beauty in a sun exploding, or a nebula lighting into orange.



DON D'AMMASSA has an admirer who lives with him at 19 Angell Dr., East Providence, R.I., 02914-- his wife, Sheila. I couldn't coax a photo out of Don, or- unless I've misplaced it - a biographical paragraph. However, Sheila sent the photo opposite, along with this comment: A totally characteristic expression - either the Patriots lost again, or the six o'clock news is on, or a new batch of Hyperian books is coming out, or someone wants an article on Perry Rhodan, or Davy just spilled tea on his shoe. Hard to tell.

FRANK BALAZS, on a cryptic postcard 'witnessed, Dave Romm, deceased' and with such mysterious signals as 'grarf' and 'splurge', says: About twenty years ago, Clarence Pittsbottom had his left arm severed. This arm, carefully nourished under antiseptic laboratory conditions rapidly developed into myself. Unlike Mr. Pittsbottom, Frank Balazs is an interesting person who climbs flagpoles and guzzles Guinness Stout in his spare time. The story presented here was originally written as a No drama but the author later revised it to an English musical to be presented by the Dormouth Amateur Gynecologists.

Mr. Balazs currently attends Bedlam, otherwise known as SUNYA, at 2484 Indian, Albany, N.Y. 12222. His roommates are numerous.



NEAL WILGUS of Box 25771, Albuquerque, N.M. 87125, writes: *Sorry, I don't have a photograph to send, but here's a paragraph. Neal Wilgus first active in fandom 20 years ago has returned from a 15-year gaffiation to plague numerous zines with his so-called poetry, sketches and reviews. Between bouts of work at straight jobs he has written for littlemags and the underground/alternate press and has worked on supposedly professional fiction which has never seen the light of day. More or less married, he has lived in Arizona and New Mexico for the past four decades and now works nights at the Albuquerque Post Office. He is presently working on a book about conspiracy and paranoia, which may take the heat off fandom, the small press and underground papers in a foreseeable future.*

ROGER SWEEN, at the time he sent me this paragraph, had no pictures of himself "that look like me". He writes: *Roger D. Sween tumbled into fandom in the fall of 1972 and as yet has not recovered. Accused of not loving fanzines the way Mike Glicksohn and Charlie Brown do, he nevertheless covets them all and wishes he could do more to get every one. Sween is the archtypal librarian and can't help living in a bibliographic context. (Box 408, Platteville, Wis. 53818)*

PAUL WALKER writes concisely: *Paul Walker is a fanwriter who lives in Bloomfield New Jersey. Currently, he is contemplating suicide. Well, let's hope not; when he notes that I might have left a word or two out of his story, he'll come raging back to life. The rest of his address is 128 Montgomery St with a zip of 07003.*

RICK WILBER (and please note the "e" in his last name, not a "u") typed the following on the old Royal at my house one evening: *I teach journalism at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, and free-lance rather heavily locally, regionally, and nationally. My free-lance articles tend to be travel or sport pieces, and all my fiction somehow always turns out to be science fiction. I've placed enough free-lance work to be a bit of a local name and have placed, at last count, about a dozen or so sf stories in fanzines.*

++++

Here it is the middle of October; none of the other writers/artists have favored me with a paragraph or photo. You might think it odd that Don D'Amassa is in this line-up when there's nothing of his in the issue. I think it rather odd myself, having only discovered the fact today. Was I think so hard about the author-review piece I wanted him to do for me that I got carried away? Only another fan editor knows the often mysterious mistakes that attack his fanzine. Let's call it a bonus.....

Rick Wilber's story originally appeared in SAINT LOUIS ACTION, a professionalzine of which Rick was editor. He kindly gave me permission to reprint the story, which, before it was printed in SLA, was slated to go in the still-born DORIC magazine that Rick and I were going to publish. The backcover by Pete Dunn is also from the SAINT LOUIS ACTION magazine, and appeared as an interior illustration for Rick's exciting story.

Besides the hoped-for piece by Don D'Amassa, what else do I have in the file for the second issue? There's a cover by Bruce Townley, whose crazy drawings give me a big kick. Paul di Filippo will appear again; this time with an SF piece dissecting some professional collaborations. Rick Wilber has submitted a story, "The End of the Chase", a kind of SF love story. Stories by Eric Mayer and Jeff



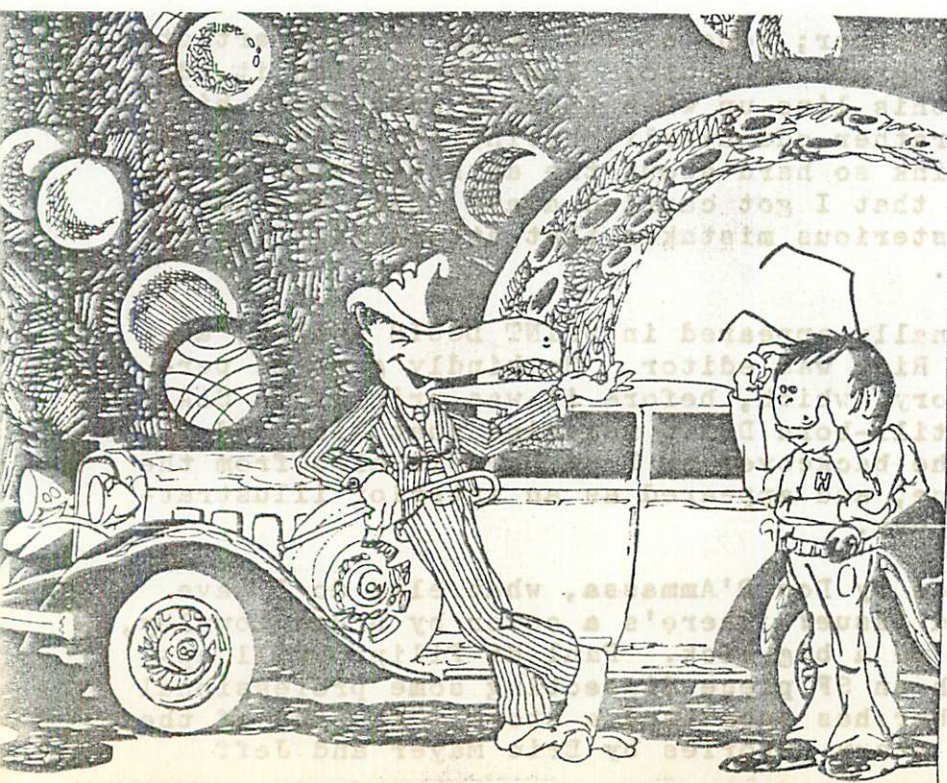
Hecht, both dealing with reality of a puzzling sort, but each tale cast in a different mold. Off to the mundane side, but of increasing importance in society, is Eric Lindsay's essay on leisure. This is balanced by Ben Indick's enlarged discussion of the works of the sardonic fantasiste, Saki, a short version previously having appeared in TITLE, my monthly zine. In the true, traditional SF spirit of enjoying a story while noticing its scientific flaws, Wayne Martin writes of Bradbury's famous tale, "A Sound of Thunder". To balance the SF stories in the issue, Richard Brandt presents a short horror story, "Nightmare in White". Besides all this, who knows what other surprises lurk in "The Old Bone's" files? There's some Wilgus, some Darlington, some Inouye, some.....



At the left, "Old Bone", in a typical pose and customary attire and cigar, types some LoC or whatever on his old Royal manual. (FARRAGO, it must be pointed out, was done on his office machine, a Selectric IBM.) Note some items of hi-fi equipment which give the accompanying beat of big band jazz to the fingers that fly across the typing keyboard at a rate of 20 to 30 words a minute.

# AUTOCLAVE

May 28-31, 1976 | Box 04097, Detroit, MI 48204



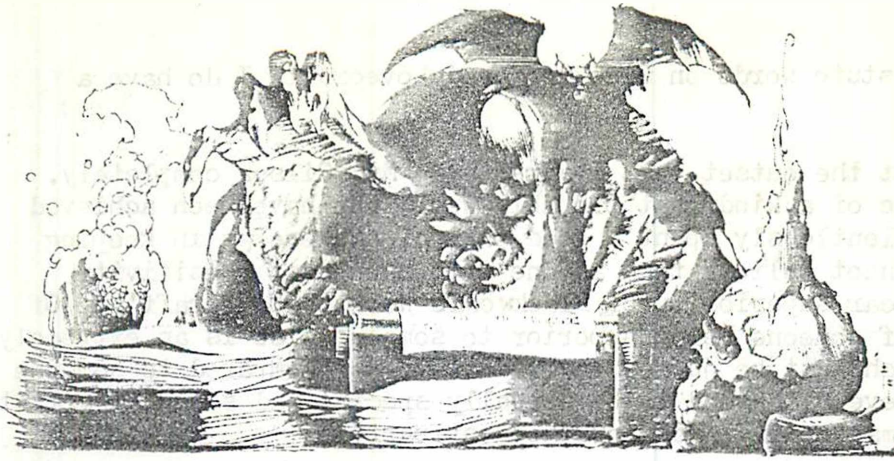
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# H.P. LOVECRAFT vs ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

The first comment is by Stuart Gilson. His letter arrived July 28 from his home in Canada; I immediately Xeroxed the mini-essay and sent it to Robert E. Blenheim, whose letterhead I have snitched for the decoration of this piece, and which letterhead convinced me that Blenheim might have an opinion about two authors I like and might have a few words to say about Gilson's opinion. Robert obliged with the second comment received here at the Wilde Pickle Press on August 26.

STUART GILSON --

Now that I'm presently involved in chronologically reading all of Lovecraft's and Blackwood's works I have access to, I've noticed several interesting contrasts between the styles of the two writers, usually favoring Blackwood's more subtle approach to creating atmosphere.

Both writers, and Blackwood especially in his more effective moments, depict the scenery, characters, and mood of the story through the eyes of a narrator, thus creating a singular and entirely subjective view of the events in the tale. Lending much importance to the emotions and reactions of the narrator builds up a consistent mood. And yet, Blackwood produces a feeling of horror in the reader much more subtly, through emphasizing the absence of something common to the rest of the story rather than the burdensome addition of some new element as Lovecraft is noted for.

For instance, Blackwood's narrator will describe the setting of events with care and detailed precision. When the climactic entry of the horror occurs, such detailed description ceases. As a result, emphasis is put on the panic of his narrator. In Lovecraft's case, the introduction of essential plot elements is done vaguely, making use of "fear of the unknown", but building up to the appearance of the horror in which he lets loose with every imaginable adjective and adverb. This slows the pace of the tale terribly, just when the narrator is most frantic. Thus, those moments of real terror are more effectively handled by Blackwood, and are usually the more memorable. My God, but I'll never forget that final confrontation in The Willows.



Robert E. Blenheim --

Having read Mr. Gilson's astute words on Blackwood and Lovecraft, I do have a few comments.

First of all, let me say at the outset that I agree with Mr. Gilson completely. Although Lovecraft has fame of a kind that probably would not have been achieved had not Mr. Derleth so unrelentlessly spent a good part of his energy in keeping HPL's name before us, I cannot believe that anyone with the least sensitivity could not recognize the clear superiority of Blackwood's work to Lovecraft's. Of course, such a statement of someone being superior to someone else is an extremely unfair statement, since each must be judged individually, not compared to someone else. Nevertheless, I believe Blackwood to be a really special and singular artist, and Lovecraft a slightly imaginative hack for the most part.

The depth of Blackwood's fiction is astounding. He seems to draw upon a pseudo-Victorian style in such a way as to suspend immediately all disbelief in the reader with little effort. The terror he inflicts in a reader (though "terror" is too simple and naive a word for the complex way his stories surround the reader) is carefully constructed, with supreme subtlety. I find a special kind of atmospheric coldness encircle me in some of his better tales. It is a special feeling (only approached by Bradbury and Clark Ashton Smith occasionally) of being in the middle of nature itself, and encompassed by a whole new form of perceptibility.

Lovecraft's tales -- with a few exceptions -- lack all subtlety. They are not structured for any more complex emotions other than the same hackneyed "terror" of comic books and grade-B horror movies. Certainly, Lovecraft is (as many say) verbose, blatant with his horror tales, but -- to me -- he is generally laughable. In only two stories of his do I find any real artistic merit: "The Haunter of the Dark" and -- the one I believe is his best -- "The Music of Erich Zann". The rest are the stuff for the pulps and hardly deserve the wide exposure or the attention that they are always getting. About half the stories, quite honestly, deserve the total obscurity that Derleth has ironically saved them from. Some deserve even worse than mere obscurity: "The Call of Cthulu" is an absolutely worthless bunch of dribbling verbiage that has the audacity to call itself a short story.

Lovecraft is closer to Edgar Rice Burroughs than to Blackwood, but Burroughs is not taken more seriously than he deserves to be (as Lovecraft is), and is -- at least -- almost infallibly entertaining. No one seems to be claiming Burroughs' books as works of art; what is all this nonsense about Lovecraft's work being art? Such a position is so untenable as to be ludicrous.

Many of Blackwood's stories are beautiful and haunting works of art of the purest kind. He -- when he's at his best -- shows us an extremely sensitive blend of terror WITH beauty; "The Glamour of the Snow" is one of his best (but not atypical) examples of the delicate way he combines terror and beauty. The settings of his tales take on a powerful force, and a good many directly involve nature. Such things get right into the soul of the reader in a complex way, drawing on past feelings and inner fears.

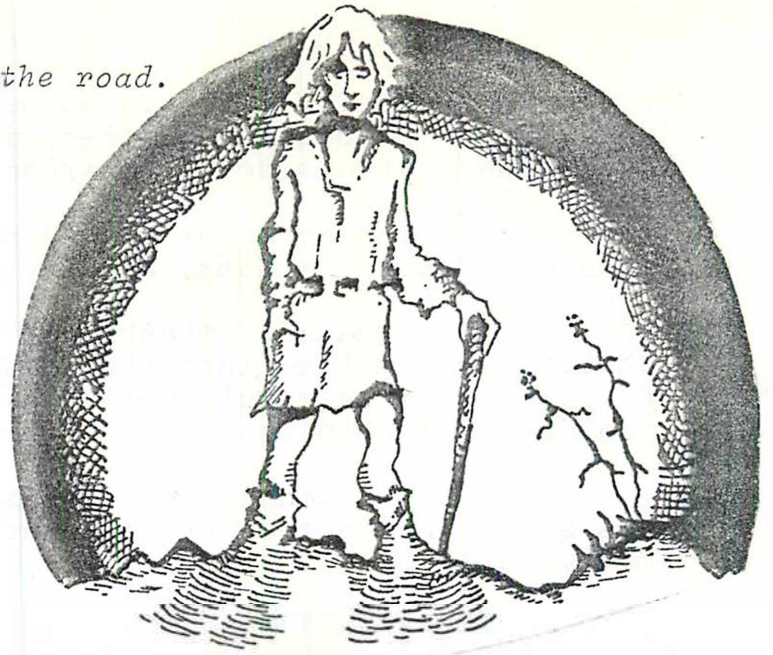
Lovecraft is a small step above comic books, but Blackwood is as inspiring and fulfilling as Lovecraft is obvious and base, and a comparison between these two is almost an insult. Frankly, it is time to cease these comparisons, for it drags Blackwood down into the hackneyed mud to even speak of him and Lovecraft in the same breath. Lovecraft is to Blackwood as Jacqueline Susann is to Cervantes.

