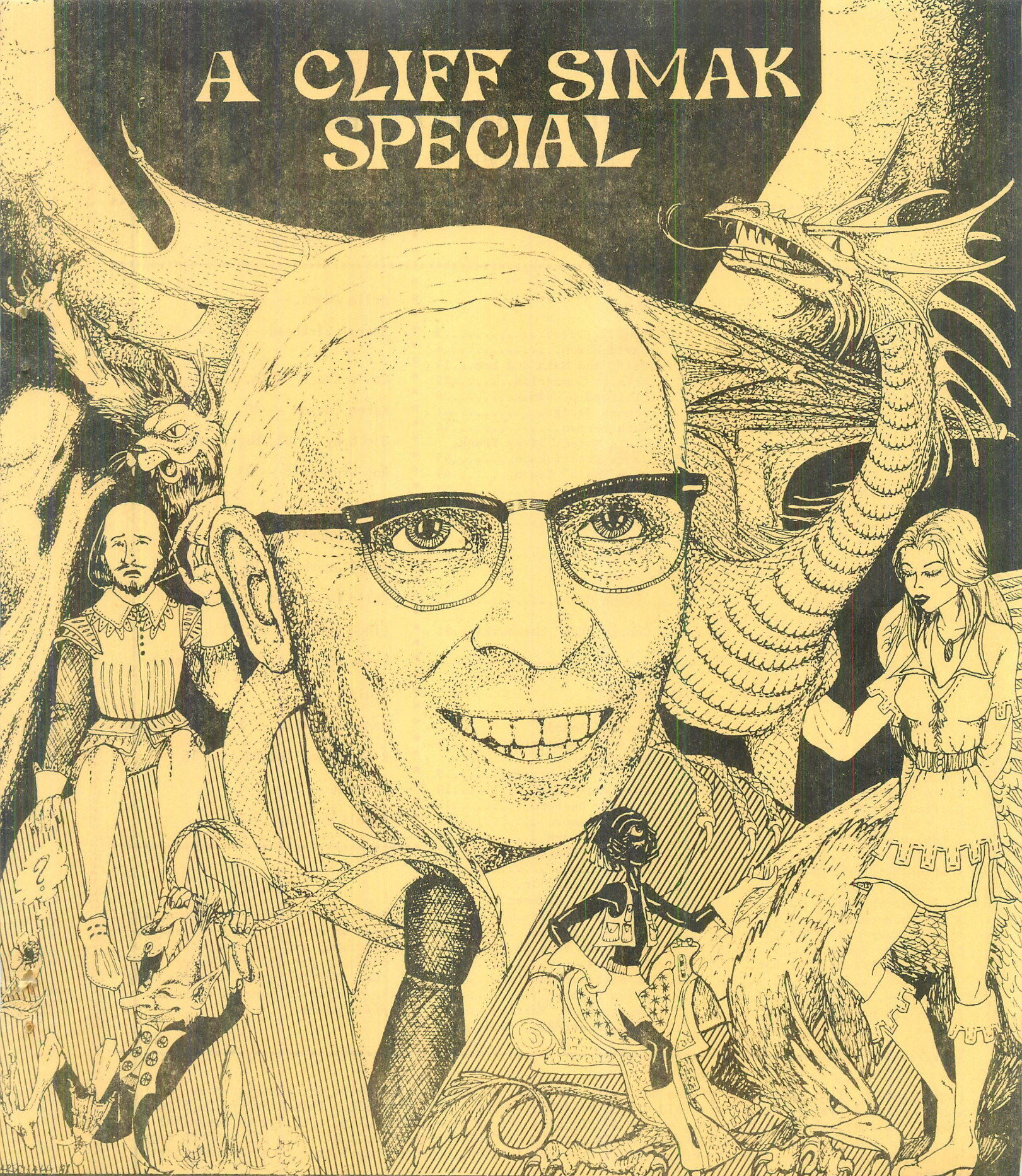


A CLIFF SIMAK SPECIAL



LAN'S LANTERN #11

A CLIFFORD D. SIMAK Special

(LAN'S LANTERN #11)

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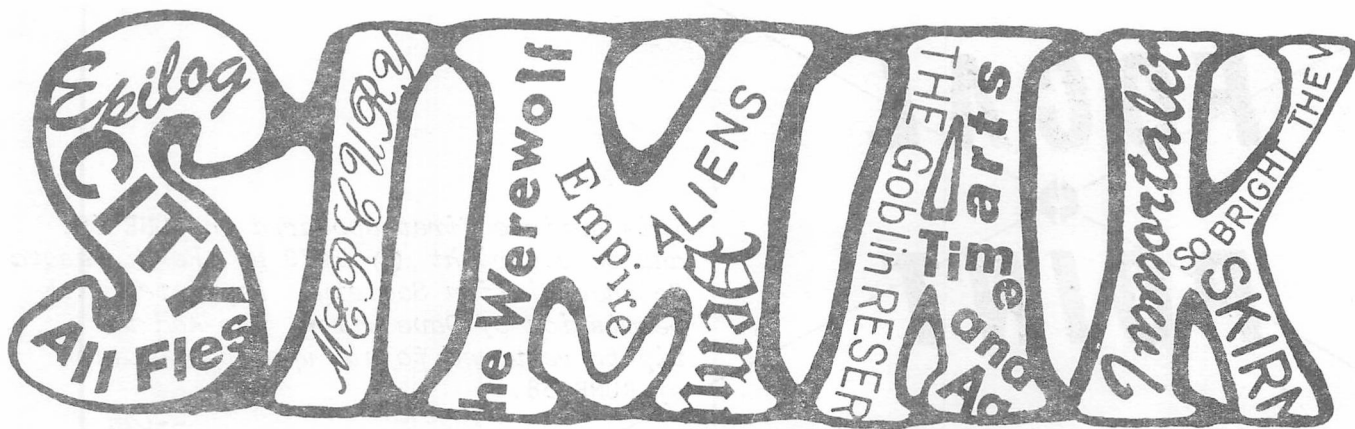
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DEDICATION

To Clifford Simak, of course, who gave us so many hours of reading pleasure, and an optimistic view and hope for all intelligent species of life in the universe. May he delight us more in the next fifty years.

LAN'S LANTERN #11 is a product of the hard work and sweat of George J Laskowski Jr, also known as *Lan*, who lives at 47 Valley Way, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48013; phone: (313) 642-5670. This Clifford D. Simak special is available for the usual, or for \$2.00, plus 50¢ postage and handling. LL #11 is copyright © July, 1981 by George J Laskowski Jr; it is also LanHI Publication #125, a Division of LanShack Press Unlimited. All rights return to contributors upon publication. ((Other copyright notices are designated within.))



(RAMBLINGS 11)

I have been quite fond of Simak's writing since the very first novel of his that I remember reading. In fact, I liked it so much that as soon as I finished it, I started reading *COSMIC ENGINEERS* immediately again. That novel, and many of the others I read of his, and his "polished gems," the short stories, stayed with me throughout my SF reading career. Indeed, as so many have mentioned in this zine, and elsewhere, Simak's writing has had a profound influence on any reader, and that does include me.

When I put together the Williamson Special a couple of years ago, I was pleased with the results, and with the fact that no one else had done anything of the sort for Jack Williamson. Fifty years is a long time to be writing, especially in a specific genre. But being pleased with one's work does not mean that one has done his best. I hadn't, as many of the comments I received told me. Taking many of the suggestions constructively, I set out to make this issue my best effort. And I think it is.

Articles on Simak's writing, remembrances and reminiscences of meeting Cliff, tributes to his contributions to the SF field and influences on other writers, all intermingle in these pages. Artwork from many talented artists, several of them full-page pieces, based on the works of Clifford Simak, is scattered throughout the articles.

And what about Simak himself? I met the man at *CONCLAVE I*, which, at that time, was a one-day convention, given in conjunction with a teachers' workshop on science fiction at Eastern Michigan University. (The convention expanded to a full weekend the next year, so successful was the first!) He was pleasant, accessible, talkative and informative. Immediately I coined the phrase "a gentleman and a gentle man" to describe him. In successive meetings, he has always been that--a person like those he writes about: kind, compassionate, and sensitive to others' needs. Our encounters have mainly been at *MINICON*, but we have corresponded frequently by mail.

When I discovered that his first story was written in 1931, plans immediately took shape and were implemented to put this Special issue of LL together. Cliff was extremely flattered, and was pleased with the interview Maia and I did especially for this issue. Many said they would contribute; most of them did. Take those who did write something and let them speak for all those who wanted to, but didn't, or couldn't because of other commitments. Who knows, I might yet receive something in the mail as a contribution. If so, it will go into the next LL.

This is a small way to say thanks, Cliff, for all that you have given us for the past fifty years. It comes from the heart. May we be able to say thanks once again fifty years hence.

13 July 81

With love,

Jan

FOCAL POINT

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--Lan

Dave Wixon

Gordon Dickson once remarked to me that Cliff Simak had no equal in the science fiction field in the art of the narrow focus. I was grateful for his thought, because the jigsaw piece with that word on it fit neatly into the Simak-gestalt in my mind, as a concept that had long been there, but unnamed.

Like others, I have before described Clifford Simak as the *pastorlist of science fiction*. And he is that; yet such is but a special case of the method denoted by the word *focus*. I mean by this a technique of presenting a large concept simply through a detailed study of one small aspect of that concept-----somewhat akin to the way the whole of a hologram is presented in smaller portions of it. A good example is the novel *WAY STATION*, wherein Simak limned an entire galactic civilization by looking, with loving detail, at a small house in rural Wisconsin....

For this reason, Simak's sf is that of the ordinary human (even if his characters are anything but that!). When an army moves, it sends out scouts ahead of it; and so it is that, when contact is made by the army with anyone else, it is the low-rankers, the scouts, who make it first. In fact, when any army, club, society, or civilization bumps up against someone/thing else--it is always the low-ranks who are in it up to the ears.

In the forward to *SKIRMISH*, a recent collection, Simak says he loves the first-contact theme, and looks forward to them with excitement. (He also says he seldom uses the alien-invasion theme, not thinking it *realistic*; however, in *FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN* he does just that--though with typical change of implication...)

Cliff's style is distinctive on this score, too: his stories almost always remain with the original point-of-view character; once established, the story lives where it began. It does not go off to explore the Harriers, the Galactic Empire, the aliens--whatever--through new eyes.

This process of focusing narrowly leads necessarily to the essence of Simak's work: it is intensely personal. He does not often paint worlds wherein people may be so distant from each other as to be able to kill each other dispassionately, coldly. Conflicts are one-on-one, and often are trials of personality, of such scope that combat is often avoided.

Let me look at his latest two novels, to show you some of what I mean.

The novel *MASTODONIA* has received a mixed reaction among reviewers. I find this a bit ironic, since I had mixed reactions to it myself--but not the same mix the reviewers had in mind. Some of them were simply bored--that means blind to the essence of the work. Others felt the novel was merely a derivative expansion of the award-winning "*The Big Front Yard*;" there are some sim-

ilarities of names, it is true, but the differences in story, plot, and theme are massive enough to dwarf those details.

If you read enough of Cliff Simak's work, you learn that he populates his worlds with the little details, the little critters that somehow express the countryside; and on them the main character reflects, and in them he is reflected. They provide the focal points on which the eye of the reader comes to rest first, to begin there the process of understanding of the whole. In this case there is a robin--the most fit of characters; his presence tells you more about Asa, Bowser, Hiram, and the land than could a thousand more prosaic words.

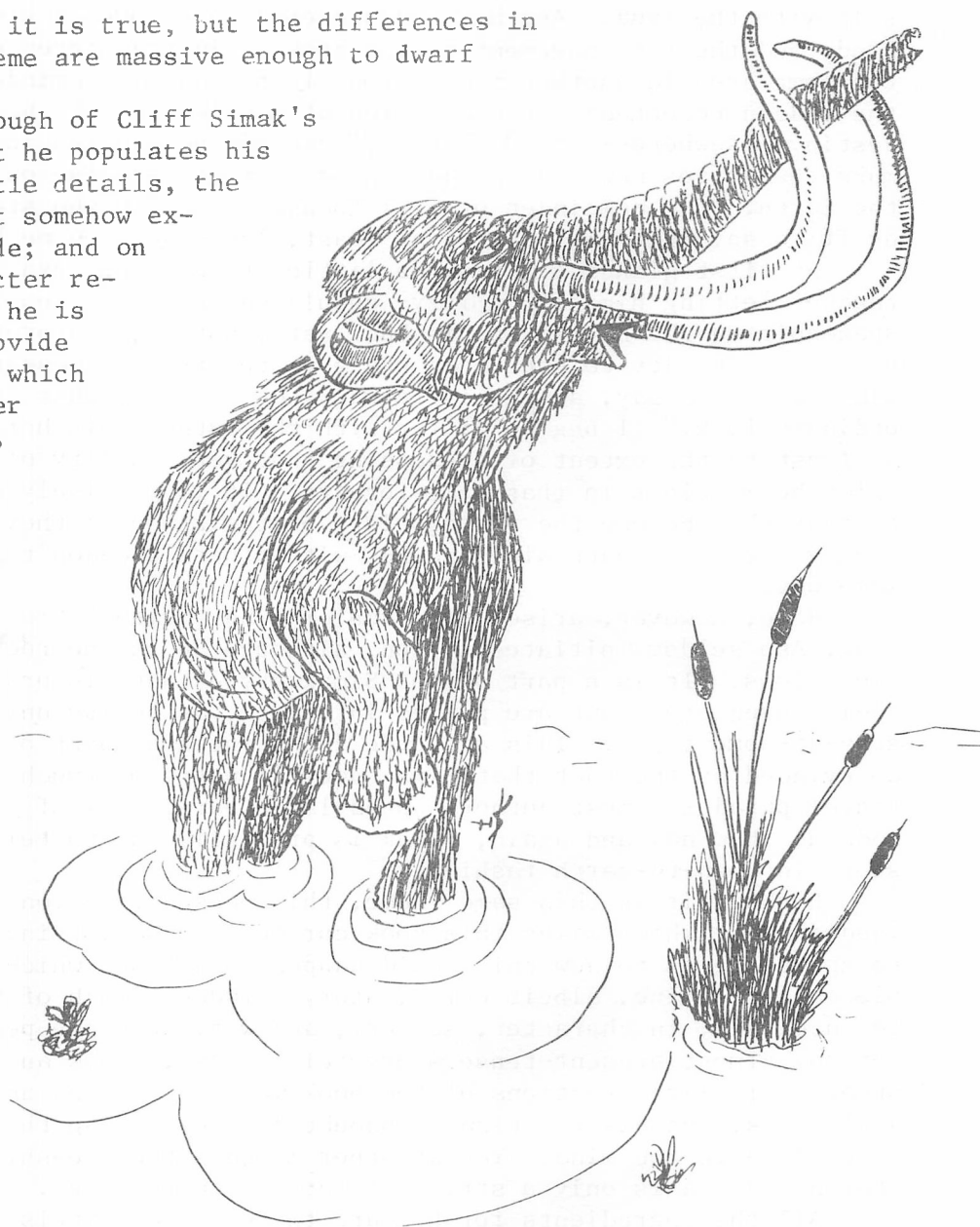
Details. Simak is aware of the tendency of robins to appropriate and rule a territory. And the front-yard-robin personifies a quietly fierce, firm independence, a flavor which is in the name of the protagonist, Asa Steele, and even

more in his character. The flavor is also in the setting, a Wisconsin countryside dear to Simak himself, the area where Asa grew up and to which he comes back after years in academia. Simak has used this milieu over and over again, and that makes it obvious that it is important to him. (*WAY STATION*, "The Big Front Yard," "The Things in the Stone," "The Autumn Land," to name only a few.)

Although Asa left Willow Bend, it never fully left him, and he successfully combines an academic rationality with simple tastes, to fully understand the land and the rural people around him, and to love them while fully aware of their foibles. In these glimpses, I suspect, the author nears autobiography.

A countryside shapes its people, and one quickly realizes that Asa/Simak's feelings for these people but echo a deep appreciation for the country itself.

Again, as so often before, Cliff finds magic in the trees--an alien living in a crabapple grove--and peace in the streams, a zing in the air, and comrade-



(from *MASTODONIA*, drawn by Herb Summerlin)

ship with the land. Asa has rediscovered this love on his return to Willow Bend, and the real movement of the book is in transference of that feeling to the same area in another time. (One is poignantly reminded too of *CITY*, with the sudden recurrence of the vision of man leaving the here-now for an unknown destiny elsewhere-- in "*Desertion*," one of the stories in that collection, men make themselves new bodies and find a sort of paradise on Jupiter, abandoning the Earth. The remainder of *CITY* focuses on those who stayed behind on Earth, as if to say that the author, at least, loves her too much to leave her....)