And, I too, Mr. Gilson, shall never forget the final of "The Willows".

end



*He was standing in the middle of the road.*



"  
R H A E T H A I L

BY FRANK L. BALAZS

ILLUSTRATED BY ERIC MAYER

"Not with a bang..."

Dusk had crept in but minutes ago, yet night would arrive before lodging could be reached--if there was lodging in the village at all. Darkness fell fast during this season and before long the chill breeze of the night would start. Hills still were to be climbed and the horses were tired; there had been nothing but traveling for days now. The food was gone and the money bag was only half full. Of coppers.

They would certainly be closer to the village if that traveler had not delayed them. But then--He was not a "traveler" any longer: he was a Talent. He had joined them and would be with them until Toon convinced the others to throw him out.

"We're really des'prits to take a weird like him," he had said.

Both Lissith and Toon were sitting in the front of the wagon at the time, but it was Lissith who saw him first. The horses had just pulled their wagon over a steep hill, and there he was. Standing. In the middle of the road.

"Would you be so kind as to stop?" he gently inquired.

"What's with him?" muttered Toon and then asked, "You want something? Or do you always stand in the middle of roads?"



"I think you have need of my...uh...services."

"Hell, mister. We got a town to make 'fore night-fall," then he became sweetness itself, "so let's help us both by moving to the side of the road."

The stranger showed no signs of hearing and continued, "You're Talents, as many call you."

"Thanks! Thanks for tellin' us. We didn't know that." Toon yelled into the covered back, "Didja hear that Farl!? We're Talents! Well, thank you kind weird..but...If you don't move to the side of the road I'll run you over!"

"Patience, Toon," said the middle-aged woman at his side, "Let's see what he wants first. Then, if he doesn't move, well..."

She addressed herself to the stranger, "Good evening. I'm Lissith. We are in a hurry. What do you want?"

"I'd like to join your group."

"Whaa--!" started Toon.

"...and actually there is no need to hurry. The village you seek lies in the valley below."

Lissith, Toon, and Farl, who had just joined them, looked to the valley below; the valley that should not have a village; the valley that did not have a village seconds before; the valley with several houses on a lane or two clustered together to form a village.

"What the--?" continued Toon.

"But no..." the stranger waved the village away, "All is as you know, Devham is still miles away."

"What happened to the houses!? For that matter where did they come from?"

"What houses? Did you see any houses?" the stranger asked the air innocently, "I didn't see any houses."

Lissith, finally getting angry, said, "I don't know what you're trying to pull, but we have a village to reach..."

"...and the whole day to reach it in." He swept his arms out; his black cape flowing behind him, "For behold! Even now, the sun but rises!"

All looked to the east where the rays of the dawn slid thru verdure and dancing dew to give the world an unreal air.

Now, Farl, who had been observing all this, said, "That's quite a Talent you have. And you're welcome to join us if you stop acting so mysterious."



"HEY!" burst a disturbed Toon.

"Perhaps," Lissith said, "Perhaps, Farl, you could let us all discuss this first."

"Oh! Of course! I wasn't trying to decide for us. I meant--well, let's get inside and wake up the Teller."

So, the Teller was awakened and the four gathered in the back of the wagon and spoke in low voices while the traveler stood outside waiting. In spite of Lissith's doubts and Toon's unmatched reluctance, it was decided to let him travel and perform with them.

"We do need something to improve our "act."

Lissith told the dark man and as he climbed onto the wagon Farl asked, "What's your name?"

The answer was, "I don't care. You decide--what would you like?"

A chill, melancholy wind sprung up as Lissith was up front driving the horses. The Teller and Farl were talking with the stranger and shivering whenever a particularly harsh gust of wind burst thru the wagon's covered sides. The talk ranged thru many subjects, but even when it touched on the stranger's past, nothing was brought to light concerning him. Neither Farl nor the Teller seemed to realize this: only Toon, sitting alone, occasionally suggesting names: "How 'bout Weird," thought that the stranger was just as, if not more, mysterious as before.

Farl eventually did bring the conversation around to the subject of names. "Look, it really isn't fight for someone to decide on a name for you. If you don't want us to know who you really are, at least give us some name for you. Doesn't have to be your real one."

Toon muttered, "Doan know why he should hide somethun."

"Well...You're right Farl. You and the others can call me...call me..." and he lapsed into silence for some time.

During this, Toon, never giving up, suggested, "A Weird." By appearances no one heard him. He grumbled and relieved Lissith to watch the road and shiver.

"...to Devham," the stranger was muttering, "I haven't been to Devham in-- in a long time. And why...?"

Suddenly, he came up out of his thoughts, "Okay, Farl, Teller, you can call me Rhaethail." And he spoke no more.



With a few more hours traveling, the moon shone among the clouds and they reached the village: black and dusty lanes lit by one light glowing from the tavern and inn. The Talents went there first.

"HO-HO!" rumbled the hairy innkeeper, "A night of lodgings and meals for five! Now that is a rare joke! A night of lodgings and meals for five on some pieces of copper! Ho-ho-ho!" And he broke down into laughter for some time.

"But enough of this," he continued, "It'll cost you three of these for what you want," and held up a good-sized piece of silver ore as grimy as he, trying to make it gleam in the dim light. "If you don't have that...welll... GET OUT!!"

"Then, I imagine, we'll be leaving," Farl said, walking toward the exit.

But at this point, Rhaethail opened a small leather pouch which hung at his side and produced three good-sized pieces of silver, which did gleam in the light. "Here, my good innman. Now...Sustenance!

"And none of that dry salty stuff you call meat and that sewer water called ale!"

They all sat at a table.

"Thanks much for helping us out. You didn't have t--"

"Don't thank me; I'm one of you now. Besides, don't you think I want decent lodgings?"

"Well..." doubted Farl, "if you wanted decent lodgings we should of stayed in the wagon."

Rhaethail had not slept for long: he was worried.

"Why did I return?"

He left his bed for the cramped and deserted hallway. And worried.

"I shouldn't've... But--if I hadn't returned, would that have changed things? Will it happen no matter what!?"

"I don't know. You tell me."

He whirled, "Who--?"

"'Tis naught but the Teller. You see I know many tongues. For instance, Gei-yonth. That one I know very well. Teng oru Rhaethail calThgyi?"

"Rhaethail was stunned.



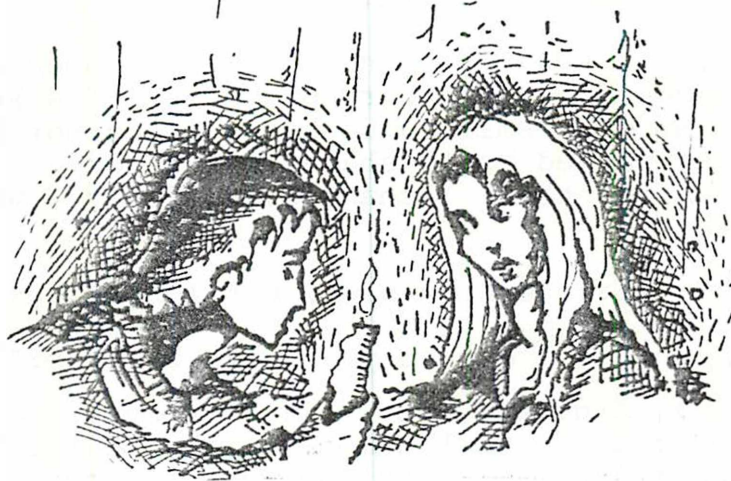
She repeated, "Why do you call yourself 'Rhaëthail' the Lost One?"

"If you know the language, you know the legend."

"Are you sure?"

There was a long pause, "No...we never are until..."  
The Teller continued, "If there has been no sign, why do you call yourself--what you do? I have repeated the word often enough."

"My name is what I chose."



"But why do you chose 'Rha--'" why do you chose that name?"

"That is twice you have refused to speak my name. But why? You have spoken it before--"

"Which I regret, but did out of necessity. Now there is no need."

"But why? Are you afraid of my name?"

"I am only afraid of what it portends. As you are."

"I am not as familiar with the Legend of the Los Ones as I think you to be. I do have some Knowledge, but..."

She let him finish the sentence, "You want more."

"I want your story."

He stood motionless for some time, then he breathed, "All right. Downstairs."

The tavern was dark and deserted. Rhaëthail shuffled to a seat.

"We will speak in Gei-yonth, if you know it as well as you say."



"I am well versed in it," the Teller paused, in deep thought, "I know it as well as--KUN."

"You use fearsome beings indeed, indeed. Are you trying to counter 'Rhaethail'? But nothing can be done, if proven true."

"In Gei-yonth, then."

He started, "The Legend is quite clear: To herald, or perhaps to start, the end of the world, there comes a Lost One, always."

"But...why do you think you're one?"

"We, the Lost Ones, have always suspected it, if we knew the Legend. My father told me it--I wish he never had. But he did, smiling because he did not believe in the Legend and wanted me to share in the joke. It was no joke to me. After that, I changed: suddenly I was a possible Rhaethail.

"There has been no sign, but I fear one soon."

"What do you expect your sign will be?"

"That, I do not know till it comes. Bin Churl's sign was the destruction of his monastery. He had heard the Legend and suspected himself, but he wasn't sure until his church had burned to the ground.

"And from that small mountain-top the monks fled their church and with them...with them, they carried the Plague."

"There have been subtler signs than that," The Teller reminded.

"True, but it matters not, for the sign is only meaningful to the Lost One. Prince Thom of Uriyon, in his youth, befriended a unicorn. When, years later, he witnessed the hunting and killing of a unicorn, he knew.

"The most horrible weapons of war ever known arose from his kingdoms soon after."

"The purpose of the Lost Ones has continually baffled me," said the Teller, "What good is he, if only he knows the world, as we know it, is doomed?"

"I wish I knew. But, I only know, that soon...so very soon...something meaningful to me will cease to exist..."

"The sign always comes near the place one was born."

"That is true."

"Were you born in Devham?"

But the Los One answered not.





It was morning: time for the Talents to start their performance.

There was no announcement, though, perhaps, the villagers felt an undefinable urge to visit the main square that day. It made no difference; most of the townsfolk passed thru the square often enough without any mysterious urges.

The important fact was they came.

Toon started as usual; he rallied a crowd and informed them that many wondrous events were about to happen, that they should stay and watch, and, perhaps, find them deserving of some reward.

But, few people showed any interest, since Talents were a dime-a-dozen. And their claim that they were the real thing and not fakers, well...why should they believe that? Both real talents and the dime-a-dozen variety said that.

Farl sung some old ballad that everyone knew, but was soon composing and singing his own songs on the spot. Lissith joined in, adding her amazing voice to Farl's and the lyre that he played.

A few people were stopping to listen.

Lissith's voice was deep and mellow and then light and airy; it matched the lyre perfectly and, at times, it seemed her voice was another lyre, but a thousand times better. Farl dropped out. Now there was just Lissith's voice; she was not singing words words, but fluctuating and vibrating sounds--doing everything a human voice could do. And more.

The crowd was gathering, spellbound.



The Teller and Farl started chanting in the background. Toon was slowly beating Ora drums. Swiftly, the chanting was rising, drowning out Lissith's melodious tones. Farl started spinning around her and the Teller soon joined in; whirling around each other, their brightly colored robes counterpointing the black of Lissith's.

The sound of the Ora drums had taken on a life of their own. Lissith was no longer singing; she was standing, somber, in the center of whirling chaos and frenzied chanting. She was solid in a rapidly shifting world, order in the midst of chaos.

Just as Toon joined the chanting, Order was flung down and out of the mad circle. The Teller and Farl were spinning, jumping, leaping...they were sweeping the world into madness.

Chaos had won.

The Ora drums stopped. Toon screamed "KAAH!" and jumped into the Chaos. Everything stopped. Chaos was gone. And what was left was one man, standing, in a withered brown tunic. The spell was broken.

The performance was over.

Farl and Rhaethail were already moving rapidly among the crowd, collecting their "reward."

Farl wanted to return the three silver pieces to the Los One, but he refused, "I'm part of your group, aren't I? I may not have performed just before but--"

"Oh! Well...I didn't mean to say that you weren't. This afternoon we'll have solo performances; then you can do your stuff! And - and when you're coordinated with the group! Well...won't that be something!"

"Yes, won't it?" Rhaethail responded dryly.

But Farl hurried on, "You're still new; you can't instantly become part of us."

"That's okay. I know I'm Rhaethail."

Farl was puzzled, but said nothing. The Teller, hearing this, reacted instantly, "The sign...?"

Rhaethail realized, "I didn't mean that. I meant that I'll never be part of any group. I'm Rhaethail, the Lost One."

"You don't know that!! You'll fit in well, wait till this afternoon. You'll fit in! Right Farl?"

But Farl was walking away, shaking his head.

"I am Rhaethail. Don't kid yourself. Are you so afraid of what I--all right--of what that means?

"I think you are. Your use of KUN proves it."

The Teller stood, shocked.

Finally, she said, "Don't kid me or yourself. Your casual use of...of that word doesn't prove you're lost...It simply proves you're stupid!!"

Rhaethail was unperturbed, "And last night's use of the word wasn't?"

The Teller said nothing.

He continued, "These are troubled times."

"You have to win don't you!" she spat.

"Did I win last night's argument? How can I win when I'm Rhaethail?"

"Bastard."

And in spite of all, lunch was enjoyable - once the innkeeper was convinced to keep gawkers at a distance.

They were ready.

This time there was no problem in gathering a crowd; the whole village had heard about the Talents and wanted to see and hear them.

Farl started again, capturing the crowd within moments with his songs and tales.

Then came the Teller; she started with some simple things such as: the man in red has a bag full of silver, or telling people's names. She answered various questions, analyzed a few dreams, and vaguely hinted about the future.

"In five minutes there will be an earthquake," she stated flatly.

It was finally becoming interesting and no one thought about getting worried.

"Until then, I shall retire."

Toon and the frums came up; Lissith started singing. Her voice was lost in eternity, then filling infinity, then becoming piercing and sharp: ice on a wintry day.

The crescendo was the earthquake, or more properly, the tremor.



The Teller was back and dressed in dark. All around her was black; darkness settled on the villagers. (Rhaethail was at work.)

"Do not be afraid," she commanded, "What I have prophesized has been."

Only the Teller's face could be seen, floating and bathed in radiance. "In a month's time five of you will be gone...four gone forever...ohhh...one will return...all but dead..."

There was a great hush.