At first glance, it seems a little strange that Asa, a college archeology teacher letting himself be lazy, should be seriously considering that a crashed spaceship may be buried in his back yard, but Simak's protagonists generally have the capacity to entertain whatever theory is necessary to fit the facts. Simak likes to say, as in his forward to *SKIRMISH*, that "my people are quite ordinary folk." I beg to differ with the author: his heroes are extraordinary, at least to the extent of possessing that very quality of intellectual courage which he mentions in that same forward. It is precisely because of this quality that they become the protagonists of their books: they do what is necessary, even while the countryside abounds with others who don't see the situation the same way.

Here, however, arises the problem I have with *MASTODONIA*: throughout the book, Asa seldom initiates action, although he is the rock around which the action flows. It is a part of the Simak style that his protagonists do not seek their adventures, but are pushed into them, as befits unassuming, thoughtful, stay-at-home types. This attitude is an integral part of the theme, and is also evinced by the fact that Simak doesn't worry overmuch about the sort of time travel paradoxes most authors spend large paragraphs of essay on. Although he nods at them now and again, Simak is primarily out to tell the matter-of-fact story in down-to-earth fashion.

Perhaps it is this same theme, this personification of the wisdom of the land in Asa, which makes this book curiously unsatisfying. It is frustrating to speculate as to how this could happen to a book which contains all the pieces for a fine, albeit quiet, story. Indeed, much of the Simak touch remains to entertain, in character, scenery, and wit. But the personality of the first-person, almost-present-tense story-teller, Asa, stops and starts like a fitful breeze. In large sections of the book we see the land and the people through Asa's eyes, and his reactions--undoubtedly reflecting the love of the author--come alive in the mind. Yet at other moments the eye-shine dulls and the character named Asa is only a string of letters on the page.

All the ingredients for him are there: the symbols of independence, moods of despair or anger, friendships, memories. Yet, when he is placed in mental communion with the alien, Catface, the swift progression from wariness to intimate friendship is not to be believed. Asa's personality fails to gel; he is too close to being the color of the land to be his own man.

Never real for us either is Rila, who comes back to Asa from his past in the first sort-of-time-travel in the book; nor are the other characters. Perhaps this too is the result of the first-person narrative: we have only Asa's eyes and mind to see them with, and he is dreadful at this. Asa tells the story, and tells what he sees, but the reader comes away with the sense that he has been given only the bare-bones report, and that Asa has no insight into anyone else's character, or has chosen to keep it to himself. Ben, for instance: small-town banker and mayor, clever, and described as almost a scrooge, a sharpie with an eye on your money. By the middle of the book he is suddenly Asa's best friend. The transition is unprepared for. One is left to conclude that Asa has not reported changes in his own views. It is possible that Simak has succeeded all too well in capturing the essence of an archeology teacher in Asa--an academic unskilled in reporting on real life, as opposed to his dear dead past; he succeeds only in giving to a warm landscape the gray frame of a detached observer.

Simak's next novel, *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN*, appears outwardly to be the *quest* type of fantasy with which we are all too familiar; but the novel has its definite place among the ranks of his works, for it still, despite the radical change of plot-line, retains the familiar Simak theme of the quiet joy of a good working relationship between Man and the planet he was meant for. Very seldom in a Simak story does the action leave the face of this planet; and even then, as in "*All the Traps of Earth*," it often will only move to find another Earth.

In brief, *FELLOWSHIP* takes place on an alternate Earth, where an alien presence served to halt the progress of civilization, so that 20th-century England is still feudal. The author is inventive and entertaining in presenting an adventure in that setting; more important, though, is the fact that he continues to do the things which makes his style so unique. The countryside is populated with Little People of various sorts--not the cute little elves of the fairy tales, but alien races with their own motives and ways, elementals, perhaps of the countryside. There is an assortment of loyal, intelligent animals; there are other forms of knowledge--witchcraft (and a witch) and wizardry. There is a demon, and even a ghost, whose purpose in death is never explained.

When Simak does something in a well-mined vein, you can be sure he will do it with a new perspective. Here he rejects the massive *Good-versus-Evil* struggle so common to *quest* stories, rejects the bipolar world-view, to imply that Evil may be of many sorts, and in some cases be only another, different way of life.

Both these novels display a common Simak theme, that of the stars coming down to us. The thought behind this seems to be that we humans may be better off on our home ground. In contrast, *SHAKESPEARE'S PLANET* hints at a human race either homeless--lost--in the vast universe, or mutating into something not so human (as if being *human* is defined at least partially in terms of a relationship to Earth). Nowhere does this contrast between the two sorts of futures for mankind come through more clearly than in *A CHOICE OF GODS*, wherein a few humans, left on Earth, live calm, quiet, contented lives, while the rest of the race vanishes into space, either lost to other concerns, or jostling frantically among the stars.

Cliff is aware of the need not to stagnate in the same old pool, as he showed in "*Huddling Place*:" fear of *Out There* is not the proper motive for one's staying home. Yet the central theme of his whole shelf of books is that of *home*. At times the song is somewhat muted, but even in *FELLOWSHIP* Duncan's motivation arises primarily from considerations of his place in the line of his family, of his duty to people and place--a duty which he accepts with no qualm.

In other stories the refrain is even stronger, and it dates all the way back to the *CITY* stories; and it's not a feeling reserved for humans. *Home* is more than a place, though; it connotes a niche in a whole ecosystem and a society. Simak subtly portrays the feeling of happiness as including the invisible web of ties to those around one. In "*Neighbor*" (1954) he shows a little valley which accepts an alien who demonstrates acceptance of their ways; in "*All the Traps of Earth*" a robot is fulfilled by such a small thing as a new little planet whose struggling pioneers need help--yet still can extend the greeting to "make yourself at home."

What *home* is varies for each person, and it is no part of Simak's thought to suggest that the whole race should remain Earth-bound. But *home* is an environment which suits the being, and vice-versa--one feels at home because one is suited for a place/milieu.

If, as in "*Desertion*," one changes, one is no longer at home in the old place; but one can make a new home... In *SHAKESPEARE'S PLANET*, again, Ship is on the other path, slowly changing to match the environment--one day it will be at home in the between-stars emptiness. (The tragedy has come to Carter Horton, though, who now has no home at all, except Cold Sleep.)



Herein, perhaps, lies the explanation of why Simak's characters, often so simple and unsophisticated, are yet so successful at encountering the unexpected bit of Otherness which drops into their lives: they are adept at treating the Other as they would like to be treated--made to feel comfortable, *at home*. Simak has said he is excited about the idea of first contacts, and what he offers us, subtly, time and again, is a lesson in how to do it: no hostile moves, but neither with slobbering enthusiasm (only dogs can get away with that).

And yet--maybe here is the reason why Asa (in *MASTODONIA*) took to Ben so suddenly: perhaps Ben was the subtle extension to Asa of the hand of Willow Bend. If so, Asa, who had never fully lost his feeling for the area, cannot be blamed for seizing it so gladly. Ben was the focus of the community's reception of Asa.

As Elayne said to Carter Horton when, in *SHAKESPEARE'S PLANET*, he finally commented on the rose tattooed on her naked breast: "I had been beginning to feel disappointed that you hadn't noticed it. You must have known that it was there to direct attention. The rose is intended as a focal point."

I reckon there are few sf authors who more deserve a tribute than Clifford Simak. He stands with a handful of *stars* in the genre, who introduced most of us to the genre in the first place. In elementary school -- oh, by the third grade at the latest -- I was already reading science fiction. I'd read horror stories even before that time. But in the sf arena, I recall two names above all others, whose short story anthologies I carried about with me all through the third or fourth grade: Theodore Sturgeon, and Clifford Simak. It would be some while before I discovered such luminaries as Heinlein, Clarke and Asimov. For better or worse, Simak must take the lion's share of responsibility for making an sf reader out of me. Here it is, maybe twenty years later; I've sold a bundle of short stories to various anthologies, edited an original anthology, and my first novel is forthcoming from Ace. Again, for better or worse, Simak must be counted among those who directed my persuasion.

A little love to an immortal of the genre: Clifford Simak.

-- Jessica Amanda Salmonson

I'd always heard of Cliff Simak before I ever met him (at the Chicago SF Convention) because Daddy and Mother liked him so well, and Jack Williamson thinks so much of him.

Cliff is so easy to talk to, and truly a quietly brilliant man. He has only good words for other authors, in fact, for everyone! No bitterness, no cynicism, no cheap showmanship. His sterling virtues shine through all he does. I've enjoyed everything Cliff has ever written!

With love from
Al and Verna Trestrail
("Doc" Smith's daughter)

(From *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN*,
drawn by Herb Summerlin)

OH TO BE FREE

FREE

FREE

IN 2503

by Ross Rocklyne

I am going to re-write an article of some years ago which somehow did not get itself published. I am to call it a reminiscence

because it somehow involves Cliff Simak, about whom material has been requested.

Years pass and pass, FIFTY YEARS PASS, and maybe Cliff and you people won't mind being taken word-wise back to another time....but only a few years ago to -- the St. Louiscon! -- that being where I met him.

Now that's the bait, and here's where we start chewing.

First, I admit I am not a slave to chronology or possibly even to accuracy. After all, does it really matter whether a given event happens before or after Tuesday or Friday? Does it really matter who threw the plate of salad in the waiter's face? So let's forget about chronology and go back to the beginning.

If there's one thing my friends have noticed about me it's my snappy decisions. I brooded for only two weeks, and being in L.A. wrote a quick letter to Dale Tarr in Cincinnati, my first fan-friend, in which I said partly, "For one thing, Alex, Anne, Bea, Bjo, Bruce, Bob, Bob, Bob, Cliff, Dean, Don, Ed, Elmer, Forrey, Jack, Judy, Karen, Leigh, Lester, Lou, Phil, Poul, Ross, Rusty, Sam, Wendy, and others will be there." All those people can hardly be "one thing," but it's already flowed smoothly off my typewriter, in alphabetical order you'll notice, so it has to stay in. (My own name is in there too, which indicates how unemotional I am about these reminiscences.)

When Dale Tarr, who, with me and Hari Seldon, coldly and logically formed the Cincinnati Fantasy Group, called, I accepted his offer to share a room in the CFG suite. What a break for me to be mixed in with the brilliant fans of which Lou Ben Tabakow heads the list. In a trice I was packed, and dawn found me in the lounge of the Chase-Park Plaza.

So there I was that Friday morning, sitting in the lounge, tense, expectant, and depressed. What was I doing in St. Louis when I could be sitting in the lounge at home in L.A., tense, expectant, and depressed?

Just then I saw two Bob Blochs walking down the hall. They waved at me and yelled, "Don't go 'way!" I didn't; they did. It was too two Bob Blochs; actually. Only one of them was Bob Tucker, wearing Bob Bloch's lapel, and vice versa. They caused some confusion at the opening of the convention that morning. They accused each other of being Bloch and Tucker respectively. Wearily, I must add they considered this very funny; so did everybody else.

Back to the lobby! After Bob Blochs passed, I piercingly looked around for Cliff Simak. No sign of Simak, and, after all, he was one of the big reasons I --just then came my first big break of the convention. A Mahaffey was coming toward me. Yes, it was a genuine Mahaffey, of the "B" class.

(Where are you now, Bea? The last report I got about you was not good.)

"2503!" she shrieked in her reserved manner, adding all sorts of information about the late arrival of Dale Tarr and the fact that Louis the Tabakow and friends were breakfasting across the street.

Elated, I ran across the street. Nothing but parkland. Depressed, I gave a bellhop a ten (ten *what?*) to haul my bags to the room I would share with Dale Tarr, right next to 2503.

Fabulous, wonderful, luxurious, memorable 2503!

"2503!" grinned Elmer Purdue at a party back home in L.A. two weeks later. "Why should I play poker when such as 2503 existed?" Elmer Purdue not play poker at a convention? Now you know how wonderful 2503 indeed was.

(And, Elmer, where are *you* and how are you *now*? The last I heard, and today's date is July 18, 1980, you were very sick in L.A.'s Good Samaritan Hospital.)

Last year at the *BAYCON*, I had been a pesty guest of the Cincinnati Fan Group. Who do I pay, I asked myself, as I surreptitiously mixed a drank(s). Is this a Commie set-up? When does the propaganda start? So ran my guilty thoughts as I carefully looked around for somebody not to pay an entrance fee to. In St. Louis I learned that every year the CFG gave its unheralded gift to the convention. It was obvious, as I went in free free free to 2503, that Dale Tarr, Hari Seldon and I had planned well!

It was in 2503 that the First Fandom meeting was held. It was at this meeting that Bea Mahaffey rivalled Bob Blochs by becoming two associate members of the organization. She may even be three associate members, despite the per-eginations of Rusty Hevelin and Parliamentary Law. Don't ask me for details though, I don't even have the facts.

It was to 2503 that everybody came, let's get that straight. The wonderful delReys. The Hamiltons. Jack. Sam. Cliff Simak. The Bob Blochs, or the Bob Tuckers, whichever. And dozens of others, including you and you and you... and so on.

(I *did* say the Hamiltons, didn't I? Yes! Ed! Noe Leigh! *Damn!*)

And, Cliff Simak came but I didn't know who he was. I did know there was somebody on the other side of the room surrounded by autograph-hunting admirers. Then the fans got pushed back and he was surrounded by Poul Anderson and Bob Silverberg. Then Karen surrounded him. I won't be modest, I had already signed two autographs myself!--so I wondered, why don't I push through the crowds and surround the man myself, and if it's really Cliff Simak like I suspected, maybe he'll sign my program booklet, and maybe we can talk a little bit about---well, I thought awkwardly, blushing a little, about science fiction and the days of yore and a few of his titles!

It didn't work out that way. The scene now changes, and it's probably Sunday afternoon.

Sunday Afternoon? It could have been Saturday. The main fact is, the Burroughs Bibliophiles luncheon is being held, and who's to care what day it is; especially since I am wedged between ladies whom I much admire, Wendy on the left, and Leigh on the right.

Also at the table nearby--Edmond Hamilton! Alive and well at that time, of course. I find myself being sixteen again and reading all about the monsters "*On the Other Side of the Moon*" in an early *AMAZING*. (Oh no you don't, you NASA men, you can't take that away from me.)

Then there's Jack Williamson! Forrey Ackerman! And--of course!--somebody who has to be Cliff Simak, 'way at the other side of the luncheon room.

And there's Don Wollheim.

Wendy Ackerman, in this joke I am about to tell you, is discussing with pretend dissatisfaction her Americanization of the German language Perry Rhodan novels.

"Yes," Don Wollheim gravely nods, adding, "These things always lose something in the translation!" Correction from the first page: It was Wendy Ackerman who threw the salad into Don Wollheim's face.

I had my first glimpse at the cover of Sam Moskowitz's new book, mostly about Burroughs, *UNDER THE MOONS OF MARS*.

"It's never been used before," chortled Sam.

Sam was given three minutes to speak. He did speak for three minutes. Having done that, he began his talk, as interesting a series of revelations about an author as I've heard. Burroughs kept meticulous records of his correspondence, and Sam had access to the records.

Now for a montage! First remember I'm on the 25th floor and I have to catch the elevator. This will take some time. Pressing the button seems not to be very effective, for the operator has to return the elevator each time he gets to the last number, which he has picked up from a lighted board in the lobby. Best, then, to telescope time, and so I find myself on the eighth floor, knocking surreptitiously on a door. It opens and Anne McCaffrey stands there.

"Come in, sweetie," she whispers, and I slink into a quiet room where seventy people are watching Gordon Dickson on television. Good old Gordie. He's really telling the dumbheads out there where it's at.

I mill around. Usually it's crowds that mill around. Anyway, here's Dean McLaughlin, also milling. We mill around each other.

"Dean, do you find yourself waiting breathlessly for the presentation of the coveted Hugo Award among whose possible recipients you are listed for your fine and talented novella *"Hawk Among the Sparrows"* published last year in *ANALOG SCIENCE FACT AND FICTION*, a Conde Nast Publication edited by John W. Campbell, Jr., Assistant Editor Kay Tarrant?" I flung at him penetratingly.

"I won't win it."

"And if you don't?"

"I have a rule to follow," said Dean. "No matter what happens, lose or win, always present an expression of pleased surprise."

If there was one thing I was going to take back to California with me besides four free paperback novels, that was it. Pretty penetrating. Somewhat floored, I reeled off and found Philip Jose Farmer.