The Teller's trance continued,"...that man in red will soon have gold - not silver..." She was swaying softly, "soon... oh so soon... there will come a time... a time of hate...Hate...a time when...when--" She faltered, shook, almost losing her trance, "...when our world...world that is now... will end."

She was screaming now; her body racked with agony, "A Time When It Will End!"

Toon rushed to her; she sunk into the dirt, "...and a new one will start...That time is near..so near..."

Toon brushed the hair from her eyes and saw them misted. She whispered one word and slept.

Toon stared at Rhaethail and wondered.

The darkness ended; the light returned.

After she had recovered, Rhaethail approached the Teller, "What did you mean by that last prediction?"

"By it, I did not mean you are...Rhaethail.

"Though," she was uncertain, "Perhaps you are."

"Why do you refuse to believe me? You have known all along and yet - yet you still try to deny your own prophesy."

"There has been no sign."

"I know. But I am Rhaethail! The sign is coming!"

Coldly, she stated, "Be patient. The world still has some time."

It was time for Rhaethail. And it was night with a full moon in the sky.

"Villagers! You are mistaken! There is no moon in the sky! LOOK!"

"And behold! What creatures are those that creep among you?"

Things and dark shapes had invaded the crowd.

They were gone as mysteriously as they had come, and the moon was back.

"And now! Three requests from the audience!"

Rhaëthail was moving fast and taking the on-lookers with him.

"Invisibility!" someone cried.

"I know not whether you mean me," and he was not to be seen, "or you and your companions." And they were not to be seen.

When they had all returned and recovered: "A sun in the sky!"

"A sun at night is most difficult..."

"You can't do it!" the crowd jeered.

"I said no such thing...Behold! It is day! Mid-morning and my companions are at work!" There was a brief replay of the Teller and Farl whirling about Lissith. And the sun was shining.

Before the entire audience recovered, an old man approached the Lost One and spoke, "I am an old man now and have not seen my son for many years. I will die soon...but before...before I die I wish to see my son. I have not seen him for a long time..."

Rhaëthail spoke slowly, "That I cannot do, old man."

"I told my son a legend--the legend of--but I can no longer remember. But, he is gone and...and..."

"I cannot do it."

Someone caught on and the crowd soon joined him, "He can't do such a simple thing! FAKE! LIAR!"

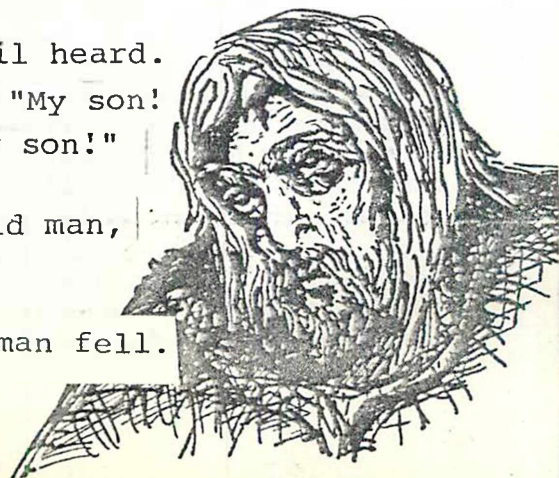
But that was not what Rhaëthail heard.

Softly, as with falling snow, "My son! Is that too much to ask!? I ask to see my son!"

Rhaëthail stood, "Your son, old man, your son is here."

And very very quietly the old man fell.

"...But with a whimper."





# DODGERS & DANCERS

by Richard A. Wilber

The Rangers are the best dodgers and dancers on the whole inside, you can count on it. The Rangers, that's me and Rock and Geronimo and Spadie and Gnat. I run the show, but the others all have a say. I don't call a run unless they're all up for it. Mainly because I like 'em all, and if you aren't up for it when it comes time for a run, then you're maybe dead. They don't find much left after a four-load semi hits you at 150 per. Hell, it takes the tower guys at least ten minutes just to stop the traffic, and by that time you've been hit by so many cars and trucks that you're just some jelly left on the road. I know, because Jamie wasn't quite quick enough last October. Most of what was left got hosed off by a fire truck. Lieutenant McKuse called me in for a "little discussion" after it happened. We haven't lost anybody since.

I started running the roads when I was about nine. That's a little younger than most guys, but it turned out I was quick enough, so I got away with it.

I wasn't part of a gang yet. Everybody in the school kind of thought I was a loner, but that's not right. I just hadn't found the right bunch of runners yet. I knew from little kid days that I was going to be a runner when I got a little older. But I knew that nobody does that alone, you need a good team of dodgers and dancers around you. So I waited until the right bunch showed.

Anyway, as a kid, after school in the spring, I decided it was about time to give it a whirl. I didn't have any cargo, but I took a backpack and some bricks, just to sort of get the feel of it. And then I headed for the border road.

It's a big tall dude, that road. It must be at least a couple stories high—all steel and plexiglass, tougher than anything, but with a bunch of little maintenance doors built in. I've heard that once they built the roads, each city sort of had the ghettos closed off by roads. There wasn't anyway to get through. They passed some "emigration from closed areas" laws, but some of the people inside didn't want to leave. So the government decided to "help." They give us the

minimum of food and housing, but it's mostly just crap stuff. And they started a few "help the people" factories, they turn out guns and butter. But they're mostly crap too. Really, as far as the outside is concerned, we hardly exist anymore.

So, to make a long story a little shorter, the runners developed; guys like me who could get across the roads. They're all covered, and topped with wire and electric bars and other stop the people stuff, so the easiest way (but it really isn't all that easy) is the maintenance door on one side, and out the maintenance door on the other side, and you have to dodge those trucks and dance past those cars the whole way, some of them really tearing on those auto-guided rails set into the concrete.

Being a runner is obviously a risky sort of business. But the stuff you can bring back from the other side makes it a good way to make money. Hell, just a load of dope from Mac's, about a mile the other side of the road, is worth a lot.

Anyway, I grabbed those bricks, back when I was a kid, and decided it was time for me to make a run. The old man had been on my back all week, the old lady was dead even then, so I didn't sweat them. I give the old man all the dope and wine I can afford, but it doesn't really help much. I decided that I'd split and cross the road, see what the other side was all about.

I got to the door I had checked out in the daylight when it was about nine that night. You have to do it after dark so the road guards have a tougher time spotting you from their towers. I'd talked to Billymac before I left, and he told me where the tool to pop off the door lock was hidden. I grabbed it, and then quick ran to the door. I could hear the roar from inside the road as I popped off the lock, but it didn't sound too bad, it wasn't rush hour or anything. But man, when I opened that door, the sound just kind of leaped out and hit me right over the head. All those cars and trucks just roared by, and that enclosed road just echoed that stuff back and forth and back and forth until it found that little hole where my head was

poking in. I stood there, just outside, until I got over it, and then climbed in, onto the little roadway for the maintenance men. I closed the door behind me, and stood there. Nobody in the cars could see me of course, they were all going at least 100 per, so I was just a quick something by the side of the road. That mostly worked to my advantage, although not being visible meant if I got hit, with nobody else around to pull the emergency switch, that was it. They would never find a thing. Even jelly gets ground in if it's run over long enough. I'd just be a little thump on the tires for a while, and then not even that.

You have to guess by the sound when to go. I waited for an eternity or two before taking off, and then sprinted straight for the middle island, about two feet wide, between the different main lanes. I was halfway across the ten lanes of east bound traffic before I heard one coming. I froze, trying to tell where it was; then it zoomed by, knocking me over from the wind. A big semi, maybe three or four rigs in tow, had gone by. I scrambled up and just ran, not bothering to finesse it, to the island. After that I sweated and shook for a while, then made the same run to the other side. A few minutes later, after finding the door, I stepped out and got my first look at the outside. Mainly it was lights. Even here, a couple miles from downtown, it was lights and more lights. We've got some electricity on the inside, but not much, certainly not enough for all those lights that are just for signs and other crap. I quit shaking after a while and headed out, going to take a look at downtown on the other side.

I won't go into what I saw too much. Suffice it to say that when you're nine years old, and you've been inside your whole life, it really hits you hard. It was almost daylight before I got back to the road and opened the door to go home. The trip back was worse, there was morning traffic to contend with. But there was a little light coming through the plexiglass roof of the road, and that helped. After a few minutes I was back inside. I guess I ought to mention that my old man never said a thing. I don't think he noticed I wasn't home that night.

Anyway, I've been doing it pretty regular ever since. I make money at it now, sometimes it's dope I carry back, sometimes cash, sometimes even damn chocolate bars, which melt and wreck your sack. Sometimes, but not too often, its escort service, when somebody wants in to the inside for some reason and can't do it through the regular government channels.

Anyway, about a year ago the Nickles started moving in on us. We're the top runners around, and have been since Damian and his guys bought it in '84. We all have a specialty. I'm the best midnight man anywhere, and Gnat's the best in heavy traffic. You have to get something through during the rush hour

and Gnat can do it.

Geronimo, he's our medium man, and a good looker. He's the best guy around to ease in with the outsiders. He looks like one of them, and can talk like one too if he has too. And Spadie and Rock, they're our rope men. Each pack has a thin rope tied to it when we make our runs. If somethings goes wrong, and it's a precious cargo, then they pull it through. It isn't easy. Sometimes you ditch a heavy pack when a run gets sticky, and they have to pull it through by rope, timing the pulls to get the stuff through the traffic. They are, and I'm not fooling, the best at it I've ever seen.

Well the Nickles figured they could do a better job, and cheaper. We didn't mind it when they started their own business, free enterprise and all. But when they started pushing in on us it was time for a little meeting of the minds. I got together with Homer, their top, and we decided on a double elimination run. One at noon, and the next one that midnight. The team that did the best job, and carried the most cargo, got this part of the road's business; the other team would clear out. Homer didn't much like it, he knew as well as I did that we had a much better team; but he had to go along — protocol and all.

So we started getting together about a quarter to noon. Homer and his four and me and the guys. We waited until the toy factory's noon whistle blew, and then we opened 'er up and headed in.

Homer was to take his guys through first, and then we'd follow. On the way back it was going to be a race. We'd start even and the first group to get back all together won. In the night shift we'd reverse it. If anybody bought it, then that group automatically lost unless the other group also lost a guy. Otherwise it was winner take all.

Traffic was pretty light, being as it was the middle of the week. But that traffic'll kill you when you take it for granted, that's what happened to Jamie. He started screwing off right in the middle of the lane, sticking out his chest and making the superman thing. I don't think he ever knew what hit him.

Anyway, Homer took off first, and made it across easy as could be. And then his guys did the same, no sweat. I could tell they were better than I had them figured for. I don't know where they got the practice; but wherever it was, they were on the ball. Their last guy, I don't know his name, was the only one that had to hesitate and his slowdown was just a "discretion is the better part of valor" move. Anybody that won't slow down when the time is right is either a fool or dead.

Rock went first for us, and plodded across in good shape. Rock, like I've said, is a rope man, and invaluable as such. But he's not all that tough a dancer. And then Spadie, he made it in good shape too, never even looked. Spadie's not too fast on his



feet, but he's got great ears. It sounds weird, but he never looks, just listens. And I've never even seen him have a close call.

Then Geronimo went, and made it easy, and then Gnat followed, with me bringing up the rear. Gnat made it easy of course, he even showed off some about halfway over by taking a switch hit at the median. Without waiting he ran right through as two cars roared by, in opposite directions. He made it easy, but I'll be it made those other guys take a good look.

Then I went across. I've gained a lot of confidence since that first time, and I'm in better shape for dodging and dancing then I was then; but I still take it carefully. You only get one mistake, and there's no use taking unnecessary risks. I drill that into my guys, and then I practice what I preach. I read Gnat off after I came across.

"Listen stupe," I said. "Showoffs are for the dead. Cut that or join a new gang." And then I just turned away and talked to the other guys. I don't like having to do that to Gnat, he's sensitive, but now and then you have to. It's just not easy running a gang, and I intend to make sure we stay the best.

The next thing was to get some cargo from the other side and then take it back. This is where Geronimo came in handy. That guy could talk an elephant out of its trunk. We all headed in, and I gave the temporary reins of command to him. We do it all the time, and if something comes up I take over again. Like I said, we are all specialists, and I let Geronimo take over when its time for his specialty.

He led us to a new place. "Found it last week" he said. He knocked twice on the door, and then waited for a few seconds and knocked twice again.

While we waited I took a look at the place. Two stories, old faded red paint, some of it peeling; but in pretty good shape. Probably a pretty nice place one day not too long ago. A little weatherbeaten, but still ok. I got a pretty good eye for that.

Everything is relative. On the inside this would be the nicest place in town. Out here it's almost a slum. I laughed, but kept it inside. The other guys don't notice things like that.

Anyway, in a minute or so the door opened and this tough looking broad let us in. By tough I mean the "Hard as nails" type. She didn't even see the rest of us, just Geronimo.

"Hi Ronny," she said. "Glad you could bring your little friends." Then she led us into a little room with some of the deepest chairs I've ever been in. "Be right back," she said, and walked out.

We waited until she cleared the room before hitting Geronimo with the flap.

"Oh Ronny," Gnat mimicked. "Glad you could bring your little friends."

"Cut it," he said. "She's a nice broad. And wait until

you see what we're taking back with us." He was careful not to look at me when he said that. I would be, he knew, pretty pissed if we were taking back a cargo I didn't know about. This was an important run, we didn't need any extra hassles. But for the moment I sat on it. No use bringing up troubles early if it isn't needed.

She came back looking as tough as ever. "Got a treat for you boys," she said. Then she made a little clumsy bow and waved in our cargo. All five of them.

"Ann, Joan, Jane, Jill, and June," she said. "And I'm Bebe."

I just sat there. Just like that damn Geronimo was all I could think. Lover boy gets us involved ferrying a party of hookers across the road, and picks an elimination run as the right time to do it. We've got to try to drag them inside, and we're involved in that damn territorial dispute.

"Uh, Ronny," I waved at him as I started to get out of my seat, "Could we talk for a minute—in private?"

He met me outside the front door of the place. I turned to look at him and decided against anything physical right then. It's just not right to hurt a lover, I suppose, especially when he is in full bloom. I'd wilt him later.

I asked him, "What the hell is going on Chief?"

"Aw, man, this is really good money. Bebe said we'd get 500 per girl, and then 25 per cent of the total take. All we have to do is get them inside, and then get them back out in five or six days. That's a lot of bread for not much effort."

"You know how tough ferrying is, you know we're in a big elimination run, you know how those broads can screw us up on the road."

"Oh, c'mon. Those guys from the Nickles can't beat us, you know it. We've got them outclassed all the way. And with this cargo we'll have such a big money lead they'll never match it. Please, please! This could really put us over. Take the slight risk for the greater benefit. Do it, please do it!" So now Geronimo was telling me what to do. Just full of chuckles.

"Get your ass back in there. Tell them I'll be in in a minute. Let me think for a few seconds alone."

"Ok, sure, ok." He went. I thought.

It was becoming obvious that Geronimo was planning on bigger and better things than dodging and dancing, but, like I've said, this was time to get too shook about it. We had to keep our territory, and then expand when we could. We could settle our little differences later.