"I liked your last book, *TARZAN IN THE VALLEY OF CROTCH*," I told him guiltily.

It is at this time that Forrey can't be stopped from saying, "You mean *TARZAN AND THE GOLDEN LOIN*?"

Mr. Farmer went someplace to find a typewriter. A newsman from NBC found me just then and began an enthusiastic interview until I happened to mention I was not Rusty Hevelin. Crushed, I willed myself to 1503 via the astral route (the levitators work so much better) and found myself appropriately in a spirit-ed discussion with Elmer Purdue and Jack Williamson.

Elmer remembered I had made the acute observation that Jack smeared colors into his stories like an artist. Green, red, ye llow, blue, violet, and so on.

"*THE STONE FROM THE GREEN STAR*."

"*THE GREEN GIRL*."

"*GOLDEN BLOOD*."

"*THE PURPLE CLOUD*."

"What does xanthic mean, Jack?" I hurled at him.

His past brought vividly before him, Jack Williamson blushed. Crimson, I believe.

It's the next day. Saturday? Sunday? Anyway, there's a poolside meet where Authors Meet The Fans. I am trying to get Bjo Trimble's autograph, but there are a lot of Authors ahead of me (except not even one Cliff Simak). I ask Bruce Pelz humbly will he please sign my program booklet, but Bruce is signing Alex Panshin's instead. Disgruntled, I stand in line for my cup of sarsaparilla flavored ice.

The calliope is playing "Daisy, Daisy." Or "Take Me Out To The Ball Game." Or "The Streets Of New York."

A vision floats in Bikini along the edge of the pool. It's called Mrs. Robert Silverberg.

Another vision called Karen Anderson stands before me, saying, "I was not issued a hat!"

"You, the wife of an Author, were not issued a hat," I muse. "The fancy straw hat worn by every young man in 1910 when life was one long Sunday Afternoon." I place my hat on Karen's head, and how it does become her. But now I look just like any other fan. Maybe some anxious Author will ask me for an autograph....

The word goes out.

"Clifford Simak is looking for you, Ross!"

All over the hotel the great news travels. I can hardly believe it. After all these years I am to meet the great man whose first stories I read when they appeared in 1931 and 1932. I will not recount our conversation when we met. It was about ourselves, it was about the tunes we had been playing on the keyboard of an instrument which has been giving us music most of our lives. From this one meeting I find myself rating Cliff with the nobility of science fiction, other names in that set coming in as Edmond Hamilton, Jack Williamson, Emil Petaja.

One more item: The convention ends, and it was a good one. It could hardly help but be with such names as "Alex, Anne, Bea, Bjo, Bruce, 3 Bobs, Cliff...."

And 2503.

CLIFFORD SIMAK: A Remembrance

Though I had read the Simak opuses as they came out, I did not know much about the man until I met him in Minneapolis in spring, 1980. The surprise was that he and I had a lot in common. We both grew up on farms and had relatives of no great professional stature in the world: just country folk. We both got more education than anybody else in our family. I was uprooted from Alabama at age 9 or so, but Simak stayed close to his native ground, and that shaped him in a different direction.

For indeed he is our foremost regional SF writer. He brings off time and again what others seldom attempt (what, indeed, they don't even conceive): the infusion of cosmic themes with a heartening human landscape.

He keeps his big ideas intertwined with personal problems and concerns, without lapsing into sentimentality. And through it all comes his love of the land, the place, the human context.

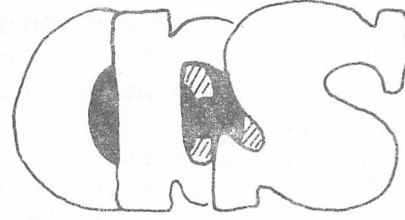
I remember sitting on a couch for some hours, talking about what it was like to work on hard-scrabble farms and dream about the stars. (You can see them a lot better out there, than in the dim cloak of a city night.) I could see the sources of his strengths as a writer, very simple sources that are more powerful for being that. Like Jack Williamson, he is a kind of SF writer we shan't see again. We should greet every new book with enthusiasm and a careful reading. He is one of our giants.

-- Gregory Benford

An Interview With

This interview was conducted at MINICON, Easter weekend in Minneapolis, in 1980. Maia and I had an early morning appointment with Cliff on Saturday, and in spite of taping problems (I had brought the wrong power chord for my tape-recorder and didn't notice it until just before Cliff arrived, and Maia's recorder didn't have an automatic shut-off, so we had talked for a few minutes while nothing was being recorded) we had a nice, long, informative interview. What follows is a transcription edited by Cliff, Maia, and myself.

--Lan



LAN: I was reading Sam Moskowitz' account of your life in his book *SEEKERS OF TOMORROW*, and he mentions that the first story you wrote was called "The Cubes of Ganymede". What happened to it?

CLIFF: "The Cubes of Ganymede" was my first story, which I sent out to *AMAZING*. T. O'Conner Sloane was the editor at that time. I did not hear from him for several months, and it was not until I had read a news item in a New York fanzine that I found my story had been accepted. By that time I had already written, and had published, a couple of other stories. I watched for the story, and it did not appear in *AMAZING*. About three years after I had sent it in, back came this crumpled, dog-eared, and tattered manuscript. Attached was a note from T. O'Conner which said that he couldn't publish it because it had become outdated. I could not imagine how a story set on one of the moons of Jupiter could become outdated, but if that was the excuse he wanted to use, it was okay with me.

The story was, as a matter of fact, a pretty bad story, as most first ones are inclined to be. I put it back on a shelf and forgot about it. I suspect that the manuscript does exist somewhere, tucked away. I doubt I'll ever see it again.

LAN: So the first one you wrote and submitted for publication was never published. Instead, the second one you wrote, "The World of the Red Sun", became the first, and it appeared in the December, 1951, issue of *WONDER STORIES*.

CLIFF: Yes, that's exactly right.

LAN: In that story you do something which I had not seen done in any other SF story I had read from that time period. It was a time-travel story, and the main characters go into the future using a time-travelling machine in an airship.

CLIFF: Yes, I had attached the time-travelling device to an airship so that they would be above any of the geological disturbances which might heave up a mountain, open up a valley, or even flood an area.

LAN: That makes a lot of sense. Had anyone done that before?

CLIFF: I don't think so, but you must remember that this was very early in the field, and writers were doing lots of this that had never been done before.

LAN: Also, instead of using a super-scientific weapon to take care of the menace of oppression to our future earth, to defeat Golan-Kirt, a psychological weapon is used.

CLIFF: Yes, psychology. Now that may be the first use of psychology as a weapon in science fiction. I wouldn't swear to it, because I'm not sure, but it could well be. I had never thought of that before.

LAN: From all that I have read from the period, you are the only one who has done that. You also used a psychological weapon in "The Asteroid of Gold." Two brothers who find an asteroid veined with gold are discovered and captured by a pirate and his cohorts. They decide between themselves that no matter what tactics the pirate employed to make them talk, they would not crack; they would use the same things against him.

MAIA: It was a long time before psychology, sociology, and those sciences were considered in the same class as biology, chemistry, and physics.

CLIFF: That's true. But once again you see that myself and others early realized that you couldn't rely on mass technology, nor on the horrible weaponry of E. E. Smith, whose answer to any threat was to build a bigger weapon. Some of the strength and power that lay within the mind was as important as technology.

Now I don't think that we sat down and said this to ourselves, but I think that some of us did realize it, and used those kinds of devices.

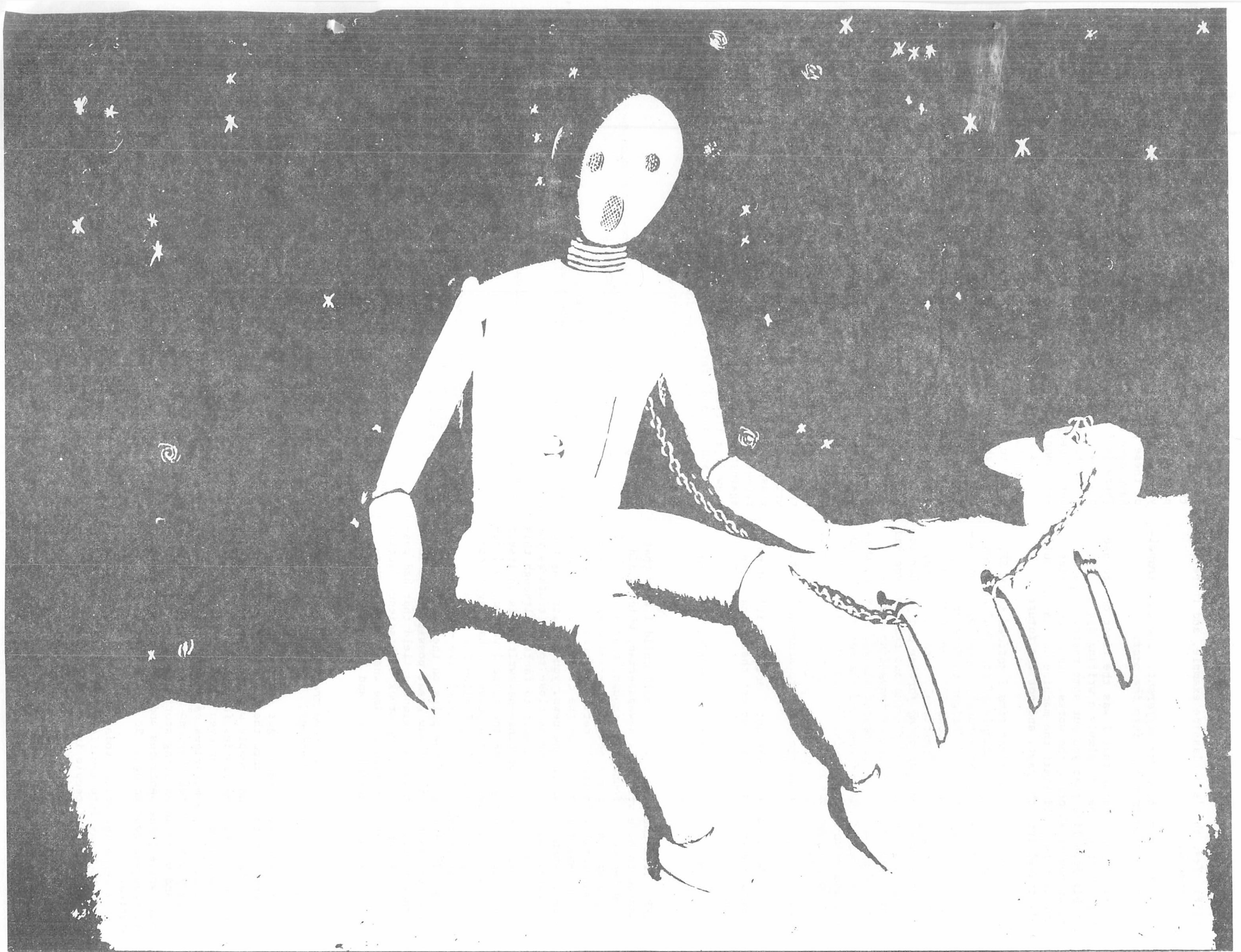
LAN: In reading what stories were being published in the magazines, you might have subconsciously wanted to add something to the story, some twist that had not been used before.

CLIFF: I think perhaps that might be correct.

LAN: Also, "The World of the Red Sun" does not end happily.

CLIFF: Stories don't have to end happily. This is one of the quarrels I have with science fiction, but not so much today as in years in the past. I believe this was something fostered by John Campbell who, after all, did set the trend of what science fiction would be, and should be. John and a number of other editors insisted that the human race must always win, that we must be brighter, and smarter, and more intelligent than any other being in the universe--which simply doesn't make sense. As a matter of fact, we may not win. The chances are weighted so that we won't win. Egocentrism--but we are getting away from that now, and as a result stories do not have to end happily. Some of the best stories in all of world literature did not do so.

MAIA: HAMLET.



from *"All the Traps of Earth"* drawn by Laurraine Tutihasi

CLIFF: Yes, that's a classice example, and there are many others.

LAN: *One other thing was different. The time-traveling machine would not go into the past.*

CLIFF: I don't think that I was the first one to use that. I think that is simply a writing device. On any big idea like that you put some restrictiona on it, or you're shooting the works. In other stories some authors could limit the machine in that it could only travel into the past, and not the future.

LAN: *This is not the first time I noticed it in SF, but it is the earliest example of it. Poul Anderson wrote a story called "No Return", which was also published under the title of "Flight to Forever", in which they could only go about 200 years into the past as a maximum, but limitlessly into the future. The time-travellers keep going farther and farther into the future in hopes of finding out that science had perhaps solved the problem of travelling into the past. Eventually they go beyond the end of time, witness the end of the universe and the rebirth of a new one, and return to the point in time when they had left in the previous one. It's a mind-boggling story. Poul's copyright was 1948; yours was 1931. It could be that you were the first to start using it.*

CLIFF: Well, maybe, maybe not. Actually it's of no consequence who started it, except that it has been used.

LAN: *When did you get started in writing? What made you want to be a writer?*

CLIFF: From the time I was a small child I knew that I wanted to be a writer, a newspaperman, which I did indeed become. I found out, though, that as much as I enjoyed writing for the newspapers--and I was a newspaperman until 1976 when I retired--I found that writing the news did not give me the creative scope that I needed. When you write the news, you are striking for the truth, you are hitting as close to the truth as you can; you must confine yourself to facts. Although this was somewhat creative writing--newswriting is in itself an art--it did not give me the scope I wanted, so I began to write stories for the pulps. I had begun reading science fiction with Edgar Allen Poe and H. G. Wells, rather than AMAZING STORIES like most other people, but I did discover the pulps on the stands. I think even at that time I saw great possibilities in science fiction; it was a beginning field that had possibilities for growth. I've stuck with science fiction except for a brief period of time when I had a writer's block, and I needed money, and I wrote a bunch of westerns.

LAN: *Do you still think there are a whole lot of possibilities in science fiction?*

CLIFF: Certainly. When I got started in writing, it was very easy to move into the field. The magazines did not have too many people who could write for them. They were reprinting stories from the past. Very few people would write sf, or even think about writing science fiction. The magazines cared nothing about style or how you put it together, so long as you had a good idea and wrote an exciting story around it. If you could write three sentences and make them hang together, that was good enough. So it was easy to get started.

A beginning writer today has a much harder time trying to break into the field than I had. They have a large number of people in competition with them.

Everybody seems to be writing science fiction now. If they keep at it and break in--that is, once you are published, even one story--you have a track record and you can go on from there. But I'm afraid that a lot of these people trying to break in, while they could have done so in 1929 and 1930, cannot break in now. There is too much competition. The market is wider now--back then there were only a couple of magazines to write for--but even with the wider market, the number of people writing has grown so much that the market cannot absorb them.

As far as the possibilities of science fiction go, as far as developing the concepts themselves, it seems to me that there is absolutely no end to it. You might think that we've written everything we can, but someone will come along who has an entirely new idea and start a new era of thinking. A new concept like cloning: immediately authors picked up on it, used and developed it.

LAN: *One problem I see with present-day writers who are trying to break into the science fiction market is that they are writing stories which were written back in the thirties and forties.*

CLIFF: Many of them probably read anthologies which have reprinted the older stories. and they think what they read is good, and try to imitate. To be able to write science fiction, the writer must have a very good grasp of the body of work so that he or she does not repeat what has already been done. But there's nothing against repeating what somebody else has said, if you view it a little bit differently, maybe a little better, and use a different style. There's absolutely no reason why it shouldn't be done, but you just can't go back and rewrite the old stories.

LAN: *You yourself have used the time-travel machine idea, but you've done it differently.*

CLIFF: Nobody can patent an idea. Isaac Asimov can't say: "Robots are mine; nobody else can write stories about robots!"

LAN: *And you have written about robots.*

CLIFF: Yes, I have.

MAIA: *You've even mentioned the law against harming human beings, which may even predate Isaac's Three Laws of Robotics. The story I'm thinking of is "Lulu."*

CLIFF: Oh yes, the robot ship who couldn't take off and leave the human crew stranded on the planet. She had loyalty to the crew built into her. She could not do them real dirt. She could throw them out, lock them outside the ship, but she couldn't leave without them. I remember that one. However, Isaac had already established his Three Laws by that time.

MAIA: *I still get fairly offended when a robot disobeys them.*

LAN: *Like in the movies.*

CLIFF: Yes, Hal, in 2001.

MAIA: *Or Ash in ALIEN, or the robot in THE BLACK HOLE.*

LAN: *They all violate the First Law.*

CLIFF: There's nothing sacred about the First Law. It's just a damn good gimmick, and everybody has seen the practicability of it.

MAIA: *It's a nice gimmick, because I get so very tired of setting robots up as the heavies. It's all right that there are those villainous robots, but set up something original--you can't make robots the heavies. It's not part of their programming.*

LAN: *I've noticed that anytime you name your robots, you go back to biblical names.*

CLIFF: I don't know if I do that as much as I used to, and it's not only robots, but human characters as well whom I would call by biblical names. I can't give you any specific reason for it. There is a certain lilt, a certain sense of rightness to some of them: Hezekiah, Elijah, Asa. They are awfully good names, and rather unique because no one else uses them anymore. So that's probably why I use them.

MAIA: *They sound very much like the names Southern Plantation owners would give their slaves. If robots are servants--it may be coincidence, but it fits.*

LAN: *In some of your stories you do explore religious themes. For example, in "All the Traps of Earth," the robot Richard Daniels was honored with two names by the Barrytons, the family he had served for so many years.*

CLIFF: 600 years.

LAN: *Yes, 500 years longer than he was supposed to have served any family without a memory wipe. When the last Barryton died, the minister came by and talked to Richard. Richard told him that he thought he had a soul, which startled the minister. Later in the story he obtains mental powers, which again is something different which you have done with robots. You have explored the possibilities of robots almost becoming human.*

CLIFF: You see, my concept of a robot is not a servant, although I have, in many cases, made them the good, loyal retainer. Robots in my stories--and in many other people's stories, I think--have become surrogate humans. You can take a robot and give him a blend of characteristics which a human probably would not have. You can hold up a robot and say, this is the way a human should be. So they're surrogate humans, for me at least. After all, if a man makes a machine which is so much like himself, has he recreated himself? in almost every detail, except there is the possibility that there is no soul?

LAN: *In many of your stories you treat machines as extensions of human beings, and sometimes even attribute to them human qualities and feelings.*

CLIFF: Well, aren't they? They're tools.

MAIA: *You name your car.*

CLIFF: I always name my car. This cat that I have now is the first one that I haven't named, and I don't know why. Maybe because they are so commonplace now. Before, when I had old Annie and Nellie--they were always girls' names--they were very, very precious things. Almost like having a dog.

Machines are tools. The first tools were shards of stone, maybe accidentally found at first, then chipped. From those all the way up to our most sophisticated machines, they are extensions of man's bodies.

LAN: *In one particular story, "Operation Stinky," you have Betsy, the old car, suddenly become an independent thinker, able to take care of her master, starting herself and driving home, flying if necessary.*

CLIFF: That old car appears again in "Ghost of a Model T." It's the same car, runs by itself.

LAN: *Yes, you're right. I didn't connect the two.*

Well, Asa, the main character, explains the phenomenon this way: Stinky, the skunk, felt that the car was not happy, and fixed it so it would be happy. You have done this several times--allowing machines to become self-aware.

CLIFF: If you are going to write a story, you use everything you've got. If you can make robots and machines and aliens as characters, you are that much more ahead in the game. You can run into trouble with only humans as characters.

LAN: *Many of the alien characters that you use are depicted as physically ugly, yet within each of those aliens there is something human-like, almost as if you are trying to say that we are all alike in some way.*

CLIFF: When you deal with any kind of life, wherever, or whatever, its origins might have been--in the shallow seas of earth, or the shallow seas or lava pits of another planet--you should realize that you are dealing with a brotherhood. Life doesn't make sense in the Galaxy. Why should something that is self-aware and trying to establish its own values and its own rules rise in an environment where physical and chemical laws hold absolute sway? Life has sneered at those common laws, and in that way life has become a common brotherhood, whether it's a spider-man, an intelligent worm, or a human being, or whatever else it may be. This becomes more of a brotherhood when you add intelligence, because intelligence is the thing that has made human life dominant on this earth. Presumably intelligence will be the quality that will make any life-form dominant--maybe not in the way we're dominant, but in other ways--on other worlds.

When we find an intelligent being, we're not dealing with an outlander, we're not dealing with a stranger. We are dealing with something very much like ourselves. While it may be repulsive to us, we may be just as repulsive to it. If you strip off that repulsive outer covering of both of us, and try to get at what's inside, there will certainly be, I think, some common basis for understanding, or if not understanding, at least sympathy. Maybe the alien could come no nearer to understanding our concepts than we could to understanding its concepts, but we would have to act in faith.

Something I have thought about for years, something which I hope I would be able to write a story about--I probably will never be able to because I haven't figured it out yet, and I'm not too sure that I'm ever going to--is that historically evolution has never been at a loss to develop a survival value which will tend to make one species dominant. We have become dominant because we have the survival value of intelligence. We have made ourselves dominant by becoming a tool-using people. An alien on another planet may have made himself dominant by putting his intelligence to some other use; he may not know about tools, but he would know about something else which would make him dominant. If history holds true, in the next few million years evolution will come up with something else that will supersede intelligence as a survival factor, and all things, including ourselves--if we survive that long, if we don't die from some other causes--all intelligence will disappear before the dominance of this new thing which will be greater than intelligence. What I have been asking myself is: What could possibly be greater than intelligence? I can't think of it; I don't think you could think of it; I don't think there is anybody on earth today who could think of it. But I am just as sure as can be that it is going to happen.

Evolution is continually shuffling and discarding and picking up new survival factors.

MAIA: You touch on one point of that in "Operation Stinky", where Stinky can't use tools because he simply doesn't have the physical make-up to do so. He can, however, affect his environment; he obviously is intelligent. In CITY, the dogs are not tool-users, except indirectly with the robots, but are intelligent. We are genetically fit to use tools because we have the hands to grasp. It's entirely possible that other species would develop other means of shaping their environment.

CLIFF: Yes. The key thing behind them is intelligence.

LAN: WAY STATION, for which you won the Hugo Award, is a masterful work. You used many aliens, ugly in our terms, but we see the amount of knowledge and intelligence they have, which just boggles our minds.

CLIFF: I am happy you like WAY STATION. It's one of my three best novels. If I was going to write it today I would change it. I regret that I used one character who seemingly had no redeeming characteristics at all. After giving a fair shake to all the other aliens in the book, I didn't do that with him.

MAIA: Once in a while people are villains, whether they're humans or aliens.

CLIFF: That's true, but he was such a black-and-white character. If I were writing it now, I would try to make it clear that he was a villain and had done wrong in our eyes, and in the eyes of much of the rest of the rest of the galaxy, but he still had a moral valuation and ethic system which said that he was right. I did touch on this a bit when Enoch stands over him after killing him, and says he's sorry to have been the one to do it. Enoch contemplates along those lines, but doesn't express it as well as I would have liked.

LAN: Some friends have told me that MASTODONIA is a rewrite of "The Big Front Yard."

CLIFF: No, I don't think it is. It has some of the same types of characters in it, the dog, the village idiot, the man living alone, all of them situated in Willow Bend, but while the background is similar, I went about writing each in different terms. With "The Big Front Yard," there was a spaceship which had crashed, whose crew-members created a way to warp space and get to another planet, whereas in MASTODONIA, the alien from the crashed spacecraft built time-raods into the past. The main point in MASTODONIA is how someone might be able to make a profit out of time-travel. Travelling back on safaris to shoot dinosaurs is a good way.

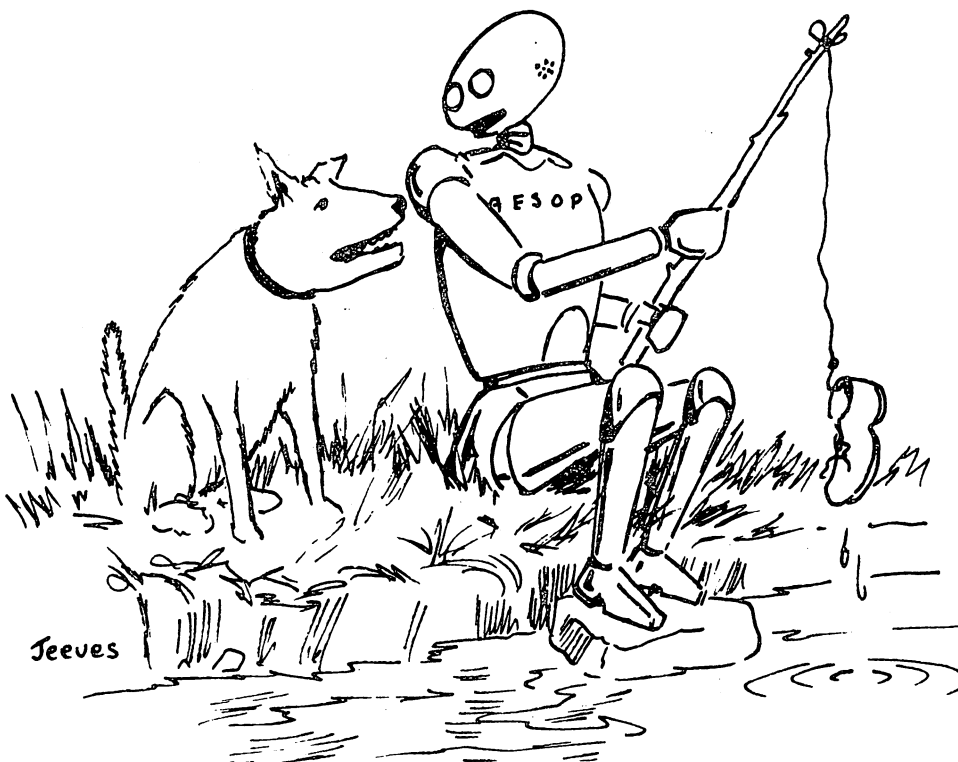
And if you did have time-travel, one of the big tourist attractions would be the crucifixion scene, mainly because we are a very faith-inspired and faith-inhibited people, a spiritually moved people. Some of us have no doubts, some of us have many doubts, as to whether the Christian story, as told, actually happened, and if it happened in the way it is said to have happened. I have thought about this and how it could be handled, and it occurred to me that the very powerful religious groups in the world would not want to have anyone go back to view the crucifixion. They would do this not from any particular lack of faith, but why go picking away at the story or myth which has evolved so splendidly over all these years? Why risk the possibility of picking it apart or casting some doubt on it? So they came in and tried to buy the block of time in which Christ was born and died so they would be in control, and no one could travel back to that era at all.

MAIA: Hear how loudly some people scream when a new movie is made of the life and crucifixion of Christ, because it doesn't match their specific beliefs.

CLIFF: Yes, that's exactly right.

MAIA: I can pretty well understand what you mean by faith-inspired, but what do you mean by faith-inhibited?

CLIFF: I have a theory that we might become a better race if we didn't cling so closely to this faith. It



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may seem strange to you, but I know of small towns where the hatred between Protestant and Catholic is so strong that a Protestant will not go to a Catholic merchant to buy anything, will not go to a Catholic doctor, and a Catholic will not go to a Protestant merchant or doctor.

MAIA: And neither will go to a Jew.

CLIFF: In some cases, yes. It is ridiculous that in the last quarter of the twentieth century we should hold these views, that there are still people like this. I think that's what I'm getting at when I say *faith-inhibited*.

MAIA: I can see two interpretations: one, that we are losing our ability to believe in things; or two, that our faith limits what we're going to think about, because it all has to fit within the confines of what we already believe.

CLIFF: I think that large numbers of people have simply boxed themselves into their faith with their interpretations of events.

MAIA: I agree.

LAN: I do too. I can see religion as being an excuse for not facing responsibility.

MAIA: The Devil-made-me-do-it idea.

CLIFF: Yes, or an excuse for exercising powers and prejudices which you wouldn't otherwise.

MAIA: Where the Catholic Church is strong in certain countries, like in Ireland, you still can't get birth-control pills, last I heard; or in Spain, there is the restriction about a young woman moving out of her parents' house; or in Italy, they can't have abortions. Whether you believe in it or not, whether it is right or wrong, the Church is deciding for all the people, be they members or not.

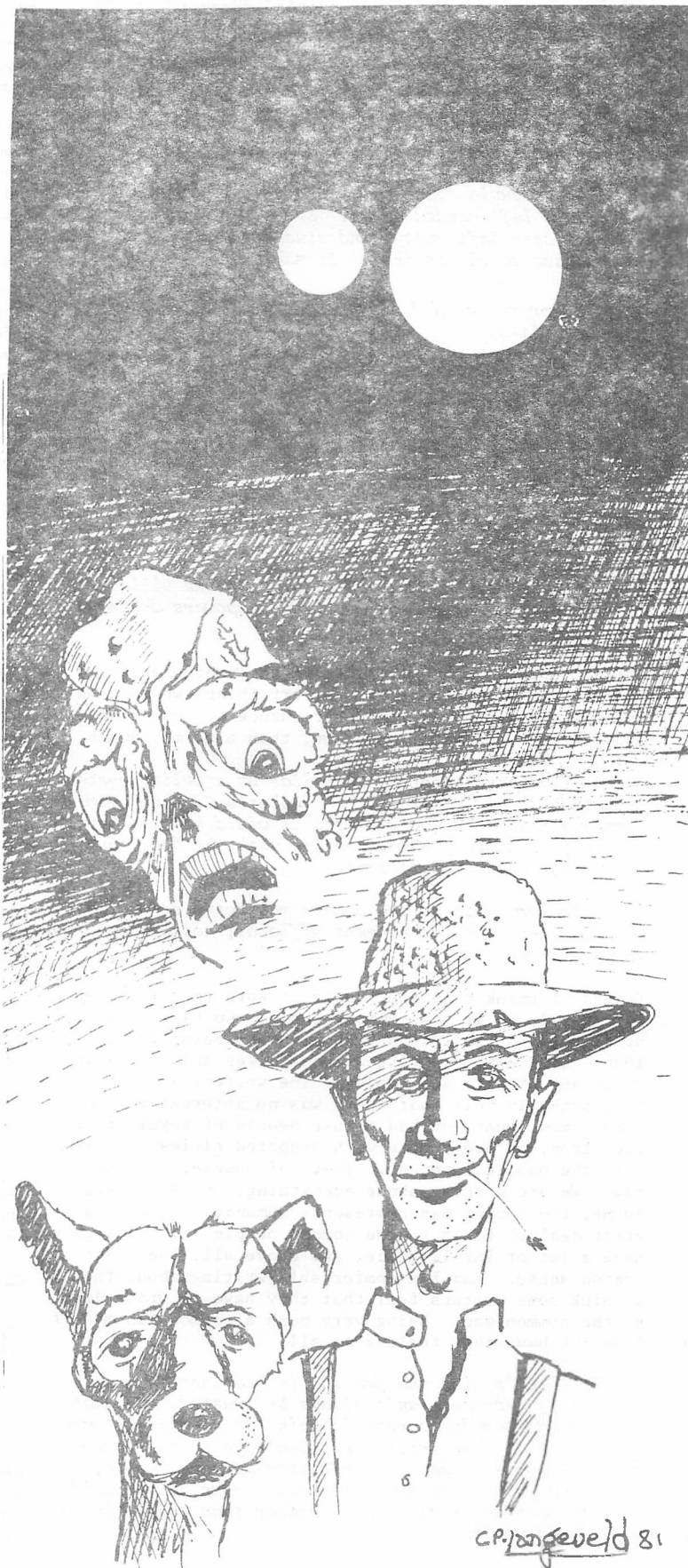
LAN: In many of your stories you use the village idiot. Do you have any specific reason why?

CLIFF: It's not that I've known, or have had close associations with, village idiots, although almost every village had its idiots--and Minneapolis probably has many, many idiots--but I have a theory that these so-called village idiots, which we try to make conform to society, send them to special schools to try to teach them something, are just as capable as we are, that they may have abilities we don't have which they could well use if we could only find out what they were. We are denying them development by interfering with their lives, and if we could use some kind of sympathetic managing, we could help them. We might begin to get a glimmer of what kind of mental process, what kind of psychological environment these people may have if we let them alone. We might learn a great deal from them. They may be just as capable in many ways, their ways, as we are in ours. They may have some better concepts than we do.

MAIA: We try to make them think the way normal people do. It's like making a musical prodigy major in physics; or making me be a steel-worker--that's not right for me, it's not right for them.

CLIFF: Here is an example. My son, who is today a chemical engineer, and a pretty good one, is left-handed. When he went to school, the teacher insisted that he learn to write right-handed until I went in and read out the law to her and the school officials. He continued to be left-handed, and it didn't harm him in the

from "Idiot's Crusade" drawn by
Colin Langeveld



least. In fact, since I had a left-handed boy in my own family, I began to notice that many of the smartest people I know are left-handed. Now this is an unscientific observation, but my observation is that left-handedness has never crippled anybody intellectually, or in any other way.