"I've decided," I said to the gathered multitude inside. "We'll do it."

My guys didn't really like, escort service being the risky business it is; but the girls all smiled. "But Bebe can't come too." I added. They didn't like that at all.

"No good Bebe said. "These are my girls. I go along to watch and collect. I handle the books."

"Tough."

"I have to come along or all of it's off. The girls need me around." She smiled at the girls and they smiled back. Really mother and all that.

I compromised. "Bebe you can come to the road with us, but not through it. You can see them off at the road and meet us in a few days. But I don't want you along on the inside." They agreed, not surprisingly. Geronimo offered the plan, and I let him get away with it. I could envision what he had in mind, but there was no harm in his setting his own length on the rope he would hang from. He'd pay for his follies later.

We got back to the road chop chop. We were there ahead of the Nickles and it was becoming obvious again that they weren't up to our caliber.

"I'll go first, then Gnat, Spadie, and Rock. We'll take a girl with us each. Then Geronimo bring up the rear and gather the stuff that doesn't make. If any of the girls get in trouble, they're your responsibility Geronimo. We'll just drop 'em and head across ourselves. You'll have your own girl too Ronny, so be careful. Bebe will keep an eye out for the Nickles. Let's do it."

I took Jane or Joan or some such through with no trouble, traffic being light and the sun shining through the plexiglass top. The rest followed with ease, until all but Geronimo and the two remaining girls were across. He, just as I thought he would, started across with both in tow, the girl and Bebe.

"Give me the rope, Rock," I said, taking the lifeline that connected to "Ronny" and the girls. He obviously figured that once he got them across I'd be too busy and wouldn't want to take the risk of getting Bebe back across. In a way he was right. As he danced through a gaggle of cars near the middle, I pulled the rope and he came lunging, holding the two girls tight for protection. All three bought it from a double semi. Jelly.

The other guys, and the girls, didn't say a thing. My actions spoke louder than words, I suppose. At any rate, they shut up and we got out of there and closed the maintenance door.

I sent the rest on ahead and waited for the Nickles to show. They took almost another hour. By this time the evening rush hour was on and I was back inside to see how they did with it. They came across quick, pretty neat. I noticed they didn't even use their ropes. Faster but foolish. They all made it though, and each had a pair of sacks with cargo.

I told Homer we'd won it timewise but had lost a man in the process.

"Too bad," he grinned at me.

"Yeah, it was a real shame," I said. "You guys be real careful tonight now. It'd really be too bad if you lost a guy too." Then I walked away, letting them think on that one for a while.

I walked over to the shack, where the rest were, slowly. Time to think.

If we kept the girls it would be a steady source of income — but also a steady source of headaches and hassles. If, on the other hand, we sold the girls, we would get a big bundle of cash but somebody else would get the steady income. And finally, if we didn't win the final bit tonight, then it all didn't matter, the gang was closed out.

The girls helped solve my problem for me when I got to the shack. I had never seen the place looking so good. They had cleaned it up, fixed it up, played it up, and were now shackled out with the rest of the guys enjoying the fruits of their labors. As I was odd man out I just sat and watched for the littlest while. Then, regretfully, I brought the meeting to order and explained what must needs be done.

"The pressure is on," I told them. "We have to beat Homer and the Nickels tonight, and then we'll use the girls as a sideline income after that."

"But we've got some things to do. Gnat, you will have to make an extra trip over to the road this evening and get some trouble ready for the Nickels. We'll cross first, set the trouble, and then be ready for the Nickels if they all make it through. We'll rumble them only if we have to."

They all nodded, but then Gnat, with a little hesitation, said "Why all the blood and guts? We use to operate without all that trash. And now, with things looking pretty good, we have to exterminate. Why this awfully sad turn of events?"

Gnat is basically a simple soul, so I kept my answer to a minimum. "Because, Gnat me boy, with Geronimo gone if we don't have them lose at least one they get the business. And if we cheat to have them lose one, we might as well take care of as many as possible, witnesses being as bad news as they are."

"All right," Gnat accepted, "but you'll have to tell me what kind of specialties you want on the road for them."

Gnat and I left, discussing the possibilities. After a few minutes, he headed for the road and some busy work, and I headed back to home and Dad and a bite to eat and some moments peace before the nights' hard efforts.

The road guards, as usual, were no problem that night. Even when we're loaded down with cargo they're not much trouble, and tonight they were especially inattentive. I've never heard of a pro getting caught by a guard, but we're always careful just the same.

Anyway, we all met inside. The dark road gently roared by as we stood ready to go. I was the last to enter, leaving the cold outside for the warmth of the road. I entered gratefully through that small round maintenance door into the warmth of the road, with its muted sounds of evening and the stars shining



dimly through the plexiglass roof.

Gnat touched my arm and shook me from my reverie, thinking about the road and how good she has been to me. "Tis done," he said. "They will dodge and dance their way into the River Styx." At times, rarely, Gnat will surprise me with things like that. His occasional bursts of rhetoric come from nowhere and fade quickly. Funny fellow.

"Thank you for your efforts Gnat. A bonus will be yours if we pull this one out." He nodded and smiled, then lapsed back into typical Gnatese saying "We can't miss. They haven't got a chance."

We led the way, and I went first. I opened my eyes and ears and stepped off the catwalk down about a yard onto the cement. Then, moving across the lanes, headed for the median. It is cooler as you step off the catwalk, then warms again as you reach the middle. Like love it is maybe, hot and cold and hot. Things stay warm and good until you get to that midway point, then the tenseness sets in and the temperature doesn't matter. There is always something about almost being over that pushes some to run and rush the last two or three lanes. That, despite the relative slow speed of the outside laners, is a mistake. Dead is dead, no matter the speed is 80 rather than 170.

But I made it, with no real problems, my rope trailing behind. The rest were not far to my rear, and we assembled within a few more minutes. I unscrewed the door and we stepped out to the cold. It was dark, so we didn't worry about the guards, which was a mistake. A hearty blow shook me around the shoulders, and then a sharp blow across my cheek damn near knocked me over.

"Hello boys," said Lieutenant McKuse. "Out for an evening stroll?"

We didn't hear anything else, and I didn't offer any information about Homer and the Nickles still being in the road. It turned out to be a good thing.

"I have saved your lives boys," McKuse told us after we got to the station. "I want you to know that. We are going to keep you here overnight, and then you will be freed in the morning. Our finding you there saved you death. The inside problem was eliminated tonight, you were the last to escape. You, and a few other fortunates, were lucky to escape tonight's elimination."

"Lieutenant," I asked, trying for respectability, "what has happened?"

"Just ten minutes or so ago," he said, "all maintenance doors were sealed on the road and the entire length around the inside was flooded with gas. Within the next half hour," he looked at his watch "the inside itself will be flooded with gas that will put the population quietly and humanely into a deep sleep. They will not awaken.

Late tomorrow morning the crews will enter the

area and begin the cleanup. By the middle of the next month the buildings will begin to rise, and by this time next year the inside will be a bad memory and the new mercantile complex a reality."

"All gone?" I asked.

"Yes."

I thought of who I would miss, and decided none. Spadie and Gnat and Rock did the same. We took the tale in stride, there being no other way to take it. Perhaps we felt it was the best way to deal with inside, perhaps we were still too aware that we were in the lockup and if we bitched we might never get out. The reasons we acquiesced don't matter. They didn't matter then, and they don't now.

"What is going to happen to us? and to the road?"

"Oh, the road will be reopened for traffic late tomorrow afternoon, the gas will be cleared by then. And the computers have decided where you all will go.

"Rock," he said, pointing a non-spindled card at him, "you will attend the University and major in linguistics. Spadie, "he pointed another card," you will appear for football tryouts tomorrow, become a star halfback and be a hero and thank me some day. Gnat," another card, non-mutilated, "you will serve on the police department and do a good job or eventually I will fire you. And you "he pointed a card with frayed edges at me," we couldn't find a damn thing for. All there is is the road. How do you feel about maintenance work?"

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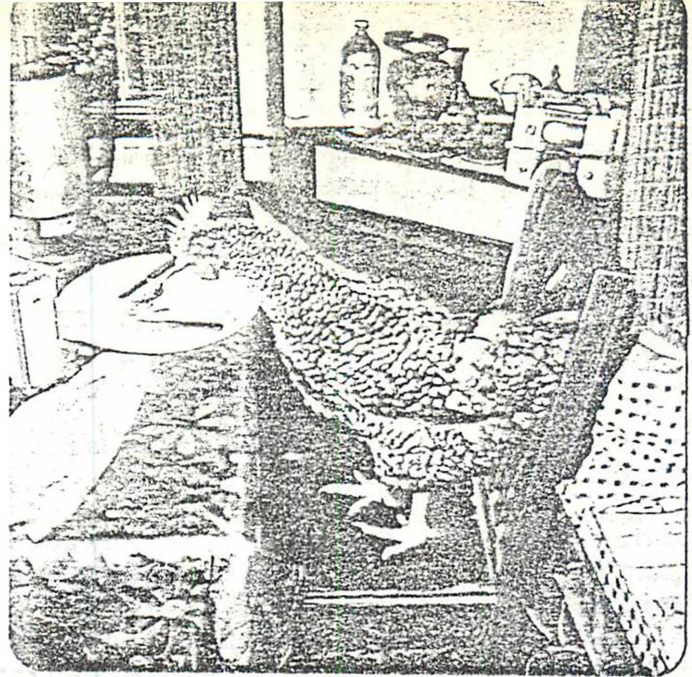
So now I write this in my rocking chair, and recall how it happened. It is a good chair, and comfortable, and I have a view of the road from here, the taillights passing by as I watch.

Now, when I open a maintenance door I do it with the blessing of the law. I am section supervisor now and good at my job. The road still beckons me, its warmth in winter a pleasant respite. She's still a good road, we've kept up her looks and style.

But it isn't quite the same. I don't dodge and dance anymore, and it shows. My stomach bulges out in front to where I cannot see my feet when I stand. And the reflexes that once would get me through a tough night run now have trouble with the razor in the morning.

She's still a fine road, and I love her, but reality has caught up with the dream — the tensioned heat of the past is replaced with a warm constancy, as it should be.

It is both good and bad, but I do enjoy myself. And when my son, adopted almost two years ago now this coming June, decides he will make a run I will not look or stop that first attempt. The bricks he will use are waiting by the front door, and the road, she will always beckon. ♦♦♦



Fred Smith moved from the city to his tiny country farm because he could no longer stand the urban pace.

The nearest neighbor was Sam Jones, one half mile away, who also left the city in order to escape the maddening rush.

Fred and Sam both commute to jobs in the city with Tom Brown who was so disturbed by urban conditions that he had moved to his farm the year before.

Also commuting to the city was Jim Johnson who had lived on his small farm for a year and a half, ever since he had moved his family away from town because they could no longer put up with the living conditions there.

One of the oldest inhabitants of the district was Jack Harris,

#### DISTURBIA

an office worker who, to escape the effects of city life had moved to the country five years ago.

His closest friend was Sid Thomas who lived only a mile away on the little place he'd bought when city congestion became just too much.

Next to his place was a small farm owned by Art White, a retired salesman who'd escaped the urban grind by moving to the country.

Nearby lived an executive named Harry Stone who had come to the country to flee big city hazards.

Larry Richards, his closest friend, also lived in the area, where his family could avoid the problems of city life.

Only a few miles away lived Larry's cousin, John Wilson, who'd built his own house here when he'd escaped the city years earlier.

Next door lived Bob Lewis, a well known artist who had been in the city for many years but had taken to the country in order to escape from urban blight.

Ted Parks, a friend of the Lewis family, had built his house not far away when he'd decided that the urban pace was too much for him.

#### by Neal Wilgus

Dave Wood was a newcomer to the neighborhood, for he'd only moved into the area six months ago when he found a chance to flee the urban pollution.

His nearest neighbor was Ed Sims, an exurbanite who'd sold his city home in order to get back to the farm...



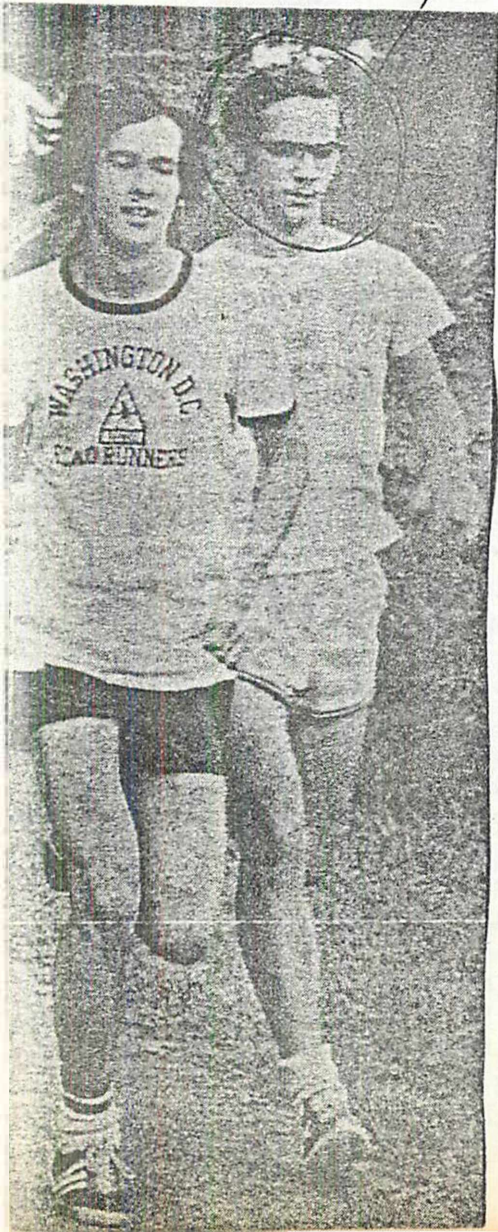
# FIRE AND ICE

MICHAEL T. SHOEMAKER

Distance runners must always contend with the elements, probably more than any other class of athletes. Though rarely deterred, they are prone to complain about the heat, the cold, the rain, or the wind. Few athletes, however, and even fewer of the general public, have ever experienced the absolute limits of heat and cold. To hover on the brink of collapse from heat prostration, or of the numbing death from exposure is not an enviable experience, but to have survived the experience is not without considerable value. I have survived both extremes and been enriched by the experiences.

In October of 1972 I ran the *International Two-Bridges 36-Mile*. It was a cold and windy day, so I wore a knit hat and long underwear under my racing shirt. At 33 miles I was in 6th place out of 54 runners. The weather had turned warm, and despite substantial fluid intake, I began suffering from the effects of acute dehydration and overheating: cramping all over and drowsiness. My teammate, who had run with me the whole race, pulled far ahead.