MAIA: They are making left-handed desks now.

LAN: In a couple of the classrooms I've taught in there were left-handed desks. Sometimes that's been the only desk left empty, and students who are right-handed have to sit in them. It makes them upset.

MAIA: Everyone should sit in one, just to find out what it's like.

CLIFF: Are you left-handed?

MAIA: No. Except for most things like writing, I can use either hand.

CLIFF: You're ambidextrous.

MAIA: I think it's more a lack of training for the left hand.

LAN: You usually hook up an alien with the village idiot. In many cases you give idiots powers which humans don't normally have.

CLIFF: I think that's because of an innate feeling that the idiot, because of the very things we've been discussing, might have a better chance to understand, and able to work with, an alien, than a normal human.

MAIA: The intelligent human builds up a belief system that this is not possible. In "Idiot's Crusade" Jim comments that if he were smart, it would have bothered him to find himself communicating with the dog. But as it is, he just accepts it.

LAN: You write about the common man being contacted by aliens--not the government official, not someone who has power.

CLIFF: I think that the reader accepts the character more easily if it's a common person. Go back a hundred years to the literature which was being written then. Stories were written about dukes and counts and kings and royalty and nobles. The writers at that time probably felt that there was no interest in the common man, that you had to use people of royal or noble blood, or use people with assorted titles, to capture the public interest. That, of course, is gone now. We are writing about everything, on all levels. To me, the common man represents humanity. I have a great deal of faith in the common people. I think they have a lot of intelligence, and above all, they have common sense. And I'm comfortable writing about them. I think some writers feel that they have to write down to the common man. Being very much a common man myself I do not have that feeling at all.

MAIA: There's also the feeling in the last few years that the government can't always be trusted, and what the common everyday person is going to do might be more in the rest of our interests. Don't go to the government officials to see how inflation affects people, you go to the people who are affected. So an alien would want to meet the real people, rather than anyone in any official capacity.

CLIFF: Yes, that's right.

LAN: And in setting your stories, you center them out in the rural areas. A lot of your novels and shorter lengths are set on earth, rather than out in the galaxy, and quite a few of them are placed in a little town called Millville, Wisconsin.

CLIFF: Millville is an actual place. It's a little town in southwestern Wisconsin where I was born and grew up. I write quite often about that countryside, and even when I am not writing about it directly, I still use scenes and environs from there. After all, it is the one place I remember best. I think that in the first twenty years of a man's life his environmental associations and philosophical concepts begin to sprout, and they stay with him for the rest of his life. What I am doing is expatriate writing, because I've made the Millville area a little more beautiful, more somber, somewhat different, and more weird, than it actually is. When I go back to visit, the hills aren't nearly as high, the ravines not nearly as deep; but there are still touches of it there. Occasionally when I go back to visit my brother I always drive through certain sections of the countryside. Many of the places I remember are gone.

I was born, not in the town of Millville, but in the township of Millville. I was born in my grandfather's home which stood on the ridge that overlooked the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. Those two rivers figure prominently in my life, in my writing. I write that way because I can feel in touch with that kind of land; I am treading on familiar ground. So Millville is an actual place.

Willow Bend is a mythical place, and I guess it's in Wisconsin--I'm not sure. Willow Bend and Millville are the two principle towns I use. There are others I use, Like Coon Valley, but not as often as I use these two.

MAIA: There are also some recurring characters, similar names, like Bowser and Towser for dogs, and Banker Stevens, which you used a couple of times.

CLIFF: I think that's just a memory-lapse on my part. Maybe Banker Stevens is a character name that fits so closely the person I wanted to trace that I used him once, forgotten I had, and used him again.

MAIA: The name brings such an image with it; you don't have to go into such great explanations about the kind of person he is.

CLIFF: Yes, to me the name Banker Stevens conjures up a clear-cut mental picture of the person I'm writing about.

MAIA: A man of about medium height, balding, very respectable, three-piece suit with a watch-chain across the vest...

CLIFF: ...and he'll sell you out for a nickel, ...

MAIA: ...and dispossess his own grandmother if she didn't make the payments.

LAN: You have also written a number of stories about the elderly, and not just in recent years.

CLIFF: No, it was in earlier years that I wrote about elderly people. I wrote these stories then, when I was a much younger man, because, strangely enough, I had a great respect for age at that time. As a matter of fact, I felt that being old wouldn't be too bad. I used a number of elderly characters; they may have been projections of elderly people I had known in my earlier



years, although I didn't mold my characters on any one particular person. I think it was a respect for old age, the theory that old age was not a bad thing, and in no way a crime. And at age 75, I find old age ain't so bad! It's a very good time of your life. The thing that really hurts is when you become ill; it hits old people the worst. That's one reason I'd like to see much more done in the health area.

LAN: You've written a few stories about aliens coming down and giving us, or having supplied to us, a cure-all.

CLIFF: Yes, "Shotgun Cure," but there was a price to that one. A reasonable price, don't you think?

LAN: I wasn't sure how you had meant that. I think you were saying, now let's relax a little bit, let's get used to the knowledge we have obtained, especially since we now don't have to worry about disease. And we don't have to extend our technology that much.

CLIFF: I was saying too that technology itself was a disease, and it was perhaps the greatest disease of all which will be cured. Well, not necessarily technology itself, but this rat-race, this high-pressured society we live in, which can be tied directly to technology.

MAIA: Technology often causes the symptoms of old age --heart failure, high blood pressure, and so on. It's the way we live because of what we have.

CLIFF: Yes, and so the old doctor, who has been a doctor for a long time, decides that the cure is better, in spite of the side-effects.

LAN: You are 75½ right now.

CLIFF: I don't count halves; I'm seventy-five until the day I turn 76.

LAN: Which will be on August third.

CLIFF: Yes. It's a good time to celebrate a birthday because there's not much else to celebrate in August.

LAN: And you retired four years ago?

CLIFF: I retired in 1976, yes, four years ago, around the first of September.

LAN: Have you regretted retiring?

CLIFF: No, not for a minute. What kept me from retiring earlier was the Social Security Law. Until I reached age 72, any earnings I got from my writings, over and above a certain amount, I would have to share with the government. I hassled with the social security people, but we could see no common ground, couldn't reach any sort of decision. They said it would be okay if I didn't spend more than so many hours a month working. I said, how are you going to know how many hours I work? I could keep track of the amount of time I write, but what about the time I pace the floor and think? Well they didn't know, so I thought that the only thing to do was to wait until I was 72; then there would be no hassle with it. I get my Social Security free and clear each year without having to make this accounting of the hours I write.

LAN: You mean that under age 72, if you work more than a certain number of hours after retiring, you have to pay taxes?

CLIFF: Yes, or if you make more than a certain amount of money, I think you are liable. But still, even now, I pay Social Security taxes, but I'm receiving full Social Security benefits.

MAIA: Anything to make life more complicated.

CLIFF: I do suppose that there is a very good reason for it, but I never delved deeply into it. I don't particularly care to.

LAN: In a number of your stories, you have dealt with items which become available to the public, either for a very nominal price, or even free. These have ramifications which you've explored. In RING AROUND THE SUN, for example, you toyed with the forever items: the Forever Razorblade, the Forever Lightbulb, the Forever Car. You brought out some of these again in THE VISITORS, like the free car.

CLIFF: It's not just a car; it's a life-form.

MAIA: In "Dusty Zebra" they get all these things which have an impact on the public.

CLIFF: Yes, but that one backfires, because all the dust they sent away came back.

This was a rather horrifying look at industrial philosophy. I never saw it myself, but I understand that in the board room of a certain corporation in this town there at one time hung a sign—it may still hang there—which said: *Obsolescence is the life-blood of American industry.* And my theory is that when you buy a car, that car is built to last only so many years, maybe seven, or 60,000 miles. And it is built to go haywire at either one of these points, or maybe before.

MAIA: The television goes awry the day the warranty runs out.

CLIFF: Exactly. Everything else is the same way; there is a life-span built into it. If you bought this tape-recorder and it worked perfectly forever, you'd never have to buy another tape-recorder. By the time everybody who wanted one bought a tape-recorder, the company would then go out of business. But isn't that a horrible situation to have? where goods are made available, but limited by the quality of their production? That's what I was talking about.

LAN: I think you carefully examined the effects of such products, and some of them were not pleasant.

CLIFF: No, some of them are not pleasant. Still, it doesn't negate the obscenity of obsolescence as an industrial philosophy.

MAIA: There's also technological obsolescence. I would buy a new tape recorder if I could find one about half the size of the one we're using to record this interview—it would be easier to carry around--if it would give the same quality recording. Or people who go from a black-and-white TV to a color set.

CLIFF: I have a panasonic which is a little more than half the size of yours, and I've had it for years.

LAN: When you paid for it, it probably cost a great deal of money. If you bought it now, you would probably pay half that amount, or less. I bought a calculator seven years ago for a hundred dollars; they're available now for \$12.98--a little bit smaller and thinner, and with the same functions, some even have more, because of the advances in technology.

I just finished reading "Mr. Meek Plays Polo." In that story was a reference to him doing something among the moons of Jupiter. Was that part of a series?

CLIFF: It was intended as a series. I was going to carry Mr. Meek on forever and ever because it was a quick, easy way to make a buck, and PLANET STORIES would but anything if it had a lot of good adventure. But there were only two stories; I got interested in something else and let the series fall by the wayside.

LAN: As far as I can determine, there are only two people with whom you have collaborated: Carl Jacobi, and, I guess it's your son, Richard Simak.

CLIFF: Yes, only two collaborations: with Carl, and my son Richard.

LAN: Is there a reason? Do you prefer working alone?

CLIFF: I do like working by myself. Jerry Pournelle and Larry Niven work well together; their collaboration works. I would suppose there are some heated discussions occasionally, but I'm not sure about that. Carl Jacobi and I were good friends, and our friendship damn near ended by the time our story was finished. We disagreed on every little thing. I wanted the man to take sleeping pills, and Carl insisted they be called sleeping powders. It did come out quite well, but more of a Jacobi story than a Simak story. By far it *sounds* more like Jacobi than Simak. We didn't lose our friendship, but we went through some pretty heated battles, and I thought we came through them all right.

On the second collaboration I had the basic idea for a story, but I couldn't figure out the chemistry. When my son came home for Christmas, we got ourselves a jug, sat down in front of the fireplace down in the basement, and we spent about three hours together--he, with his calculator and my notes, figured out the sequence of chemical changes that would have had to take place to make the concept possible. I wrote the story in first draft and sent it to him, figuring that he would only rewrite, or change, the areas where I had used his explanations. He did more than that. He rewrote his sections, clarified them and made them simpler, and he rewrote some sections which, as a matter of fact, were a good deal better than the way I had written them. Richard sent it back to me. I did a little bit more polishing up, and sent it back to him. We never had a minute's trouble. Unfortunately he's too busy now for further collaboration, but he's a good man to collaborate with.

MAIA: Has he done any writing on his own?

CLIFF: No, he hasn't. He's involved in research and development work, heading up one project or another all the time. He has to write up endless reports. I don't think he has any time to do any creative writing; I don't think he has any particular yen to write. He's one of those people who can look at an object and see the atoms and molecules, how it's put together, the structure. He analyzes it in mathematical terms; it's second nature to him.

Richard is very happy doing what he's doing. But whatever he does, he tries to do it right. The story did turn out quite successfully, I thought.

LAN: So did I, and so did Judy-Lynn del Rey, who published it.

CLIFF: It was Richard who thought of the ending, the sandbox. I thought it was a beautiful touch.

LAN: There is another theme which runs through several of your stories. I first noticed it in *TIME IS THE SIMPLEST THING*; you state right in the beginning that space is not meant for man. "Founding Father" is written around that same idea.

CLIFF: Yes. "Founding Father" shows the almost impossibility of sending out a colonization force. I simply adopted a particular point of view for those stories; you wouldn't want to use that point of view if you wanted to write about man sending out a lot of ships to colonize the planets in other stellar systems. So it's

a narrative device, rather than any clear-cut conviction on my part that space is not meant for man, or man is not meant for space. I'm not sure that man is not meant for space. We can't say that because we are certainly going out into space.

LAN: I see. The result which appears in *TIME IS THE SIMPLEST THING*, the ultimate method of getting there, showed the direction in which the Human Race had to go; that is, the use of psionic powers to explore other worlds and stellar systems. You also brought in the fear non-psionic people had of those that did have such powers, and how they were treated as witches and warlocks were in our history as a race.

CLIFF: This is in the same category as the village idiot: people have some powers we don't understand. We should try to understand them; they may have a great deal they can contribute to us.

MAIA: I've noticed that in your stories there is always a catch. Like in "Green Thumb," Joe develops a rapport with the plant, but then feels totally uncomfortable eating vegetables. And in "Lulu," the computer over-reacting to the crew who were doing absurd things.

CLIFF: I liked "Lulu;" that was one of my favorites.

LAN: Again, that was the application of psychology as a weapon.

MAIA: And also the exploration of the computer maybe really having a personality, or even a soul, and you have to reach that before you can deal with it.

LAN: Are you planning anything now?

CLIFF: I'm planning on writing as long as the brain holds out and the fingers can type.

LAN: Do you have anything in particular that you are working on?

CLIFF: By the time this sees print, I should have a novel out through del Rey Books called *PROJECT POPE*. Right now I have one more chapter to write in an adventure novel, and plotlines going on three other novels, but not getting too far along with any of them; I've been sandwiching them in among other projects. Once I complete a few things, I can sit down and consciously plot those stories. It should go faster then.

MAIA: It sounds as though you retired so that you can get more work done.

CLIFF: I am enjoying myself. I don't know what would happen to me if I couldn't write. I'd probably go into withdrawal--it's just as addictive as alcohol. If I go away for a few days, I feel myself itching to get back to it.

MAIA: I remember a discussion on a panel where writers were trying to come up with an answer to the question, Why do you write? They came up with all these deep psychological reasons until David Gerrold got up and said, "Nonsense! Because it's easier than non writing!"

CLIFF: Yes, I understand!

LAN: One of my favorite books of yours is *COSMIC ENGINEERS*.

CLIFF: You like that?



WHAT'S SO GREAT
ABOUT THIS
BACK TO NATURE
KICK?

LAN: Yes.

CLIFF: I've never liked it very well, but I've come across a lot of people who do seem to like it. It was badly written to start with. If I had anywhere near the skill then as I have today, it would have been a much better story. I would have avoided some of the excesses, and some of the grand and eloquent parts of it. You see, the secret of good writing is understatement and low key—carry off the scenes in low key, rather than screaming, and they are far more effective. And that one I think had a lot of screaming in it. But I'm glad you liked it.

LAN: I mentioned that to you when I first met you four years ago at CONCLAVE I, the convention in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and you said that Campbell had approached you and asked you to write something.

CLIFF: I believe he did at that; Campbell was always a good one for telling writers what to do and guide them in the right direction. If Campbell had been interested in that type of story at the time, then I would say that he urged me to write it. You see, I was still a relatively new writer at the time, and I wanted to build up a track-record, so I would have jumped at the chance to write something Campbell would buy.

MAIA: He didn't ask you, just made a suggestion.

CLIFF: It wasn't so much of a thrill, then, because by that time I had become fairly professional, but professionalism doesn't always get you the job, or the story sold.

LAN: Do you plan to write more short stories?

CLIFF: I don't know if I will be writing many short stories. I ache to write short stories, because I love to write them—you can polish them up like little gems. But you have to write an awful lot of short stories to make what you could from a single novel. If I have the time, I may write a few. I enjoy writing them.

I think this is what's happening in the SF magazines: writers write short stories so they can break into the field, get a track-record, then go on to novels where the money is.

LAN: You are one of the select few who has been writing for as long as you have.

CLIFF: But, you see, I never had enough sense to quit! I got caught up in it, hooked on it. I've expected the quality of my work to fall off, and I'd find myself writing poorer stories. At one time there wouldn't have been anyone to say so; today there are critics who might tell me. It may be happening now. I don't think

it is, but that is one of the horrors of my life, that as I advance in age the work I do is not quite as good. It may happen. Then I don't know what I'd do—hunker down or keep writing for myself alone. Or I would stop and say, *This is it!* I simply do not know what the answer would be; when the time comes, if ever, I'll answer then.

LAN: I enjoyed your last novel, *THE VISITORS*. I was left wanting more.