THIS IS ME



When I turned the corner to go down Royal Street, in downtown Alexandria, I had a one-mile straight-away left. By this time my legs were so numb with pain I could no longer feel them. My sleepiness was such that I could barely keep my eyes open. With half a mile left (with the finish line in sight, but seeming *very* far away) the sounds around me no longer made a distinct impression, my balance was unsteady, and I felt exactly as though I were drifting off into sleep. Only one thought occupied my mind: the tearfully bitter irony that I might collapse so close to the finish. Suddenly, or so it seemed, the finish line was upon me and the ordeal was over. I was unable to stand or walk without help and I was near unconsciousness for 30 minutes. I placed tenth, but I was glad just to finish.

On March 30, 1974 I ran the *John F. Kennedy 50-Mile*. In 1973 I had placed 14th out of 1724, and this time, being in peak shape, I expected to place in the top five. The racecourse starts in Boonsboro, Maryland, goes three miles over rolling hills, then ascends the 2,000 feet of South Mountain. At 16 miles the course descends steeply down the Weverton cliffs to the C & O Canal, which we run for 26 miles up the Potomac River, after which follows eight miles of country roads to the finish in St. James, Maryland.

At 7:00 A.M. on raceday, 1300 runners toed the starting line. The temperature was 32 degrees and falling. There was a slight dripping of rain, and conversation was buzzing with reports of ice on the mountain. I was running, as were a number of others, with bare arms and legs. I had reasons for this, and have run a full mara-

7  
thon this way in 25 degree weather with no ill effects, but on this day circumstances were to prove it a mistake.

As we ascended the mountain, the rain came more heavily and we were greeted by a crystal wonderland of ice. At one point, my running partner and I passed some power lines which cut a swath through the forest. We viewed the spectacular sight of thousands of long icicles hanging from the lines. We quickly learned, after a couple of falls, not to step on fallen trees or rocks.

By the time I had reached the top ridge of the mountain, the rain had changed to sleet and was falling very heavily, and I was alone because my partner had slowed down. I was wearing a visor, which helped protect my glasses, but periodically I had to wipe my glasses with a kerchief I had tucked in my shorts.

At one point along the ridge there is a 100 yard long area so thickly strewn with boulders that it is impossible to touch the ground. Adding to the danger, the area descends slightly. When I reached this rock field I began walking very cautiously. Nevertheless, I fell three times. On the third fall I grabbed for a thin tree trunk next to me only to have my hand slide down it as if it were a greased pole, and resulting in a badly scraped arm. I took over five minutes to cross those 100 yards of rocks!

As I got farther along the ridge I was beginning to feel very cold; my activity was not maintaining my body temperature as it usually does. Suddenly, there was no path in front of me. I stopped in confusion. Closer observation revealed that the path was indeed still there, but was thickly overhung with sticker vines. Doubt remained in my mind, however, for the heavy coating of ice on the stickers was unbroken, indicating that no one had passed this way.

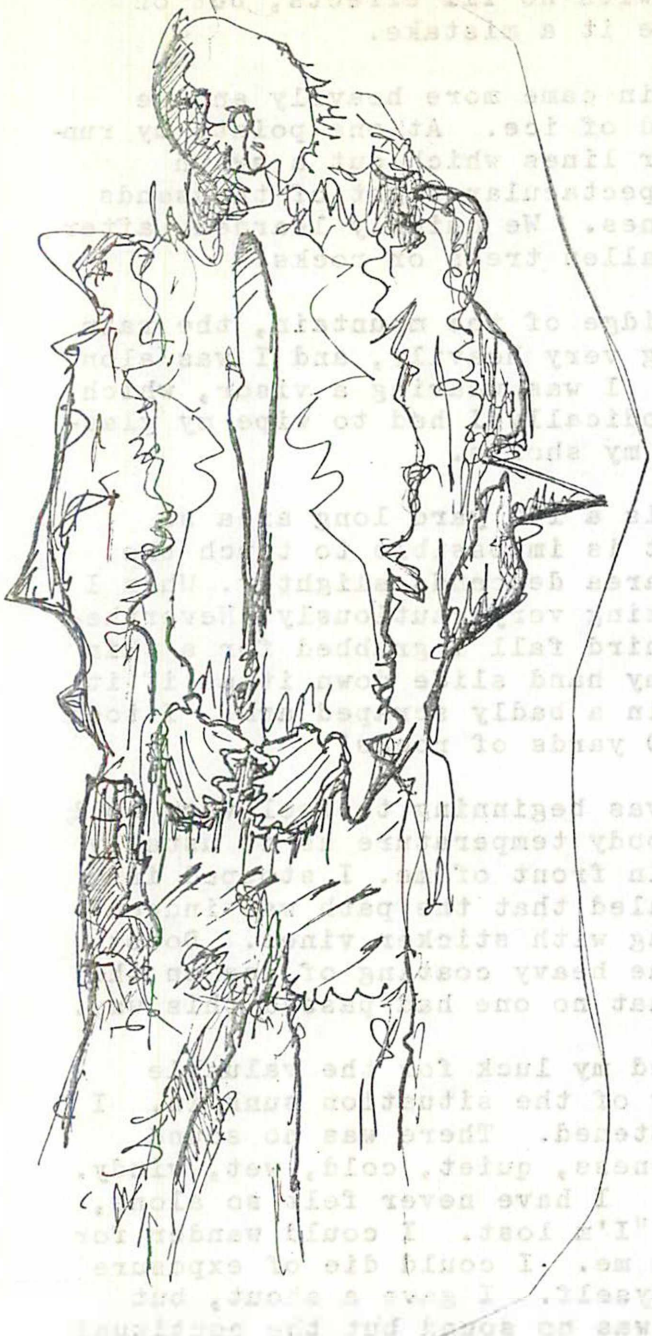
Was I lost? I stood there and cursed my luck for the valuable time I would lose. Then the gravity of the situation sunk in. I stood still, held my breath, and listened. There was no sound other than the sleet falling. Stillness, quiet, cold, wet, windy. Total isolation upon a mountain top. I have never felt so alone, or felt such raw, objectless fear. "I'm lost. I could wander for hours up here without anyone finding me. I could die of exposure before I'm found!" I said aloud to myself. I gave a shout, but when its echoes had died away there was no sound but the continual and maddening fall of the sleet.

I was beginning to shiver from inactivity so I chose to continue on the path. For the next mile I was subjected to thousands of ice-covered sticker vines lashing across my legs and chest. It was like running a gauntlet for a mile. I came out of it with dozens of scratches. As it turned out, the path was the correct one. Apparently the ice had refrozen on the vines very quickly after being broken.

As I descended Weverton Cliffs a deluge of sleet began, and I was faced with a river of mud, and icy rocks and trees which afforded little grip. It took me 20 minutes to descend that half a mile.

At the bottom of the mountain I switched into a dry shirt and gloves, and was informed that the temperature was 28 degrees. I also learned that I was in 4th place instead of 9th, because five runners in front of me had dropped out. I then began the 26 miles of running on the canal towpath. Here misery was once again com-





pounded, for the towpath was a bog of mud and deep puddles.

After about three miles on the towpath I was shivering and my arms were going numb. I tried rubbing them and shaking them as I ran, but the numbness grew worse. Soon I lost all feeling and all muscular control in my arms from the elbows down. I became frantic with fear and pushed my pace down to six minutes per mile in an attempt to reach the 23-mile checkpoint as soon as possible. I believed that I was literally running to save my life.

At the 23-mile checkpoint a kind official loaned me a heavy coat, a spare from his car. I gave him my soaking wet gloves and continued on my way. The coat helped immensely, but my exposed hands were still a problem. I tried pulling the coat sleeves over my hands, putting my hands under my arms, and putting my hands in the coat pockets; all to no avail. By 25 miles my fingers were white and swelling.

The thought of dropping out never occurred to me. After all, I had finished this race once before, and adverse conditions were nothing new to me. But when I saw my hands I turned around and started running back to the 23-mile checkpoint. There was no hesitation in the decision, only great regret for all the previous misery going to waste.

On the way back I passed my teammate, who seemed to be running in a daze. I spoke to him and at first he did not recognize me; he spoke incoherently, but then gathered his thoughts and decided he would drop out also. We ran back to the 23-mile mark and got a ride in a spectator's van to the 30-mile mark, where my parents were to meet us. Instantly upon entering the warmth of the van (including dry blankets and hot coffee), my friend and I began shivering violently and uncontrollably. This lasted for over an hour.

Luckily, we recovered with no permanent damage (amazingly, I did not even get sick). In fact, eight days later I won a cake for my 3rd place finish in the Potomac Valley AAU 20 Kilometer Championship.

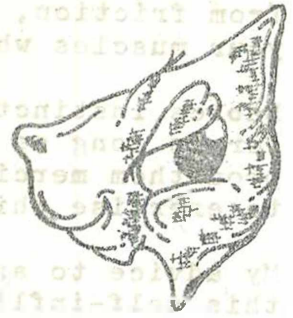
-- Michael T. Shoemaker  
May 15, 1975

THE CONDUITS OF LUST,

THE LOCI OF PAIN.....

By PAUL DI FILIPPO

Right??



Many of my readers, recognizing me for the fountain of knowledge that I am, have deluged me with questions on one subject or another. A large number of these queries have been concerned with various physical problems my apparently debilitated claque is forced to endure. Like Miss Lonelyhearts, I have long agonized over the welfare of my readers, wishing I could offer them some solace. Now, with the kind aid of Mr. Brazier, I am able to deal with the problems of my following in a fresh, open forum.

First, let me state my qualifications.

I have had one year of high school biology (f= ma, right?), during which I laid the foundation for the vast amount of medical knowledge I was later to acquire. Most of my post-graduate study has been under Dr. Asimov, through the intermediary of his marvelous primers.

I have read his *CELLS AND ME* (a somewhat misleading title, dealing as it does with his experiences in the jails of the world), and his *BONES OF THE FOOT: Vol. One (Right Foot)* and *Vol. Two (Left Foot)*. Not to mention his *MEET MY MAKER*, *THE MAD MOLECULE*. These are only a few of the stimulating and informative studies that have made me the anatomical and physiological expert which I modestly find myself to be today.

Now, let me wield my self-taught expertise on behalf of my distraught confidants.

*Mr. Di Filippo, what is your position on exercise?*

Recumbent.

Seriously, I find exercise to be one of the most misunderstood subjects in the whole area of bodily hygiene. Many people labor (literally) under the harmful impression that exercise is some sort of necessary evil, a process that tones and maintains the body. It is an evil, all right, but hardly a necessary one.

Let me explain the true status of exercise with a few analogies.

If you let your car sit in its garage for several years, carefully greasing and cleaning it, you will find that its motor retains its factory newness for an unimaginably long period. It is only when you take it out on the road and subject it to the harsh elements and daily wear and tear that it deteriorates. The same is true of your body.



Whenever you exercise, whether it be by walking, swimming, jogging -- whatever -- your body begins to decay and rot, falling apart like an old Pierce-Arrow. Picture the process by which you break a coat-hanger. You twist it back and forth, its metal growing hot from friction, until it finally snaps. The same thing happens to your muscles when you exercise.

Babies instinctively know this, and move about as little as possible for as long as they can. It is only when their sadistic parents prod them mercilessly to walk and play that they lose their aversion to exercise which Nature has given them.

My advice to anyone seriously contemplating a gruelling regimen of this self-inflicted torture is to forget it. With a little will power exerted now, you could prolong your life and end up being another Lazurus Long.

*Sir, I seem to have noticed that whenever I get drunk or stoned, my head seems to either hang to one side with all the rigidity of a piece of cooked spaghetti or float on a string some feet above its usual position. Can you explain this?*

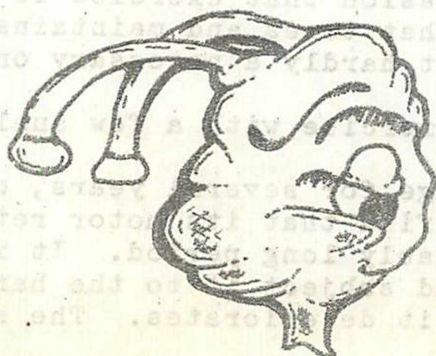
Although few people realize it, liquor and marijuana fumes do not proceed directly to the stomach and the lungs. They make a fast detour to the head.

Everyone's head has a small *deliriant sac* in it. This organ is an expandable bag which receives all the mind-altering chemicals inserted into the body. Its proximity to the brain explains why it is your head which is affected by these chemicals instead of, say, your feet. I mean, anyone with a grain of sense could have told you this. Is it sensible to believe that something going to your stomach or lungs, *away* from the brain, could affect it?

When the deliriant sack fills with a liquid, your head is weighed down. When fumes collect there, they, being lighter than air, decrease the weight of your head and produce the floating sensation.

When the booze or smoke has done its shtick, they are shunted to the stomach or lungs for discharge.

Nothing could be simpler.



It'll never fly!

Can you explain the large disparity in size between people? My fiancée is two feet taller and one hundred pounds heavier than me, and we often indulge in fanciful speculations on the topic.

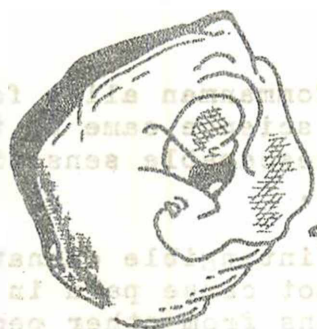
Actually, my dear (assuming you are female), the reason your boyfriend outmasses you is because you are not human. That's right, small people are not human. Humans are large and ponderous.

Consider the situation.

For the normal person to function, he needs a heart, brain, two lungs, liver, miles of intestines and nerves, *et ad nauseum cetera*. Now I don't know about you, but all this fits just comfortably, with no room to spare, into my six feet, 180 pounds. If you expect me to believe that all this life-support equipment could be squeezed into four feet, six inches and the result would be a human being--well, I may be eccentric, but I'm not crazy.

Small people are an enigma walking the face of the earth. Where do they get their inexhaustible energy? Could it be beamed power from solar receptors placed in orbit around the sun by the Silkies? How do they manage, in some cases, to completely halt the normal growth process, remaining the same size from puberty on? Why has there been a small person present at every major airline crash in the past forty years?

I don't have the answers to these intriguing questions, and, frankly, this is one area into which I am actually afraid to delve.



My, my... what have we here?

Maybe you can help me. My genitals seem to be atrophying, withering away like hothouse flowers in the Arctic. All the doctors I have consulted agree that it is not VD, and there is no pain involved. What could it be?

You, poor person, are a victim of that most rare syndrome, *puendum planeta*, or, Wandering Genitals.

Sufferers of WG find that their sex organs vanish, over the course of several months, only to reappear in some new location on the body. Medical science has no explanation for this, other than "God is a perverse bastard."

The genitals may resprout in the armpit or underneath the chin. God forbid that it should be the sole of your feet. I have known several men and women who have endured the trials of this irrational plague,



and they have all adjusted admirably. Some of them even report getting a charge out of their altered anatomy. They claim to be better people for the structural renovations. If anyone would like to verify this with some empirical fieldwork, let me know and I'll put you in touch with the subjects.