CLIFF: So were some other people. I got some criticism on the book, several letters demanding a sequel. I don't think I'm going to write a sequel. People demanded a sequel to Larry Niven's *RINGWORLD*, and he wrote one, which was probably better than the original. I haven't read *BEYOND THE BLUE EVENT-HORIZON*, Fred Pohl's sequel to *GATEWAY*, but I understand that it is better than the first one. These are exceptions. Usually the sequel is not as good as the original story.

MAIA: That is, unless the original story was written early in the author's career, and he or she had learned something about writing since then.

CLIFF: I shy away from sequels just on principle. Once I've written a story, I've finished it. I want to go on to something new; I have no hankering to go back and explore it further. If I want to explore some ideas further, I pump them into a new story.

LAN: Do you still think that *CITY* is your best work?

CLIFF: Many people tell me that *CITY* is my best work, and it may well be. I thought for some time that it wasn't, that I had done better writing since then. But I'm glad that I wrote it, because that was the book which gave me the reputation that I was more than an ordinary pulp-fiction writer. I probably would not be where I am today if it were not for *CITY!*

LAN: You won the International Fantasy Award in 1953 for it.

CLIFF: I feel honored to be mentioned with the other authors who have won it: Tolkien, Sturgeon, Ley, and deCamp. I'm proud to have won it, and I'm usually above pride.

LAN: You have won other awards: in 1959, the Hugo Award for the short story "The Big Front Yard;" in 1964 the Hugo Award for the novel *WAY STATION*; in 1971 you were the Pro Guest of Honor for the World Science Fiction Convention in Boston, NOREASCON I; you will be the Pro GoH at DENVNITION II in 1981; in 1977, you were awarded the Nebula Grand Master. That is an impressive track-record!

CLIFF: It is a good track-record; I'm awfully glad I have it. I am the humblest man on earth, and part of the ordinary crowd, but I do feel a great deal of satisfaction in accomplishing those things. It's nice to know that someone has recognized what you've done, and given you some formal recognition.

LAN: I wish your luck with the forthcoming novel, *PROJECT POPE*, due out in 1981, and everything else you do. And thanks for the interview.

First New World

by Herb Summerlin

Clifford D. Simak's first public dealings with a new world was not with an alien one. It was our own home, Earth, though changed to such a degree that I think it can be considered a *new* world. I am speaking of *new* in the sense of the unfamiliar. As for age, it was a very old world indeed.

"*The World of the Red Sun*" first appeared in the December, 1931, issue of *WONDER STORIES*. It was Clifford's first published story and I suppose it was his first sale as well. For fifty years his writing has continued to sell, be published, and to grow. His popularity has survived every phase thrown against the science fiction field, from the *Golden Age* to the *New Wave*. The height to which his works' popularity has reached is equalled only by the artistic growth they have achieved.

Of course we must remember that when "*The World of the Red Sun*" first appeared the genre of science fiction was quite a different thing than it is today. It was very far from being respectable; in some small ways this was just, but I don't think it was fair on the whole. Certainly sf equalled, if not surpassed, the other forms of popular fiction of the day, at least as far as its writers' abilities were concerned. It has certainly outlived a great number of them.

Some of the early sf bore the heavy marks of the prejudices of the day. Of course these prejudices were just as present in the other forms of popular reading of that time. Not long after "*The World of the Red Sun*" appeared the world was launched into war, and prejudices played a major part in that conflict. "*The World of the Red Sun*" however didn't contain any large degree of these social misconceptions. It was certainly more just than, say, the *Ulm* stories of Capt. S. P. Meek, as well as many others. In fact, Clifford D. Simak was one of the first writers of SF to begin tearing down the stock characters of the past. He was among the beginning group of writers who first questioned, and then dismissed, the acceptance of traditional prejudices. Soon names like Heinlein, Asimov, and Pohl would appear among the ranks of these new kinds of writers.

"*The World of the Red Sun*" had one important thing in common with a lot of the sf in the early thirties. It had the magic and the wonder of imagination. Through the medium of the magazine, that magic reached out and touched a diverse people. A skinny Brooklyn youth read that story very carefully so it might be returned to the magazine rack of his father's candy store. It stayed and stirred in the boy's mind and heart. It is still there, fifty years later. That story, and many more like it, formed the boy's basis in science fiction, and is partially responsible for his name, Isaac Asimov, being the force in the field that it is today.

In "*The World of the Red Sun*" we are in the city of Denver, or at least what used to be Denver. When Cliff's first published heroes, Harl Swanson and Bill Kressman, reach the future city, they find they have over-shot their targetted time by many thousands of years. There isn't anything familiar left in the city. The decaying remains of once-great buildings are the only sign that man's hand has touched this world, which is dominated in its old age by Sol; the light of the once-familiar sun is now deep and bloody.

Clifford D. Simak built his time machine, in this tale, in a twin-engine airplane. It's an idea which could reduce a number of dangers of time-travel, at least in the short time-jump that Harl and Bill thought they were taking.

The greatest danger that these early Simakian heroes face is the result of scientists of a not-so-distant future. It is called Golan-Kirt, and it is a huge brain-creature which was once human. Golan-Kirt has ruled the survivors of the human race for many centuries through his ability to use illusions, summoned from their own minds, against them. Golan-Kirt attempts to use these powers, as well as his control over the human population, to destroy Harl and Bill. However, it isn't they who are destroyed; it is Golan-Kirt who is finally killed by Bill and Harl.

To me, the most important, and most powerful, part of this first Simak tale is the ending: it is sad and deeply brooding. They bid farewell to those whom they've freed, and board their flying timecraft. They take to the sky and make the jump through time, intending to return to their own time. When they come out of the shift, they find that they've only gone that much farther into the future. The only thing Bill and Harl find is an ancient statue erected in their honor for the destruction of Golan-Kirt. It seems that you can go forever onward, but you can't go back in time. It just might be so.

Many of Cliff's ideas, used so effectively in his first story, reached far beyond 1931. Certainly not the least of these was the villain Golan-Kirt. Bill and Harl didn't battle against an enemy armed with Death-ray and H-bomb; Golan-Kirt struck against his enemies, as well as his victims, with the power of his mind. He also preyed upon the weakness of human emotions and fears. Nor was Golan-Kirt destroyed by some ancient wonder brought from the past; he was defeated by a weapon carried by every one of us who chooses to use it: our human wits.

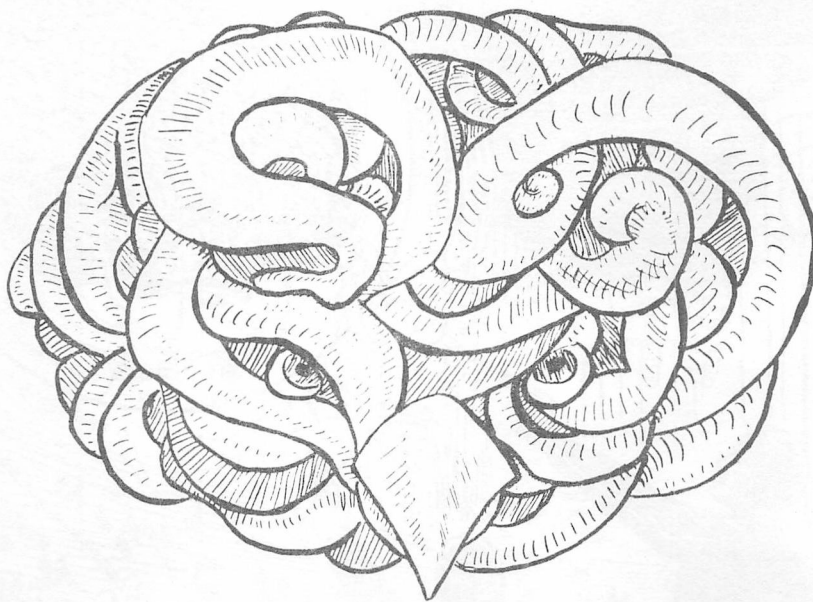
Thirty-four years later, in a 1965 issue of *GALAXY*, Frank Herbert's "*Do I Sleep or Wake*" appeared. It was later released in a book as *DESTINATION: VOID*. In that tale of deep-space travel and adventure, we are introduced to a surgically altered human brain. The brain operates as a super-advanced ship-board computer. Just as in "*The World of the Red Sun*", the mind and its powers are recognized as a great source of energy and ability. Also in this Frank Herbert novel, the surgical tampering proves to be further-reaching than is first suspected or intended.

If one chooses to believe that "*The World of the Red Sun*" did not influence tales like *DESTINATION: VOID* and others that were to follow, it doesn't dismiss the fact that Clifford Simak dealt with them effectively more than thirty years earlier.


Science fiction, like most forms of literature, is built upon that which precedes it. Those who have written and read science fiction in the last fifty years owe much to Clifford Simak and his "*The World of the Red Sun*." Simak's contributions to this field, from his first tale to his most recent works like *THE VISITORS*, have enriched and strengthened the genre. The writers and readers of science fiction in the next fifty years will owe Simak a great deal as well. It is my greatest hope to return to this typewriter at the end of the next fifty years, anti-grav chair and all, to write once again of this man, his first story and his latest accomplishments in this field. If there is no Centennial tribute publication planned for Clifford D. Simak, I shall see to it--personally.

((There now follows a facsimile printing of the story "The World of the Red Sun" as it appeared in the December, 1931, issue of *WONDER STORIES*. This was the suggestion of Donald Franson, and it goes well with Herb Summerlin's article.))

The World of The **RED SUN**

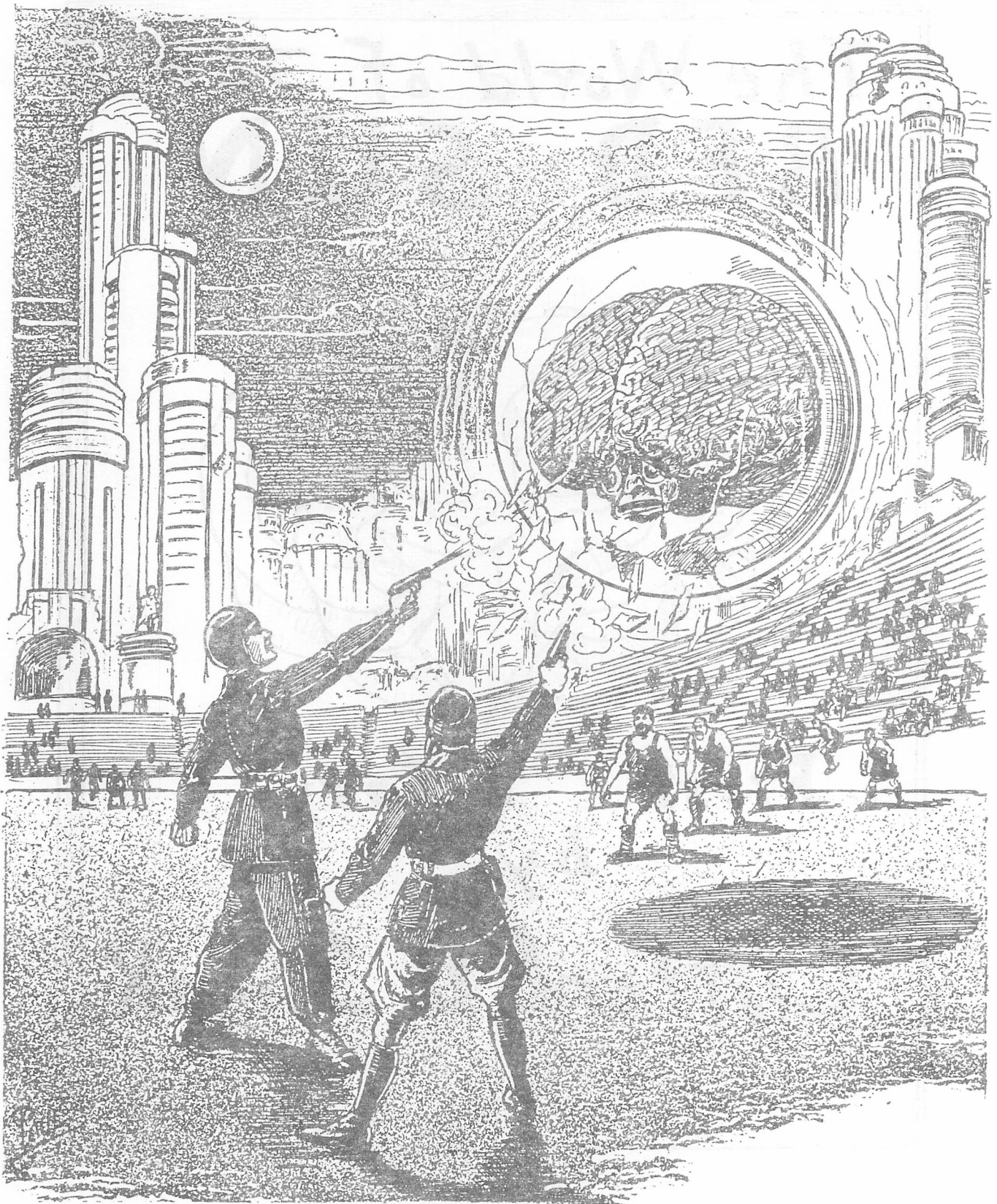


First Story
by
Clifford D. Simak

Herbert
Summerlin 

The World of the Red Sun

BY CLIFFORD D. SIMAK



(Illustration by Paul)

The revolvers of the time-travelers came up almost simultaneously, the sights lined on the brain. The guns roared rapidly, spitting fire.

THE WORLD OF THE RED SUN

READY, Bill?" asked Harl Swanson.

Bill Kressman nodded.

"Then kiss 1935 good-bye!" cried the giant Swede, and swung over the lever.

The machine quivered violently, then hung motionless in pitch blackness. In the snap of a finger the bright sunlight was blotted out and a total darkness, a darkness painted with the devil's brush, rushed in upon the two men.

Electric lights glowed above the instrument boards, but their illumination was feeble against the utter blackness which crowded in upon the quartz windows of the machine.

The sudden change astounded Bill. He had been prepared for something, for some sort of change, but nothing like this. He half started out of his seat, then settled back.

Harl observed him and grinned.

"Scared," he jested.

"Hell, no," said Bill.

"You're traveling in time, my lad," said Harl. "You aren't in space any more. You are in a time stream. Space is curved about you. Can't travel in time when you're still in space, for space binds time to a measured pace, only so fast, no faster. Curve space about you, though, and you can travel in time. And when you're out of space there's absolutely no light, therefore, utter darkness. Likewise no gravity, nor any of the universal phenomena."

Bill nodded. They had worked it all out before, many, many times. Double wall construction of a strength to withstand the vacuum into which the flier would be plunged at the move of the lever which would snatch it out of space into the time stream. An insulation to guard against the absolute zero that would rule where there could be no heat. Gravity grids at their feet so that they would still be able to orient themselves when flung into that space where there was no gravity. An elaborate heating system to keep the motors warm, to prevent the freezing of gasoline, oil and water. Powerful atmosphere generators to supply air to the passengers and the motors.

It had represented years of work, ten years of it, and a wealth that mounted into seven figures. Time after time they had blundered, again and again they had failed. The discoveries they had made would

have rocked the world, would have revolutionized industry, but they had breathed no word of it. They had thought of only one thing, time travel.

To travel into the future, to delve into the past, to conquer time, to this the two young scientists had dedicated all their labors, and at last success lay beneath their hands.

It was in 1933 they had at last achieved their goal.

The intervening months were spent in experiments and the building of the combination flier-time machine.

Miniature fliers were launched, with the miniature time machines set automatically. They had buzzed about the laboratory, to suddenly disappear. Perhaps at this very instant they were whirling madly through unguessed ages.

They managed to construct a small time machine, set to travel a month into the future. In a month's time, almost to the second, it had materialized on the laboratory floor where it had dropped at the end of its flight through time. That settled it! The feasibility of time travel was proved beyond all doubt.

Now Harl Swanson and Bill Kressman were out in the time stream. There had been a gasp of amazement from the crowd, on the street, which had seen the giant tri-motored plane suddenly disappear into thin air.

Harl crouched over the instrument board. His straining ears could distinguish the wheezy mutterings of the three motors as, despite the elaborate precautions taken to safeguard them, the inexorable fingers of absolute zero clutched at their throbbing metal.

This was a dangerous way, but the only safe way. Had they remained on the surface to plunge into the time stream they might have halted to find themselves and their machine buried by shifting earth; they might have

found a great building over them, they might have found a canal covering them. Here in the air they were safe from all that might occur beneath them in the passing centuries through which they sped at an almost unbelievable pace. They were being fairly hurled through time.

Furthermore, the great machine would serve as a means of travel in that future day when they would roll out of the time stream back into space again.



CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

***D**ESPITE our many failings, we of the twentieth century have still many virtues that spell the possibility for further progress in our civilization. Our race is still young enough, strong enough, and faced with difficulties enough to keep us alert in mind and body. We are a versatile race, we are quick to meet new situations; we have not yet been spoiled by luxury nor enslaved by superstition.*

But races are like individuals—they grow, mature, decay, and die. And it is quite possible that as our civilization progresses, as poverty, war, and disease are wiped out, and we have lost the habit of fighting against difficulties, that decay will set in. We will become an old and senile race; intolerant of new things, given to superstition, weary of life and almost indifferent. If that is true the final end of all humanity will follow—for nature is cruel and callous and only awaits the hour of our weakness to overthrow us.

Mr. Simak has given us here an absorbing picture of the world of the future and what may happen when the fresh young world of the 20th century meets the decaying humanity of many millenniums in the future.

Perhaps it might serve as a means of escape, for there was no fore-knowledge to tell them what they might expect a few thousand years in the future.

The motors wheezed more and more. They were operating on a closed throttle. At full speed they might dash the propellers to bits.

However, they must be warmed up. Otherwise they would simply die. It would be stark tragedy to roll out into space with three dead engines. It would mean a crash which neither of them could hope to survive.

"Give her the gun, Bill," said Harl in a tense voice.

Bill pushed the accelerator slowly. The motors protested, sputtered, and then burst into a roar. Here, in the machine, because of the artificial air, sound could be heard. Out in the time stream there could be no sound.

Harl listened anxiously, hoping fiercely that the propellers would stand.

Bill cut the acceleration and the motors, once more barely turning over, ran more smoothly.

Harl glanced at his wrist watch. Despite the fact they were in time, where actual time could not be measured by clocks, the little watch still ticked off the time-space seconds and minutes.

They had been out eight minutes. Seven minutes more and they must roll out of time into space.

Fifteen minutes was all that the tortured motors could stand of this intense cold and vacuum.

HE GLANCED at the time dial. It read 2816. They had traveled 2816 years into the future. They should be well over 5000 when the fifteen minutes were at an end.

Bill touched his arm.

"You're sure we're still over Denver?"

Harl chuckled.

"If we aren't, we may find ourselves billions of miles out in space. It's a chance we have to take. According to all our experiments we should be in exactly the same position we were when we snapped into the time stream. We are occupying a hole in space. It should remain the same."

Their lungs began to ache. Either the atmosphere generators were failing or the air leakage out into the vacuum was greater than they had expected. Undeniably the air was becoming thinner. The motors still ran steadily, however. It must be a leakage from the cabin of the ship.

"How long?" bellowed Bill.

Harl glanced at his watch.

"Twelve minutes," he reported.

The time dial read 4224.

"Three minutes," replied Bill, "I guess we can stand it. The motors are running all right. It's getting colder, though, and the air's pretty thin."

"Leakage," said Harl gruffly.

The minutes dragged.

Bill tried to think. Here they hung, hypothetically, over the city of Denver. Less than a quarter of an hour ago, they were in the year 1935, now they were passing over years at a lightning-like speed—a speed of over 350 years in each space-minute. They must now be in about the year 6450.

He glanced at his hands. They were blue. It was

intensely cold in the cabin. Their heat was leaking—leaking swiftly. It was hard to breathe. The air was rare—too rare for safety. Suppose they became unconscious. Then they would freeze—would drive endlessly through time. Frozen corpses, riding through the æons. The earth beneath them would dissolve in space. New worlds might form, new galaxies be born as they whirled on in the time stream. The time needle would reach the pin, bend back upon itself and slip past the pin, to slam against the side of the dial, where it would still struggle to record the flight of the years.

He chafed his hands and glanced at the time dial. It read 5516.

"A quarter of a minute," snapped Harl, his teeth chattering, his right hand on the lever, his wrist watch held in front of him.

Bill placed his hands on the wheel.

"All right!" shouted Harl.

He jerked the lever.

They hung in the sky.

Harl uttered a cry of astonishment.

It was twilight. Beneath them were the ruins of a vast city. To the east lapped a sea, stretching to a murky horizon. The sea coast was a desert of heaped sand.

The motors, warming to their task, bellowed a mighty challenge.

"Where are we?" cried Harl.

Bill shook his head.

"It's not Denver," said Harl.

"Doesn't look much like it," agreed Bill, his teeth still chattering.

He circled, warming the motors.

There was no sign of humanity below them.

The motors blasted a throaty defiance to the desert sands and under Bill's hand, the machine came down in a long swoop, headed for a level stretch of sand near one of the largest of the white stone ruins.

It hit the ground, bounced high in a cloud of sand, struck and bounced again, then rolled to a stop.

Bill cut the motors.

"We're here," he said.

Harl stretched his legs wearily.

Bill glanced at the time dial. It read 5626.

"This is the year 7561," he said slowly, thoughtfully.

"Got your gun?" asked Harl.

Bill's hand went to his side, felt the reassuring touch of the .45 in its holster.

"I have it," he said.

"All right, let's get out."

Harl opened the door and they stepped out. The sand glittered under their boots.

Harl turned the key in the door lock and locked the ring to his belt.

"Wouldn't do to lose the keys," he said.

A chill wind was blowing over the desert, moaning among the ruins, carrying with it a freight of fine, hard granules. Even in their heavy clothing, the time explorers shivered.

Harl grasped Bill by the arm, pointing to the east.

There hung a huge dull red ball.

Bill's jaw fell.

"The sun," he said.

"Yes, the sun," said Harl.

They stared at one another in the half-light.

"Then this isn't the year 7561," stammered Bill.

"No, more likely the year 750,000, perhaps even more than that."

"The time dial was wrong then."

"It was wrong. Badly wrong. We were traveling through time a thousand times faster than we thought."

THEY were silent, studying the landscape about them. They saw only ruins which towered hundreds of feet above the sands. They were ruins of noble proportions, many of them still bearing the hint of a marvelous architecture of which the twentieth century would have been incapable. The stone was pure white, gleaming beautifully in the twilight which the feeble rays of the great brick red sun could not expel.

"The time dial," said Bill, thoughtfully, "was registering thousands of years instead of years."

Harl nodded cheerlessly.

"Maybe," he said. "For all we know it may have been registering tens of thousands of years."

A creature, somewhat like a dog, dull gray in color, with tail hanging low, was silhouetted for a moment on a sand dune and then disappeared.

"These are the ruins of Denver," said Harl. "That sea we saw must cover the whole of eastern North America. Probably only the Rocky Mountains remain unsubmerged and they are a desert. Yes, we must have covered at least 750,000 years, perhaps seven million."

"What about the human race? Do you think there are any people left?" asked Bill.

"Possibly. Man is a hardy animal. It takes a lot to kill him and he could adapt himself to almost any kind of environment. This change, you must remember, came slowly."

Bill turned about and his cry rang in Harl's ear. Harl whirled.

Running toward them, leaping over the sands, came a motley horde of men. They were dressed in furs and they carried no weapons, but they charged down upon the two as if to attack.

Harl yanked his .45 from its holster. His great hand closed around the weapon and his finger found the trigger. It gave him a sense of power, this burly six-shooter.

The men, their furs flying behind them, were only a hundred yards away. Now they yelled, blood-curdling, vicious whoops which left no doubt that they were enemies.

No weapons. Harl grinned. They'd give 'em hell and plenty of it. There were about fifty in the mob. Big odds, but not too great.

"We might as well let them have it," he said to Bill. The two guns roared. There was disorder in the running ranks, but the mob still forged ahead, leaving two of its members prone on the ground. Again the .45's barked, spurting a stream of fire.

Men staggered, screaming, to collapse. The rest hurdled them, raced on. It seemed nothing could stop them. They were less than fifty feet away.

The guns were empty. Swiftly the two plucked cartridges from their belts and reloaded.

Before they could fire the mob was on top of them. Bill thrust his gun into the face of a running foeman and fired. He had to sidestep quickly to prevent the fellow tumbling on top of him. A knotted fist connected with his head and he slipped to his knees. From that position he drilled two more of the milling enemies before they piled on top of him.

Through the turmoil he heard the roar of Harl's gun.

He felt the grip of many hands, felt bodies pressing close about him. He fought blindly and desperately.

He fought with hands, with feet, with suddenly bared teeth. He felt bodies wilt under his blows, felt blood upon his hands. The sand, kicked up by many feet, got into his nostrils and eyes, half strangling, half blinding him.

Only a few feet away Harl fought, fought in the same manner as his companion. With their weapons knocked from their hands they resorted to the tactics of their ancient forebears.

It seemed minutes that they battled with their attackers, but it could not have been more than seconds before the sheer weight of numbers subdued them, wound thongs tightly about their hands and feet and left them, trussed like two fowls ready for the grid.

"Hurt, Bill?" called Harl.

"No," replied Bill. "Just mussed up a bit."

"Me, too," said Harl.

They lay on their backs and stared up at the sky. Their captors moved away and massed about the plane.

A loud banging came to the ears of the two. Evidently the others were trying to force an entrance into the machine.

"Let them bang," said Harl. "They can't break anything."

"Except a propeller," replied Bill.

After more banging, the men returned and untying the bonds on the feet of the captives, hoisted them up.

For the first time they had an opportunity to study their captors. They were tall men, well proportioned, clean of limb, with the stamp of well-being about them. Aside from their figures, however, they held a distinctly barbarous appearance. Their hair was roughly trimmed, as were their beards. They walked with a slouch and their feet shuffled in the sand with the gait of one who holds a purposeless existence. They were dressed in well-tanned furs, none too clean. They bore no arms and their eyes were the eyes of furtive beings, shifty, restless, as are the eyes of hunted beasts, always on the lookout for danger.

"March," said one of them, a large fellow with a protruding front tooth. The single word was English, with the pronunciation slightly different than it would have been in the twentieth century, but good, pure English.

They marched, flanked on either side by their captors. The march led back over the same route as the future-men had come. They passed the dead, but no attention was paid them, their comrades passing the sprawled figures with merely a glance. Life apparently was cheap in this place.

WONDER STORIES

CHAPTER II

Orders of Golan-Kirt

THEY passed between monstrous ruins. The men talked among themselves, but, although the tongue was English, it was so intermixed with unfamiliar words and spoken with such an accent that the two could understand very little of it.

They reached what appeared to be a street. It led between rows of ruins and now other humans appeared, among them women and children. All stared at the captives and jabbered excitedly.

"Where are you taking us?" Bill asked a man who walked by his side.

The man ran his fingers through his beard and spat in the sand.

"To the arena," he said slowly that the twentieth century man might understand the words.

"What for?" Bill also spoke slowly and concisely.

"The games," said the man, shortly, as if displeased at being questioned.

"What are the games?" asked Harl.

"You'll find out soon enough. They are held at high sun today," growled the other. The reply brought a burst of brutal laughter from the rest.

"They will find out when they face the minions of Golan-Kirt," chortled a voice.

"The minions of Golan-Kirt!" exclaimed Harl.

"Hold your tongue," snarled the man with the protruding tooth, "or we will tear it from your mouth."

The two time-travelers asked no more questions.

They plodded on. Although the sand beneath their feet was packed, it was heavy going and their legs ached. Fortunately the future-men did not hustle their pace, seeming to be content to take their time.

A good sized crowd of children had gathered and accompanied the procession, staring at the twentieth century men, shrieking shrill gibberish at them. A few of them, crowding too close or yelling too loudly, gained the displeasure of the guards and were slapped to one side.

For fifteen minutes they toiled up a sandy slope. Now they gained the top and in a depression below them they saw the arena. It was a great building, open to the air, which had apparently escaped the general destruction visited upon the rest of the city. Here and there repairs had been made, evident by the decidedly inferior type of workmanship.

The building was circular in shape, and about a half-mile in diameter. It was built of a pure white stone, like the rest of the ruined city.

The two twentieth century men gasped at its size.

They had little time, however, to gaze upon the building, for their captors urged them on. They walked slowly down the slope and, directed by the future-men, made their way through one of the great arching gateways and into the arena proper.

On all sides rose tier upon tier of seats, designed to hold thousands of spectators. On the opposite side of the arena was a series of steel cages, set under the seats.

The future-men urged them forward.

"They're going to lock us up, evidently," said Bill.

He of the protruding tooth laughed, as if enjoying a huge joke.

"It will not be for long," he said.

As they approached the cages, they saw that a number of them were occupied. Men clung to the bars, peering out at the group crossing the sandy arena. Others sat listlessly, regarding their approach with little or no interest. Many of them, the twentieth century men noticed, bore the marks of prolonged incarceration.

They halted before one of the cells. One of the future-men stepped to the door of the cage and unlocked it with a large key. As the door grated back on rusty hinges, the others seized the two, unbound their hands and roughly hurled them inside the prison. The door clanged to with a hollow, ringing sound and the key grated in the lock.

They struggled up out of the dirt and refuse which covered the floor of the cell and squatted on their heels to watch the future-men make their way across the arena and through the archway by which they had come.

"I guess we're in for it," said Bill.

Harl produced a pack of cigarettes.

"Light up," he said gruffly.

They lit up. Smoke from tobacco grown in 1935 floated out of their cell over the ruins of the city of Denver, upon which shone a dying sun.

They smoked their cigarettes, crushed them in the sand. Harl rose and began a minute examination of their prison. Bill joined him. They went over it inch by inch, but it was impregnable. Except for the iron gate, it was constructed of heavy masonry. An examination of the iron gate gave no hope. Again they squatted on their heels.

Harl glanced at his wrist watch.

"Six hours since we landed," he said, "and from the appearance of the shadows, it's still morning. The sun was well up in the sky, too, when we arrived."

"The days are longer than those back in 1935," explained Bill, "The earth turns slower. The days here may be twenty-four hours or longer."

"Listen," hissed Harl.

To their ears came the sound of voices. They listened intently. Mingled with the voices was the harsh grating of steel. The voices seemed to come from their right. They grew in volume.

"If we only had our guns," moaned Harl.

The clamor of voices was close and seemed to be almost beside them.

"It's the other prisoners," gasped Bill. "They must be feeding them or something."

His surmise was correct.

BEFORE their cell appeared an old man. He was stooped and a long white beard hung over his skinny chest. His long hair curled majestically over his shoulders. In one hand he carried a jug of about a gallon capacity and a huge loaf of bread.

But it was neither the bread nor the jug which caught the attention of Harl and Bill. In his loin cloth, beside a massive ring of keys, were thrust their two .45's.

He set down the jug and the loaf and fumbled with the keys. Selecting one he unlocked and slid back a panel near the bottom of the great door. Carefully he set the jug and the loaf inside the cell.

The two men inside exchanged a glance. The same thought had occurred to each. When the old man came near the door, it would be a simple matter to grasp him. With the guns there was a chance of blazing a way to the ship.

The oldster, however, was pulling the weapons from his loin cloth.

Their breath held in wonder, the time-travelers saw him lay them beside the jug and the loaf.

"The command of Golan-Kirt," he muttered in explanation. "He has arrived to witness the games. He commanded that the weapons be returned. They will make the games more interesting."

"More interesting," chuckled Harl, rocking slowly on the balls of his feet.

These future men, who seemed to possess absolutely no weapons, apparently did not appreciate the deadliness of the .45's.

"Golan-Kirt?" questioned Bill, speaking softly.

The old man seemed to see them for the first time.

"Yes," he said. "Know you not of Golan-Kirt? He-Who-Came-Out-of-the-Cosmos?"

"No," said Bill.

"Then truly can I believe what has come to my ears of you?" said the old man.

"What have you heard?"

"That you came out of time," replied the oldster, "in a great machine."

"That is true," said Harl. "We came out of the twentieth century."

The old man slowly shook his head.

"I know naught of the twentieth century."

"How could you?" asked Harl. "It must have ended close to a million years ago."

The other shook his head again.

"Years?" he asked. "What are years?"

Harl drew in his breath sharply.

"A year," he explained, "is a measurement of time."

"Time cannot be measured," replied the old man dogmatically.

"Back in the twentieth century we measured it," said Harl.

"Any man who thinks he can measure time is a fool," the future-man was uncompromising.

Harl held out his hand, palm down, and pointed to his wrist watch.

"That measures time," he asserted.

The old man scarcely glanced at it.

"That," he said, "is a foolish mechanism and has nothing to do with time."

Bill laid a warning hand on his friend's arm.