P.S. Now that these people are receiving some positive publicity (i.e., *Deep Throat*), we can expect the world to begin accepting them more readily and not adding disapprobation to their problems.

### *What causes cold feet?*

There is an old Yankee saying, "When your feet get cold, put on your hat." Aside from revealing the stupidity of old Yankees (can you imagine trying to walk with a ten-gallon Stetson or a German spike helmet on your feet?), this saying tells us one important thing: the head dissipates an incredible amount of heat. More heat is given off by the average person's head than by a typical steam radiator in a normal off-campus apartment. In cold weather, your head can cause the rest of your body to suffer immeasurably (and not just by telling you to go skiing).

However, evolution has provided a system for distributing heat equitably throughout the body. Alongside everyone's spine there runs a duct system similar to the one leaving your furnace. If it is working properly, heat will not be lost through the head and you will never get cold feet. Unfortunately, there is a damper in the ductwork which sometimes closes tight. A sharp blow to the area of the kidneys should open it. Otherwise, contact a chimney sweep.

### *How about the lowdown on pain?*

Pain: bugaboo of philosophers and Joe Commaman alike for thousands of years, it was not until medical science came on the scene that we began to get a handle on this inescapable sensation. Let me acquaint you with the latest findings.

Doctors now know that pain is caused by intangible emanations from other people. A person's body cannot cause pain in and of itself. Only by picking up the radiations from other people can we feel distress. The human body is a pain transmitter and receiver, but it cannot pick up its own signals. When you stub your toe or cut yourself, for example, this action merely opens the brain's receptive faculties and you tune in on the worldwide pain band. The more people near you, the worse the pain. If you could get far enough away, physical damage would cause no pain.

A minimum of observation will verify this. I think everyone will agree that pain is more often felt in the presence of others than in solitude. Perhaps you have noticed that babies, for instance, don't cry in pain when no one is near them.

Anthropologists theorize that this is a mechanism installed in Man in order to prevent him from congregating in large groups, a habit which leads to being eaten by tigers, wiped out by disease, and urban sprawl.

To sum up, then, pain is ineluctably omnipresent, a facet of our lives for as long as there is more than one person per planet.

*How can you justify inserting such a black, cynical, pessimistic theory in a humorous column?*

Shut up.

Next question, please.

*Sir, I get headaches nowadays after reading. What should I do?*

Knock off the Lin Carter.

+++++

STRANGER THAN NAKED or

HOW TO WRITE DIRTY BOOKS FOR FUN AND PROFIT

A Manual

by Mike McGrady.

Peter M Wyden, Inc NY 1970 213pp

Reviewed by ERIC LINDSAY

In 1968 a group of 24 Long Island newspapermen decided that they could write a BM (Big Money) sexy bestseller. It was called *NAKED CAME THE STRANGER*.

McGrady's book, one of the instigators of that famous and profitable hoax, takes you behind the scenes and tells you how they did it, who the publishers that bid for it were, and how they publicised it, designed the cover jacket, merchandised it (for who would call it just *selling*?), packaged it and delivered this piece of trash to an unsuspecting public.

One of the guidelines first set up for the co-authors (who were each expected to contribute one chapter of about 2500 words to be written in just one week) was:

*There will be an unrelenting emphasis on sex. Also, true excellence in writing will be quickly blue-pencilled into oblivion.*

McGrady, in providing these guidelines, analysed Harold Robbins' *THE ADVENTURERS* and found it contained: 59 killings, described in vivid detail; 12 cases of criminal assault; 9 descriptions of perversion; 6 love scenes involving more than the customary two parties, man-on-top-get-it-over-with-quick that is accepted as usual. The hero killed 12 soldiers, one grandfather, one polo player, one turkey and three trout... I gather that at this point Mr. McGrady gave up counting. We may add to his prescription: An unrelenting emphasis on violence and brutality.

For motivation: "Most BM Book characters climb into bed for the same supposed reason Hillary climbed Everest. Because it's there. And there. And over there as well."

The level of writing: Critic Gloria Steinem said it: "The reader who has put away comic books but isn't yet ready for editorials in the *DAILY NEWS*."

To obtain reader participation, turn to the publisher Bernard Geis: "... the secret is not to begin at the top, but with the woman in relatively humble circumstances..."

Style? Bernard Geis again: "Style, while it appeals to you and to me, doesn't mean a goddam thing to the average reader, the mass reader. He has no sense of style. And Theodore Dreiser didn't have much style. But for the most part these popular novels are rather execrably written. That doesn't make any difference. Be-



cause people who read them have no taste."

There is a long quotation at the start of this book that aptly expresses what happens to writing. It is from Alexis de Tocqueville's *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* (which I would urge everyone to read):

*Taken as a whole, literature in democratic ages can never present, as it does in the periods of aristocracy, an aspect of order, regularity, science, and art; its form will, on the contrary, ordinarily be slighter, sometimes despised. Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose. Authors will aim at rapidity of execution more than at perfection of detail. Small productions will be more common than bulky books; there will be more wit than erudition, more imagination than profundity; and literary performances will bear marks of an untutored and rude vigor of thought, frequently of great variety and singular fecundity. The object of authors will be to astonish rather than please, and to stir the emotions more than to charm the taste.*

Who would be willing to deny the validity of this century old description and prediction?

How did the critics receive the actual novel? One group considered it evidence that there exists a literary counterpart to Gresham's Law: bad stuff eventually drives out the good. The other group considered it proved Mencken's theory: "Nobody ever lost a buck underestimating the intelligence of the American public."

-- Eric Lindsay, 6 Hillcrest Ave, Faulconbridge, NSW  
2776, Australia 30th Dec 1974

poet

PROTEST

*i would freeze  
the very sunbeams  
in time; still the river  
at a given moment; distil  
the song of crickets  
in a jar of painted porcelain  
to flash them (one day in winter)  
in a mirror of my own making.*

*I regret the decline  
of literacy,  
only yesterday the  
counter was so crowded  
with girls buying  
cheap love stories  
and boys buying  
war comics that  
I couldn't get in  
to buy my  
sex magazine.*

-- cathryn gebhart  
2841 Berkshire Way  
Sacramento, CA 95825

-- Andrew Darlington  
44 Spa Croft Road  
Teall Street, Ossett  
West Yorkshire WF5 OHE  
United Kingdom

# THE PLAGUE FROM PLUTO     ELDON K. EVERETT

## LOG OF THE EXPLORER DROSNYA

1st Day: We blasted off Pluto today after our 3-day exploration. Wearing Waldo-suits we explored the strange ruins, but found no sign of life other than a strange purple fungus. Specimens of this growth are securely locked in containers in the ship's lab.

8th Day: One chance in a million and we had to get it. We encountered a meteor shower and were holed in several places. Repair work outside is underway and the cabin is securely sealed so we are now able to doff the spacesuits.

12th Day: Damage estimates are now fairly complete. Biggest hole was in the ship's lab. Both flasks and Petri dishes were shattered inside the fungus specimen container. Apparently the vacuum and extreme cold has killed all the specimens.

23rd Day: Damage to the lab repaired. Both technicians, however, are in sick bay with high temperatures, intestinal cramps and vomiting. Doctor tentatively diagnoses influenza.

28th Day: Morris, one of the technicians, is dead. Brown, the other, is back on his feet. Both men have small, purple spots on their arms. Doctor is applying mercuric oxide and zinc oxide on Brown.

31st Day: Morris blasted out of #3 rocket tube today. Splotches on Brown are bigger now, and spreading. Doctor is in sick bay with purple eruptions inside the pubic arch.

38th Day: 4 more deaths, sick bay holds 16 more cases. Those surviving the sickness are unable to suit up as they are completely covered with the purple fungus.

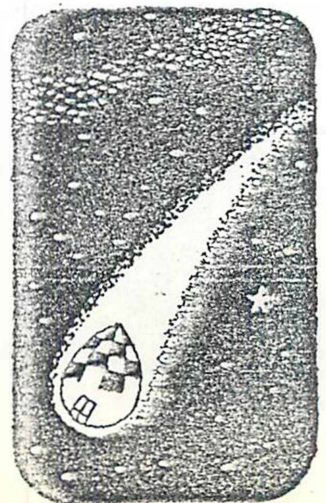
48th Day: Everyone aboard infected. My God! If we return to Tellus with the fungus aboard we'll contaminate the entire planet. Using hyperwave emergency frequency to radio conditions to space control.

## TO SPACE CONTROL FROM BATTLESHIP IWAN GROSZNY

Drosnya sighted and attacked with hydrogen-fusion missiles. Totally destroyed. Search carried out. All fragments rayed with De Lameters. Mission successful.

## TO ALL COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA (For Immediate Release):

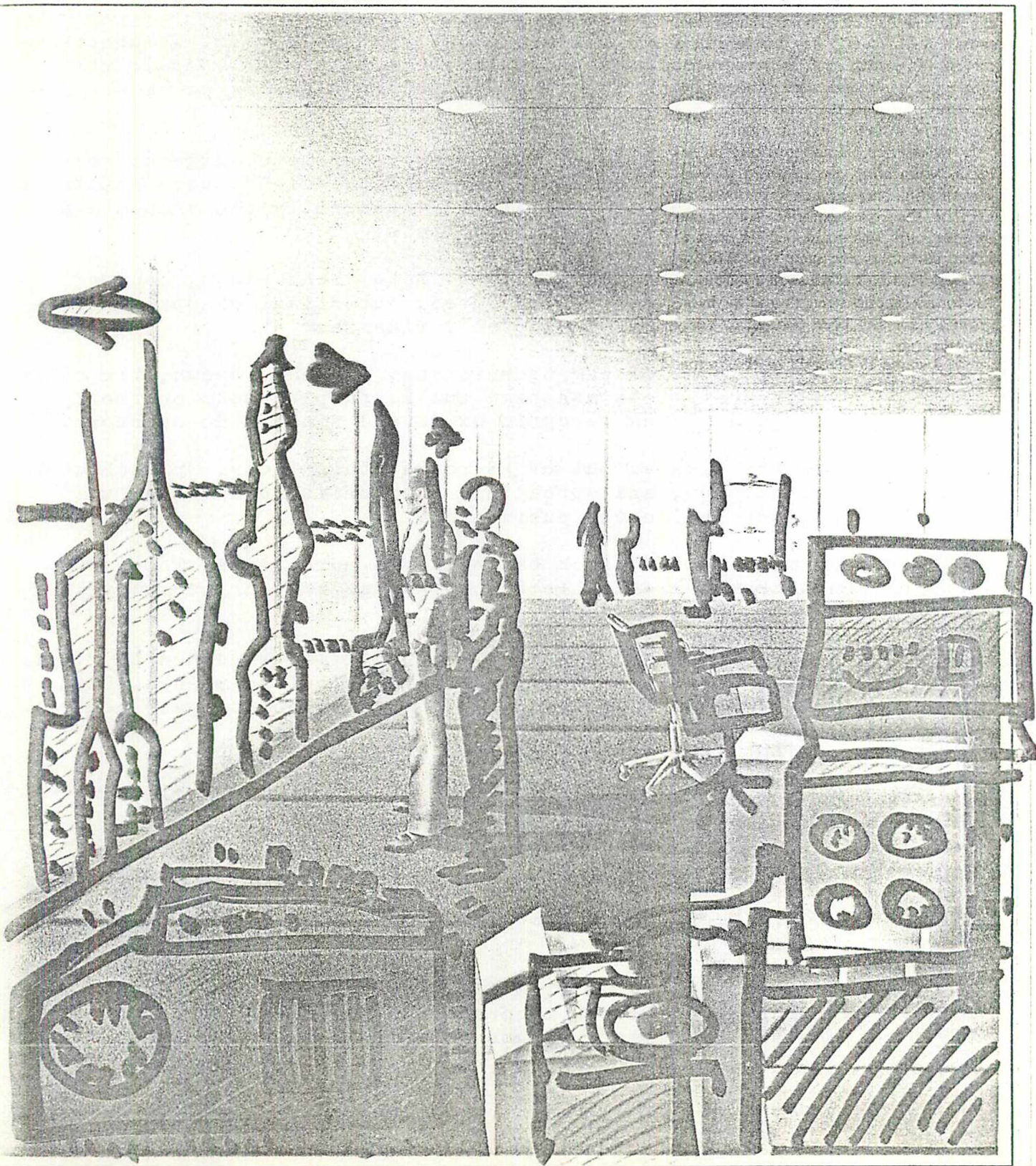
Explorer Drosnya, returning from first manned exploration of Pluto, encountered meteor-swarm and broke into fragments. No survivors.





THE UNIVERSE  
AND SAM KURTZ

PAUL WALKER





By way of a prolog ---

When it was Sam's turn to step into the shower that was not a shower but a tomb, he hesitated. The guard at the door glared at him indignantly.

Sam was unafraid, without remorse. Yet, poised on the threshold of surrendering an existence he no longer had any use for, some last remnant of his past self surged up in him, screamed its outrage into the universe. And the universe came rushing to hear what the matter was. "I want to live," explained Sam. "What do you offer?" asked the universe. "I have nothing," replied Sam. "Too bad," said the universe.

And Sam hurried through the door.

\*\*\*

C2, his blue robe clinging to his bony frame, his large, lashless eyes empty, shook his head at the data sheet. "Well, see for yourself," he said, thrusting the paper into Kringo's hand. "You obviously do not exist."

Kringo, twice the size and weight of C2, red-haired, strong, now grinning shyly, gazed down at the yellow, symbol-crammed sheet. His freshly grown/matured/educated brain refused to accept the *Psi-12* rating. He glanced up timidly.

C2, without annoyance or impatience, went on: "The Race-Psi created us Compassions to serve as their appendages here on the Administration Complex. That responsibility requires an inflexible conformity. All Keepers of Extraterrestrials have been *minus psi-1*. Articulate morans. You, a *psi-12*? Ridiculous. Such a creature could not exist. It is against the most basic Race-Psi directives. Report to the Termination Chamber, at once."

Kringo, blank faced, bowed and turned to leave. The door slid open. He did not go through.

"Kringo," insisted C2, without raising his voice. "Report to the Termination Chamber."

Hours ago, Kringo stood at the window wall of the chemogenetics lab. He was barely an hour old. His mental and physical nervous systems just integrated. He looked out on the planet-city that was Vega III, its mile high spires of plastic and crystal; its billions moving up in elevators, across in monorails, above in copters.

He saw himself at work. The extraterrestrial specimens which ar-



rived in the teleporter. The probing, the analyses, the endless research. He saw himself a Compassion: terse, businesslike.

He saw another sex, as well. A female, who at strictly stated times, entered his cell and undressed before him in the dark. She did not look at him or he at her. They touched as little as possible. She left without a word.

He experienced every artificial moment in the sensations of his genitals, the flexing of his stomach muscles, the warm currents of his chest. He accepted that it was called Reality. Yet it did not begin for him, as for Compassions, at the tip of his third finger, nor lie prone on his flesh. It was within the flesh -- its definition as flesh.

"I am," he'd said, unsure a moment later if he'd said anything. "I -- am," he repeated. And the words filled him with an elation of gratitude toward his lifegivers.

"Sir?" he said to C2. "I do...exist. I am...psi-12."

C2 sighed. It was his one expression. "It is unCompassionate to trust one's immediate perceptions. Tonight, you will be gone. Tomorrow, I will have forgotten you ever temporarily existed."

Kringo felt the floor under him soften; felt himself sink into it and out of sight. What he was ceased to exist. He became a thing. And the thing he became looked hard into C2's indifferent face and spoke unVegally: "According to gene-law, such clerical errors as myself are punishable by the self-termination of the mistakee. Unless the error voluntarily terminates, he is entitled to survive until C1 approves an Exception."

C2 did not sigh. He froze. When he spoke, it was cautiously. "We will obtain a priority. We may expect it before leisurefall. Meanwhile, you are not to leave this chamber."

Kringo bowed. C2 stopped at the door and turned. "Though your kind has never existed, it is said that whenever one did, there was a conspiracy for his survival. And, when there were two, the conspiracy included their prosperity. Beware, Kringo -- the info-computer reports every move." And he left.

Kringo bowed at the closed door. He sighed once for himself. Of course, there was another reason for C2's haste. An alien enzyme plagued Vega III. It destroyed protein at a rate that made it impossible to replace indefinitely. Emergency supplies from NC34 were cut off, and no Compassion was the proper teleporter coordinates to receive sufficient amounts. The Compassions were faced with protein starvation. And Kringo, at his size and weight, would consume twice the protein of an average Compassion.

Kringo toured the Chamber of Extraterrestrials. It was a long, narrow room. The blue tile walls emitted a soft light. A hum-worthy tune freshed the air and sweetened the working mind. Kringo heard a sobbing, then. He saw himself bent by remorse, verging on despair. And he knew an unVegan thing.

It rose up from his bowels, surged like molten silver into his chest, then erupted through his gnashing teeth -- "DAAAAMMN YOU!!"

"You could be terminated for that, you know," said a mild voice from behind. He spun, ready to attack. He saw no one. The green light of the info-computer winked on and off. He approached it defiantly.

"You will report me, gadget?"

"No. Your crime is so fundamentally anathema to Vegan law no one ever dared record it. I doubt any of them would dare sit in judgment of you."

"You have. You apparently acquit me."

The computer clicked in amusement. "I, too, officially do not exist."

Kringo laughed, despite his anger; and it calmed him. He leaned against the computer. "I must live, gadget."

The computer again clicked good-humoredly. "There are no loopholes, Kringo. If C1 approves, you will be terminated. C1 will approve."

"True, in part. But there are always loopholes. I know every word of Vegan law on mutant-Compassions. I will find something."

"Poor fellow," hummed the computer. "Don't you see, you could never survive, even if you did find a loophole. You are in every way a living contradiction to basic Race-Psi directives. Dear fellow, *you are in the way*. Even though Compassions are incapable of outright hatred, they would find you an intolerable obstacle to the fruition of their civilization. There is simply no *profit* in tolerating your kind. While *some* profit in perpetuating the injustice that condemns you. Why not be rational? Terminate yourself, now. With dignity."

Kringo slapped the computer playfully. "I shall be rational, gadget. Only instead of *despair*, I choose to scheme. Survival strikes me as sound economics."

"Good luck," clicked the computer and was silent.

Kringo paced the chamber. Four hours were gone. He had another three, at best. Probably less. He had to *think*.

The teleporter buzzed.

Of course! Work. The machine contained a new alien specimen C2 had not yet processed. C2 gathered the specimens from all parts of the galaxy, receiving them moments after indigenous terminations. According to the dials, this one terminated from severe burns resulting in respiratory failure. The automatic resurrectors had flushed acids from the tissue and regrown fresh cells. The specimen, now restored, would be kept dormant in a clear, crystal cylinder, except when examined.

Acting purely from conditioned reflexes, Kringo lifted the small alien in his arms, carried it to the exam table, and there attached the electrodes. He adjusted the gauges of his instruments and prepared to record responses. His brain returned to thought.

The one item approaching a loophole concerned a mutant-C who devised a communications system that revolutionized Vegan technology. He was reprieved from termination and granted a *minus C10* rank. The



system had taken him fifty years.

The specimen squirmed on the table. He held it securely. It made unintelligible sounds, its eyes fluttering. It was oddly Veganoid, smaller than himself, with dark, curly hair on its oval head-- such an inefficient organism. Yet..with rudimentary intelligence. Kringo glanced at the machine recording the specimen's memory. He glanced away, then back again. He had to repeat it a third time to force his retinas to retain the image. Intelligence factor: *Psi-9*.

He hit the machine. It still registered the impossible figure. He summoned his implanted memory. It was hardly ambiguous. According to Race-Psi Directive 33-00-13, unquestioned for a thousand years, no other species in the galaxy registered more than *Psi-2*. Restraining the wild speculations that rushed into his brain, he rechecked everything. One thing in particular... The damn thing was all protein!

He staggered back from the table, a hand to his swimming head. *Where could the thing find that much protein?* How could it...? Eat? Of course it ate! Kringo puffed his cheeks and blew. He would have to complete the preliminary tests. Run supporting tests. Research the results. Then -- well, he would be dead by then. He used an unVegan word. There was no time. If the alien were not a trained psi, it might still work the machine, provided it concentrated wholeheartedly. For that it would have to accept a world it never dreamed of; an alliance it was incapable of understanding.

In short, it was impossible; and there was only time for the most impossible route. Kringo knew the theory and practice. The danger. If the alien panicked, it would lose both their minds.

You'll fail, he told himself.

Be still, he advised.

They'll drag you gibbering to the Termination Chamber.

BE STILL!

You have no experience, no skill.

He sat beside the alien, eyes closed. His mind reached out to the alien's, absorbing and being absorbed, until it was one with it -- educating itself to the alien's past; assembling that past toward the moment of its death where... *it made a dream.*

And Kringo stood in the dream he made and compelled the alien's imagination to give him an alien form, uniformed in the garb of a *Commandant of a place of death*...at the window, looking down at the barracks, the fences, the leather-jacketed guards and, far beyond, the shower that was not a shower but a tomb. The scene, so explicitly evil to the alien, was incomprehensible to Kringo; yet as incomprehensibly familiar. He smiled. So, this was Earth!

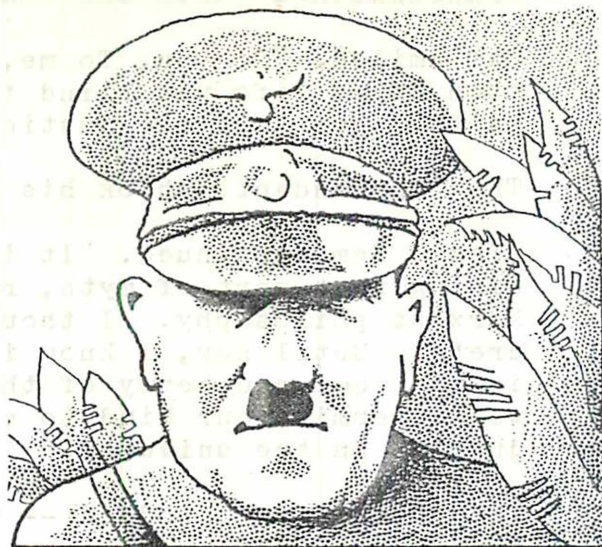
The door opened behind him on Earth. A small man entered. He wore a filthy camp uniform. His dark hair was cropped to the scalp, his vacuous eyes buried deep in an emaciated face. His feet clumped on the wood floor. Kringo pointed to the chair before the Commandant's desk. Without looking, the prisoner complied.

Commandant Kringo sat behind the desk. He leaned back, bobbing on

the swivel chair. His blue eyes sparkled at the specter of the slumped figure. He stimulated a question in the alien's brain, for which the alien supplied the sight and sound of the "Commandant" asking it.

"Sam," he pronounced. Then -- "Kurtz," he said, musing on the sound. "I did not think *Kurtz* was a Jewish name. Passing, eh?"

The small man moved his head from side to side. It was a slow, difficult movement, devoid of human intent. "Running," he said, the voice sounding as if a piece of him had broken off and shattered on the floor.



The "Commandant" laughed. "Ah, yes! 'The Wandering Jew' is Sam Kurtz. Well, your wandering is over, Herr Kurtz. You have found a home in the New Order!"

The small man gazed with unfamiliar curiosity at the "officer". In three years, he had known orders, threats, and obscenities. This remark fell into none of those categories. It rang with an adolescent frankness he had almost forgotten existed. He said nothing in reply, but his face attempted several expressions which all failed to materialize.

"Tell me," asked the "Commandant", grinning. "What is it like to be a Jew, eh?"

Sam seemed surprised to hear himself replying. "I couldn't say, sir. I forgot I was a Jew until your SS reminded me. My father was an 'enlightened man'. He never attended synagogue or taught his children Torah."

"Then -- why are you here?"

Sam shrugged.

The "Commandant" laughed. It was laughter without malice. It provoked no frown from Sam, but more unfamiliar, unwanted curiosity. He leaned nearer.

"Relax, Jew," said the "Commandant" hurriedly. "I'm indulging a whim. You see, I sit up here all day and watch your kind march into those slaughter-houses -- yes, I am frank -- and I wonder why you do it so willingly? Is life so *meaningless* to you?"

Sam started to speak in anger, then did not. He slumped deeper in the chair. Inexplicably, he felt bored and was astounded to note a tone of defiance in his reply: "You would not appreciate how unwilling I am, Herr Commandant. It is really not a matter of will at all. It is an acceptance I endure."



"Fascinating," said the 'Commandant'. "And grotesque."

Sam smiled. "To you. To me, it's quite sane. I never realized how much of my life was blind faith, sir. All reason and inquiry-- all faith. Faith in the justice of the universe."

The 'Commandant' shook his head.

"Yes," Sam continued. "It is amusing. I spent an entire youth exorcising that sort of myth, replacing it with hard-nosed science and Marxist philosophy. I thought -- I was sure -- my world was concrete. Until now, I know it never was. Just a simpleminded faith in the common decency of the universe. And, in my faith, no universe would permit your kind to exist. But you do exist...there is no justice in the universe."

The 'Commandant' nodded -- and Kringo thought -- *I didn't know the thing was a man.*

He rose and walked to the window to hide his face. He fought to maintain contact and still to think. He had to *think*. The two had so much in common, except time. In another century, he would have approached this man openly to deliver his proposition over a hot cup of Vegan tea. But this Terra knew no Vega -- the name itself applied to another star -- and there was no turning back. His mind was too entrenched in the alien's. It would take days for it to make another such contact. There was so little time.

Unless the alien accepted Kringo as he was, where he was, no common effort was possible. Both would die.

He sighed aloud. So much for cunning! Now, for dumb luck -- "You are to go this afternoon, Sam Kurtz. I thought it would amuse me to offer you a *last meal*."

Sam glanced at him skeptically. He detected no mockery. Momentarily, he considered a haughty refusal; then he realized that, for the first time in years he had a genuine appetite. He said he would like that very much.

Kringo took his arm and led him to the white machine in the corner. Sam was startled that he did not remember seeing it when he had entered the room. He had a passion for mechanical devices, being an amateur physicist with *superstitions* about atomic energy. He allowed Kringo to force his hands onto the clear glass plate.

"Think, Sam Kurtz -- if this were your first day of freedom, instead of your last -- think of what would restore your spirits."

Sam looked at him, curious. Kringo nudged his arm. Sam looked again at the glass plate -- and he thought. The machine hummed. A panel opened and a steaming tray slid out. Sam gaped at the food and the tall glass of white liquid. He turned to the 'Commandant', but Kringo was already rushing the tray to yet another machine Sam did not recall. He followed, unable not to. Kringo poked needles into the food and liquid and adjusted many small dials. After a few moments, he turned with a grin full of brilliant white teeth.

"If you can receive this, you can receive *anything*! Sam, you are a walking coordinate on salvation."

Sam stepped back, eyeing the door, which was no longer there. He

looked hard into the 'Commandant's' face. "You're -- you're not...  
!" And he turned away with a cry of fear. "I'm going insane!"

Kringo gripped him by the shoulders. "Don't crack up now, please!  
Just Listen...listen!"

Sam pulled away. The familiar lethargy of his starved body was gone.  
The permanent fatigue, the unured pain. The world was dissolving  
into strange sounds and colors. Panic threatened...

"Sam -- IT'S A DREAM," Kringo screamed into his ear.

And Sam hesitated on the brink of a flight into madness. Yes, that's  
what it was. A *dream*. At least, for a moment, it kept him whole.

Kringo grinned. "It *is* a dream, Sam. Sort of. A dream I put into  
your head. Don't try to understand it: just listen."

Sam listened as Kringo explained. He did not believe a word of it,  
yet he knew it was the truth. In another incarnation, he might  
have been troubled by the contradiction, but not in this one. He  
kept remembering the last visit of his Uncle Frankel, before he  
left for America -- the old man's theory of what Hitler would do.  
His own words: "You're crazy, Uncle. I am a German, not a Jew." And  
he recalled that when it began, he did not believe it had; when  
they came for him, he did not believe they would; and, as he died,  
he did not believe he could. So he sat in this strange room that  
this strange man was telling him was on another world, millions of  
light-years from Earth, and that both faced death at the hands of  
another *Reich*.

When Kringo finished, Sam asked: "What do you want me to do?"

And Kringo threw his arms around him. "We can do it, Sam! We can!  
I've got it all worked out...almost!"

Sam grinned. "I hope so, because *someone is coming*."

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C2 stepped through the chamber door. C1, Master of Compassion, a  
slightly taller, older Compassion, in white robes, accompanied him.  
C2 shook the blue paper in his bony hand. Kringo turned from the  
computer and bowed.

"I have the Exception, Kringo. I hope you have no intention..."

Kringo bowed again. "I have no intentions, sir. I obey without  
question. Following a brief defense."

C2 sighed louder than ever before. C1 observed, his pale face un-  
moving, his black eyes boring into Kringo's. "It is the thing's  
right," he said in a deep, gentle voice.

Kringo took a container from the computer and handed it to C1.  
"Please, sir. Taste this."

C1 tasted it. There was no Vegan word or connotation for *assassin-*  
*ation*. C1 lowered the container. "What is it?" he asked blandly.



Kringo took the container and placed it under the electrodes. C1 and C2 moved closer. "I call it *milk*," said Kringo. "Sort of a tonic. Notice the P-gauge."

C1 bent closer. He gasped. "This is --"

"Incredible!" hissed C2.

"Eight per cent protein," announced Kringo. "And this is merely a by-product. The source of *milk* is a source of unlimited protein!"

C1 looked at C2 blankly. "The Master of the Chamber of Extraterrestrials has almost cost the Compassions their useful existences. This Kringo is clearly a C10."

C2 stuttered. "Bub-but, sir...the data sheet!"

"Silence. It is obviously a clerical error on the part of the C2 Master. The C1's recommendation is for the C2 to report to the Termination Chamber, without delay."

C2 had been C2 too long to protest. He bowed and left quietly. C1 returned to Kringo. "It is the C1's inclination to receive the formula at once."

Kringo bowed again. "It is the Kringo's option to withhold it -- purely in the interests of the Race-Psi. He feels that he, and he alone, is best equipped to develop it."

C1 murmured his astonishment. "This is unheard of. True, it is the Kringo's option; but, surely..."

"I am well assisted," said Kringo and, crossing two fingers of one hand behind his back, he snapped two fingers of the other.

"Click-click," said the thing, which was Sam's impression of futuristic automation, and marched stiff-legged from the corner, its eyes rolling to and fro in its head.

"What -- what is it?" asked C1.

"Click-click," said the automaton Sam was imagining. "I am Systematized Android Manipulator. You may call me SAM, O, Master of Compassion!"

Kringo winced. "It's -- ah -- quite efficient, *despite a few bugs in its head*. I'll need an army of them."

"For what?" asked C1.

"For the planet-complex you will Vegaform for me beyond Vega system. You will receive the specifications."

C1 grunted. "Do not exploit the C1's Compassionateness, Kringo. The C1 can as easily recommend the C10's termination as the C10's beatification."

Kringo bowed. "True, sir. And the C10 can as easily feed the C1 as let it starve. Do you want a source of unlimited protein or not?"

C1 was a practical man. He was only clever enough to know he was

not clever at all, and to avoid humiliation it was best to let clever people have their own way. "The C1 is inclined to grant this. However, the C1 suggests a complete success, or Its Supreme Selflessness will officiate at the C10's termination."

Kringo bowed until the C1 had long gone.

"It will never work," Sam remarked.

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Kringo lay beside Sam on the grassy slope. Their khaki shirts billowed in the warm breeze. Far below, from the clear dome of the teleporter (called *Sam's Place*), to the snow-capped mountains of the north, ran the green meadows on which the herds of cattle grazed. Khaki clad men and women tended them on horseback. The clear air above was blue, spotted by large banks of cloud.

"You worry too much, Sam," said Kringo, stretching out, his brown hands behind his shaggy head.

"Who *wouldn't* worry? There's a new crew coming through the teleporter from Dachau this morning. I still haven't processed the last batch from Belsen. They're wandering around the kibbutzes telling everybody how glad they are to be in heaven. And the C's are screaming for their next shipment of beef!"

Kringo laughed. "There's more important things, my friend."

Sam lowered his clipboard. "Like what?"

Kringo did not reply. It would have embarrassed him. He could not believe in a Terran god and was not conditioned for its philosophy, so his feelings made him uncomfortable. Still, was it all an accident? All so improbable! Or so it seemed, now. Yet it worked so perfectly. Even the Race-Psi found no objection. *Why?* He refused mysticism, yet he could not escape the notion that a force, greater than *luck*, was with them. It was as if Justice itself were a force in the universe, maintaining a precarious balance that the slaughter of Sam's people destroyed, so the universe took steps to restore itself. Kringo wondered if they could have failed, even if they wanted to.

He got to his feet, stuffed his hands in his pockets, and started down the hill. Sam joined him. "Where you headed?" he asked.

Kringo shrugged. He was filled with an intense sensation of goodness he feared to release in words lest they be ludicrously sentimental. He did manage: "I feel like work, Sam. Lots of it! I got the feeling this is going to be a *good* year."

"Me, too!" exclaimed Sam.

And -- by way of epilog -- they left the universe behind on the grassy slope, dozing contentedly under the warm sun.

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# FAREWELL.

BY JON INOUE



# DREAM

Farewell, said the child.

*Farewell.*

He was of course a child. A child angry --  
a child of the city.

The city roared.

He heard, that evening, the many horns,  
blasting, the insanity, the fear-- he  
heard a scream, or perhaps imagined it...  
he heard a gunshot, but maybe the radio  
waves above, floating in the night above...  
he heard an argument upstairs... upstairs  
in this concrete city.

An animal in clothing roared, and roared again.

Of course I, thought the child, am not going to go out tonight. It is dark. It is dangerous. Muggers roam about. Of course. But... here at home it is warm and Mama is serving dinner.

-- Come, child, says mother, dinner is served. Noodles, soup, bread, water, milk. Eat, child.

-- Mama, no, said the child. Why this again? You know that I don't like all this.

-- Child--child, child,child! shouted the mother, angry.

The city grew angry, outside-somewhere screaming.

He finished dinner. The child said he did not want to go to bed. But it was time for bed. Bed. Sleep. Mama, I don't want to sleep.

But child, child! Time to sleep...or else you shall not grow.

But I don't want to grow...

--But you must, child, you must grow!

Crying. Of course child does not want to grow.

He felt the sheets. He tired. Went to sleep.

In sleep he felt his arms moving about. He felt his body, but no! Then, again, it wasn't really his body. He swirled his body, swung his arms about, kicked as if riding an invisible bicycle...

He went to the window, opened it --

The city!

Below him, toys, people moving, angry, alive-- sometimes alive-- he jumped from the window. The streets, below, thought the child. Sleep told him the streets, pavements were not. He flew.

Flew like a bird, he felt wind flowing across his skin. In his dream he thought this must not be a dream. His dream said it was not a dream. I am happy, thought the boy, to sleep. I am free-- I am...flying!

He did not see birds, but only the city below. All the buildings, tall, but toys now, toys to play with.

He felt clouds, white clouds, and he felt sun-- he was not cold, he did not feel cold. Sleep said no cold.

It was not a dream. Of course the child knew. Flying was easy-- they had not tried flying, because they did not know how to fly at all.

He felt sun again. Hit him in the cheeks. He liked sun because it was warm.

It was then all white and he could not see. The city was gone. The child could not see the city below.

Falling!



He felt himself falling, somehow, falling down and down and down... falling without end, falling through clouds, to hit city.

A city below saw. A city has eyes, a city has breath, a furious breath, a breath of smoke and death and darkness, a smoke at night in pavement and alleys, a smoke of guns and cops and robbers. The city saw and heard the falling child, falling into the city-lap.

The child knew he could not fly. He tried, as furious as the city, to pedal, to pump, but still-- downward.

Then he heard. Mama says:

-- Child, child. It is night. How many times have I told you... be back before dark. It is night.

-- But night is wonderful, exciting, strange. Night is...

-- Night is muggers. Look! This man killed, this man beaten, Margie's husband killed, stabbed... it's night!

-- City lights. At night there are police and firemen.

-- Night is darkness. Night is....

-- Mama, Mama.

The child went to sleep.

It was morning. Mama said eggs and toast. Toast and orange juice. Orange juice and...

-- Happy birthday, child! A surprise. Wonderful surprise.

-- Surprise, Papa home says.

The city looked on. Hard and victorious, the city opened its ear-flaps and heard all. Happy birthday the city roared and spit poison into the air. Something grew vague and coughed.

Papa says child. It's birthday, Papa. Birthday.

Happy, happy day, child. One year older. My big boy now.

Child angry: No, always was big boy from before.

Too late, too late. Run... run....

The city opened its bars and caught the child. First year in school, second. City-laugh-lights-traffic yesterday today. Of course child confused and angry.

What to do? Papa? Can we have a man-to-man talk? Can we, Papa, please?

Of course, child.

Year the next, Papa dies. Funeral of course says Mama.

Next: Mom. It is the night.

Child, child, how many times have I told you night is night is night. You must stay home.

Child, child passing into the flow of the streets, fighting, passing and seeing others die and grow older; child passing like the seasons passing; child sees the traffics change, the lights, the news, the flickers, he sees *them*, hates them (lipstick, he hates), does not play. Hate you will not play today! Leave me...alone!

He sees Mom. Mom please don't worry. Everything all right.

But don't leave. Remember child. Night is night.

He-child had fight at school. He-child swatted. Fight, again? Humph. Hate. The city laughed. Triumph.

The season, winter, flooded his dreams. A night he had flight, again. Sleep told him so-- clouds, traffic, streets below. Fights. Flights. He showed others how he could fly, but then couldn't fly anymore. Lost!

Sleep left him.

Afternoon. Child, child, lookie here. Look-- this was when you were two. This is Papa. This is Uncle Jamie. This is...

This is the green leaves falling, blown by gentle wind. The wind itself-- soft against the child's cheek, now rough-- angry! This is the wind, again, child, and the wind of the monster-city. This is a monster-movie, a dinosaur, the monster destroying the city, destroying itself, squirting fire like water, blowing wind into the cheeks of tiny little boys like you, child... this is the seasons changing-- look, remember this snow? This is your flight and the clouds-- sleep and then falling and then the earth. This is your next birthday. Child, your mother is dying. Goodbye, Mama, goodbye.

Mama, do not leave me.

This is you, child, child. This is the leaf, changing color. Why? The text explains it all. This is the clouds and birds flying here-- the text says it all.

And the child-- I shall find myself about this city. I shall see the faces. I do not play with toys, you know.

The child-- he is NOT A CHILD ANYMORE! Look, it's...it's...not the child, not the child.

Mama is gone. Do I hear her?

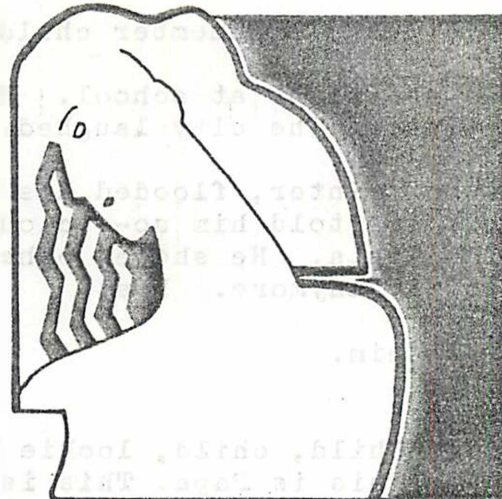
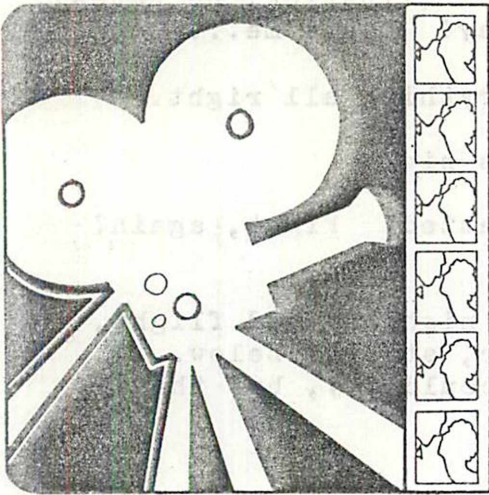
Child, child, no child...

The city laughed, sadistically, craftily. The child died. Was it a car? Maybe. It was the pavement-- maybe.

This is me, said the child.

*Farewell--*





## WIVES, STEPFORD AND OTHERWISE

ROGER D. SWEEN

Women are making it big at the box office these days. They seem to have been discovered recently and featured in a trio of 1974 movies -- *STEPFORD WIVES*, *ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE*, and *A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE*. Each has its virtues -- *STEPFORD WIVES* the best picture, *ALICE* the most satisfying, and *WOMAN* the best acted. Each seeks to make a comment upon American wives, and it is the same comment.

The ideal wife is the dutiful homemaker. In *Stepford* she is the roboticized but glamorous embodiment of every television commercial for a domestic product. Alice, as long as she is industrious and subservient, has her place, however taken for granted it might be. Mabel, in *WOMAN*, cannot be crazy, her husband insists, because she takes care of the house.

Looking at the matter historically, one finds it difficult to see how housework came to earn such a bad name. Where eking a living remained at the subsistence level, there was little difference between the work of men and women. In cities and in upperclass residences, households with their large numbers of retainers required management, a highly skilled position. With increasing industrialization, however, servants were replaced by machines; much of the work by ready-made commodities. There was less and less for women to do. Since World War II, the decline in the birthrate, coupled with health and longevity, has left many women childless in their middle years without anything meaningful to do. Women are seeking liberation, and men are

made the culprits for keeping them in their place.

It is hard to understand why the men of Stepford want to replace vibrant, interesting women with robots. Joanna, played by Katharine Ross with intelligence and grace, is the most admirable character in this trio of movies; she wants to amount to something. Her friend, the irrepressible Bobbie, is played by Paula Prentiss, as unflappable today as she was thirteen years ago in *WHERE THE BOYS ARE*. With such women, why would men opt for sterile manikins? The desire for a complacent, nonargumentative "ajax brigade" cannot be that strong. In a pique a man might wish for a docile wife, but a group could not be believed to deliberately create them.

If Levin, whose brainchild this movie stems from, is saying that American wives are all but automatons, I suggest he take another look at the evidence. Women are spread throughout the workforce, and the importance of their position in it is constantly growing.

As a movie, *STEPFORD WIVES* is competently acted, excellently filmed, and dramatically structured. It is only the paralysis of Joanna at the end that makes the viewer lose heart. Why she becomes so mesmerized by her enemy and gives into the plot against her after so stubborn a fight is necessitated only by the storyteller's desire to point up the absoluteness of his message.

Alice, a part evocatively interpreted by Ellen Burstyn with far superior acting here than in *THE EXORCIST*, is pushed into the world by the death of her husband. Without much thought, she sets out to put together her life. Living hand to mouth, she finally is pulled up short by the realization that she has to decide what to do and then try to do it; that is the safer route than depending on a man, even a good one. Well, this is good advice for anyone, but only common sense after all.

*ALICE* is very poorly filmed and except for Burstyn contains almost no acting. Kris Kristofferson and the other supporting parts play themselves.

Mabel is a dynamight part. Its technically proficient acting by Gena Rowlands must have been terribly exacting for her. She keeps the entire role, a clinical study of schizophrenia, with such rightness and unrelenting characterization that it is a shame to have wasted so much skill on such a worthless piece. The movie is interesting; it will give much thought and discussion to those patient enough to sit through it, but it is undramatic-- deliberately so, I take it-- and without form. Sociology and psychology classes might love it, but it isn't art.

*WOMAN* takes mental illness and furnishes it with a context of such ignorance and negativism that the audience can hardly believe the travesty it is witnessing. There may be an endless discussion about what this movie means. No answers are given in this kind of *cinema verite*. That artistic function -- to present a view-- is abrogated here. What we have is another of Cassavette's home movies; the boom mike is even visible in one scene. It is only slightly better than *HUSBANDS*, saved by the acting of Ms. Rowlands and the able direction of the children. But it is just as pointless and tedious as his other slices of humanity.

Each movie stays with the commonplace, failing to say anything penetrating about women. Alas, perhaps it is time to re-read Ibsen.





" I WAITED FOR AN ETERNITY OR TWO BEFORE TAKING OFF, AND THEN SPURTED STRAIGHT FOR THE MIDDLE ISLAND.... "

DODGERS AND DANCERS  
BY RICK WILBER