"A year," he explained slowly, "is our term for one revolution of the earth about the sun."

"So that is what it means," said the old man. "Why didn't you say so at first? The movement of the earth, however, has no association with time. Time is purely relative."

"We came from a time when the world was much different," said Bill. "Can you give us any idea of the number of revolutions the earth has made since then?"

"How can I?" asked the old man, "when we speak in terms that neither understands? I can only

tell you that since Golan-Kirt came out of the Cosmos the earth has circled the sun over five million times."

Five million times! Five million years! Five million years since some event had happened, an event which may not have occurred for many other millions of years after the twentieth century. At least five million years in the future; there was no telling how much more!

Their instrument had been wrong. How wrong they could not remotely have guessed until this moment!

The twentieth century. It had a remote sound, an unreal significance. In this age, with the sun a brick red ball and the city of Denver a mass of ruins, the twentieth century was a forgotten second in the great march of time, it was as remote as the age when man emerged from the beast.

"Has the sun always been as it is?" asked Harl.

The old man shook his head.

"Our wise ones tell us that one time the sun was so hot it hurt one's eyes. They also tell us it is cooling, that in the future it will give no light or heat at all."

The oldster shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, before that happens, all men will be dead."

The old man pulled the little panel shut and locked it. He turned to go.

"Wait," cried Harl.

The old one faced them.

"What do you want?" he asked, mumbling half-angrily in his beard.

"Sit down, friend," said Harl. "We would like to talk further."

THE other hesitated, half wheeling to go, then turned back.

"We came from a time when the sun hurt one's eyes. We have seen Denver as a great and proud city. We have seen this land when the grass grew upon it and rain fell and there were broad plains where the sea now lies," said Harl.

The oldster sank to the sand in front of their cage. His eyes were lighted with a wild enthusiasm and his two skinny hands clutched the iron bars.

"You have looked upon the world when it was young," he cried. "You have seen green grass and felt rain. It seldom rains here."

"We have seen all you mention," Harl assured him. "But we would ask why we have been treated as foes. We came as friends, hoping to meet friends, but ready for war."

"Aye, ready for war," said the old man in trembling tones, his eyes on the guns. "Those are noble weapons. They tell me you strewed the sands with the dead ere you were taken."

"But why were we not treated as friends?" insisted Harl.

"There are no friends here," cackled the old man. "Not since Golan-Kirt came. All are at one another's throats."

"Who is this Golan-Kirt?"

"Golan-Kirt came out of the Cosmos to rule over

the world," said the old man, as if intoning a chant. "He is neither Man nor Beast. There is no good in him. He hates and hates. He is pure Evil. For after all, there is no friendliness or goodness in the universe. We have no proof that the Cosmos is benevolent. Long ago our ancestors believed in love. This was a fallacy. Evil is greater than good."

"Tell me," asked Bill, moving closer to the bars, "have you ever seen Golan-Kirt?"

"Aye, I have."

"Tell us of him," urged Bill.

"I cannot," there was stark terror in the old man's eyes. "I cannot!"

He huddled closer to the cage and his voice dropped to an uncanny whisper.

"Men out of time, I will tell you something. He is hated, because he teaches hate. We obey him because we must. He holds our minds in the hollow of his hand. He rules by suggestion only. He is not immortal. He fears death—he is afraid—there is a way, if only one with the courage might be found—"

The old man's face blanched and a look of horror crept into his eyes. His muscles tensed and his claw-like hands clutched madly at the bars. He slumped against the gate and gasped for breath.

Faintly his whisper came, low and halting.

"Golan-Kirt—your weapons—believe nothing—close your mind to all suggestion—"

He stopped, gasping for breath.

"I have fought—" he continued, haltingly, with an effort. "I have won—. I have told you—. He has—killed me—he will not kill you—now that you—know—"

The old man was on the verge of death. Wide-eyed, the two saw him ward it off, gain a precious second.

"Your weapons—will kill him—he's easy to kill—by one who does not—believe in him—he is a—"

The whisper pinched out and the old man slid slowly to the sands in front of the cage.

The two stared at the crumpled form of humanity.

"Killed by suggestion," gasped Harl.

Bill nodded.

"He was a brave man," he said.

Harl regarded the corpse intently. His eyes lighted on the key ring and kneeling, he reached out and drew the body of the future-man close. His fingers closed on the ring and ripped it from the loin cloth.

"We're going home," he said.

"And on the way out we'll bump off the big shot," added Bill.

He lifted the guns from the floor and clicked fresh cartridges into the chambers. Harl rattled the keys. He tried several before he found the correct one. The lock screeched and the gate swung open protestingly.

With quick steps they passed out of the cell. For a moment they halted in silent tribute before the body of the old man. With helmets doffed the twentieth century men stood beside the shriveled form of a man who was a hero, a man who had flung his hatred in

the face of some terrible entity that taught hate to the people of the world. Scanty as was the information which he had given, it set the two on their guard, gave them an inkling of what to expect.

As they turned about they involuntarily started. Filing into the amphitheater, rapidly filling the seats, were crowds of future-men. A subdued roar, the voice of the assembling people, came to their ears.

The populace was assembling for the games.

"This may complicate matters," said Bill.

"I don't think so," replied Harl. "It's Golan-Kirt we must deal with. We would have had to in any case. These men do not count. As I understand it he exercises an absolute control over them. The removal of that control may change the habits and psychology of the future-men."

"The only thing we can do is fight Golan-Kirt and then act accordingly," said Bill.

"The man who captured us spoke of his minions," Harl said thoughtfully.

"He may be able to produce hallucinations," Bill hazarded. "He may be able to make one believe something exists when it really doesn't. In that case, the people would naturally believe them to be creatures which came at his beck and call."

"But the old man knew," objected Harl. "He knew that it was all mere suggestion. If all the people knew this the rule of Golan-Kirt would end abruptly. They would no longer believe in his omnipotence. Without this belief, suggestion, by which he rules, would be impossible."

"The old man," asserted Bill, "gained his knowledge in some mysterious manner and paid for its divulgence with his life. Still the old fellow didn't know all of it. He believed this entity came out of the Cosmos."

Harl shook his head, thoughtfully.

"It may have come out of the Cosmos. Remember, we are at least five million years in the future. I expect to find some great intelligence. It is physical, for the old man claimed to have seen it, and that should make our job easier."

"The old man said he was not immortal," commented Bill. "Therefore, he is vulnerable and our guns may do the work. Another thing—we are not to believe a single thing we feel, hear, or see. He seems to rule wholly by suggestion. He will try to kill us by suggestion, just as he killed the old fellow."

Harl nodded.

"It's a matter of will power," he said. "A matter of brain and bluff. Apparently the will power of these people has degenerated and Golan-Kirt finds it easy to control their minds. They are born, live, and die under his influence. It has almost become hereditary to accept his power. We have the advantage of coming out of an age when men were obliged to use their brains. Perhaps the human mind degenerated because, as science increased the ease of life, there was little need to use it. Some fine minds may still remain, but apparently they are few. We are doubters, schemers, bluffers. Golan-Kirt will find us tougher than these future-men."

THE WORLD OF THE RED SUN

CHAPTER III

The Struggle of the Ages

BILL produced cigarettes and the two lighted up. Slowly they walked across the vast arena, guns hanging in their right hands. People were filing into the place and the tiers were filling.

A roar came out of the tiers of seats before them. They recognized it. It was the cry of the gathering crowd, the cry for blood, the expression of a desire to see battle.

Harl grinned.

"Regular football crowd," he commented.

More and more poured into the arena, but it was apparent that the inhabitants of the ruined city could fill only a very small section of the thousands upon thousands of seats.

The two seemed lost in the mighty space. Above them, almost at the zenith, hung the vast red sun. They seemed to move in a twilight-filled desert rimmed in by enormous white cliffs.

"Denver must have been a large city at the time this place was built," commented Bill. "Think of the number of people it would hold. Wonder what it was used for?"

"Probably we'll never know," said Harl.

They had gained the approximate center of the arena.

Harl halted.

"Do you know," he said, "I've been thinking. It seems to me we must have a fairly good chance against Golan-Kirt. For the last fifteen minutes every thought of ours has been in open defiance of him, but he has not attempted our annihilation. Although it is possible he may only be biding his time. I am beginning to believe he can't read our minds as he could the mind of the old man. He killed him the moment he uttered a word of treason."

Bill nodded.

As if in answer to what Harl had said, a great weight seemed to press in upon them. Bill felt a deadly illness creeping over him. His knees sagged and his brain whirled. Spots danced before his eyes and a horrible pain gripped his stomach.

He took a step forward and stumbled. A hand clutched his shoulder and fiercely shook him. The shake momentarily cleared his brain. Through the clearing mist which seemed to hang before his eyes, he saw the face of his friend, a face white and lined.

The lips in the face moved.

"Buck up, old man. There's nothing wrong with you. You're feeling fine."

Something seemed to snap inside his head. This was suggestion—the suggestion of Golan-Kirt. He had to fight it. That was it—fight it.

He planted his feet firmly in the sand, straightened his shoulders with an effort, and smiled.

"Hell, no," he said, "there's nothing wrong with me. I'm feeling fine."

Harl slapped him on the back.

"That's the spirit," he roared. "It almost floored me for a minute. We've got to fight it, boy. We've got to fight it."

Bill laughed, harshly. His head was clear now and

he could feel the strength flowing back into his body. They had won the first round!

"But where is this Golan-Kirt?" he burst out.

"Invisible," snarled Harl, "but I have a theory that he can't put in his best licks in such a state. We'll force him to show himself and then we'll give him the works."

The frenzied roar of the crowd came to their ears. Those on the bleachers had seen and appreciated the little drama out in the middle of the arena. They were crying for more.

Suddenly a spiteful rattle broke out behind the two.

They started. That sound was familiar. It was the rat-a-tat of a machine gun. With no ceremony they fell flat, pressing their bodies close against the ground, seeking to burrow into the sand.

Little puffs of sand spurted up all about them. Bill felt a searing pain in his arm. One of the bullets had found him. This was the end. There was no obstruction to shield them in this vast level expanse from the gun that chuckled and chattered at their rear. Another searing pain caught him in the leg. Another hit.

Then he laughed—a wild laugh. There was no machine gun, no bullets. It was all suggestion. A trick to make them believe they were being killed—a trick, which, if carried far enough, would kill them.

He struggled to his knees, hauling Harl up beside him. His leg and arm still pained, but he paid them no attention. There was nothing wrong with them, he told himself fiercely, absolutely nothing wrong.

"It's suggestion again," he shouted at Harl, "There isn't any machine gun."

Harl nodded. They regained their feet and turned. There, only a couple of hundred yards away, a khaki-clad figure crouched behind a gun that chattered wickedly, a red flame licking the muzzle.

"That isn't a machine gun," said Bill, speaking slowly.

"Of course, it's not a machine gun," Harl spoke as if by rote.

They walked slowly toward the flaming gun. Although bullets apparently whistled all about them, none struck them. The pain in Bill's arm and leg no longer existed.

Suddenly the gun disappeared, and with it the khaki-clad figure. One moment they were there, the next they were not.

"I thought it would do just that," said Bill.

"The old boy is still going strong, though," replied Harl. "Here is some more of his suggestion."

HARL pointed to one of the arching gateways. Through it marched file upon file of soldiers, clad in khaki, metal helmets on their heads, guns across their shoulders. An officer uttered a sharp command and the troops began to deploy over the field.

A shrill blast of a bugle drew the attention of the two time-travelers from the soldiers and through another gateway they beheld the advance of what appeared to be a cohort of Roman legionnaires. Shields flashed dully in the sun and the rattle of arms could be distinctly heard.

"Do you know what I believe?" asked Harl.

"What is it?"

"Golan-Kirt cannot suggest anything new to us. The machine guns and the soldiers and legionnaires are all things of which we have former knowledge."

"How is it," asked Bill, "that we see these things when we know they do not exist?"

"I do not know," replied Harl, "there are a lot of funny things about this business that I can't understand."

"Anyhow, he is giving the crowd a good show," observed Bill.

The bleachers were in an uproar. To the ears of the two came the shrill screaming of women, the loud roars of the men. The populace was thoroughly enjoying itself.

A lion, large and ferocious, growling fiercely, leaped past the two men. A thunder of hoof-beats announced the arrival of more of the brain creatures.

"It's about time for us to do something," said Harl.

He lifted his .45 high in the air and fired. A hush fell.

"Golan-Kirt, attention!" roared Harl, in a voice that could be heard in every part of the arena. "We challenge you to personal combat. We have no fear of your creatures. They cannot harm us. You are the one we wish to fight."

An awed silence fell over the crowd. It was the first time their god had ever been openly challenged. They waited for the two lone figures out in the arena to be stricken in a heap.

They were not stricken, however.

Again Harl's voice rang out.

"Come out of hiding, you fat-bellied toad!" he thundered. "Come and fight if you have the guts, you dirty, yellow coward!"

The crowd may not have gathered the exact meaning of the words, but the full insult of them was plain. A threatening murmur rolled out from the bleachers, and there was a sudden surging of the crowd. Men leaped over the low wall in front of the seats and raced across the arena.

Then a sonorous voice, deep and strong, rolled out.

"Stop," it said. "I, Golan-Kirt, will deal with these men."

Harl noticed that the soldiers and the lion had disappeared. The arena was empty except for him and his comrade and the score of future-men who had halted in their tracks at the voice which had come out of nothingness.

They waited, tensed. Harl wriggled his feet into a firmer position. He slipped a cartridge in the gun to take the place of the one which had been fired. Bill mopped his brow with the sleeve of his coat.

"It's going to be brains now," Harl told his friend.

Bill grinned.

"Two mediocre intelligences against a great one," he joked.

"Look, Bill!" shouted Harl.

Directly in front and slightly above the level of their heads a field of light had formed, a small ball of brightness in the murky atmosphere. Slowly it grew. Vibrations set in.

The two watched, fascinated. The vibrations quickened until the whole field was quivering. As the vibrations increased the light faded and a monstrosity began to take form. Only vaguely could it be seen at first. Then it became clearer and clearer, began to take definite form.

Hanging in the air, suspended without visible means of support, was a gigantic brain, approximately two feet

in diameter. A naked brain, with the convolutions exposed. It was a ghastly thing.

The horror of it was heightened by the two tiny, pig-like, lidless, close-set eyes and a curving beak which hung directly below the frontal portion of the brain, resting in what was apparently an atrophied face.

The two were aghast, but with a tremendous effort they kept close hold on their self-control.

"Greetings, Golan-Kirt," drawled Harl, sarcasm putting an edge to the words.

As he spoke, his arm swung up and under the pressure of his finger, the hammer of the gun slowly moved backward. But before the muzzle could be brought in line with the great brain, the arm stopped and Harl stood like a frozen man, held rigid by the frightful power which poured forth from Golan-Kirt.

Bill's arm flashed up and his .45 broke the silence with a sullen roar. However, even as he fired, his arm was flung aside as if by a mighty blow and the speeding bullet missed the huge brain by the mere fraction of an inch.

"Presumptuous fools," roared a voice, which, however, seemed not a voice, for there was no sound, merely the sense of hearing. The two, standing rigidly, as if at attention, realized that it was telepathy: that the brain before them was sending out powerful emanations.

"Presumptuous fools, you would fight me, Golan-Kirt? I, who have a hundred-fold the mental power of your combined brains? I, who hold the knowledge of all time?"

"We would fight you," snarled Harl. "We are going to fight you. We know you for what you are. You are not out of the Cosmos. You are a laboratory specimen. Unknown ages ago you were developed under artificial conditions. You are not immortal. You fear our weapons. A bullet in that dirty brain of yours will finish you."

"WHO are you to judge," came the thought-wave, "you, with your tiny, twentieth century brain? You have come unbidden into my time, you have defied me. I shall destroy you. I, who came out of the Cosmos æons ago to rule over the portion of the Universe I chose as my own, do not fear you or your ridiculous weapons."

"Yet you foiled us when we would have used our weapons on you. If I could reach you I would not need my weapon. I could tear you apart, destroy you with the strength of my two hands."

"Say on," rumbled the thought-waves. "Say what you believe me to be, and when you are done I shall obliterate you. You shall be dust floating in the air, ashes on the sands."

There was an unveiled tone of mockery in the brain emanations.

Harl raised his voice, almost shouting. It was a deliberate act, done in hopes the future-men would hear, that they might realize not too late the true nature of the tyrant Golan-Kirt. They did hear and their mouths gaped as they listened.

"You once were a man," Harl roared, "a great scientist. You studied the brain, specialized in it. At last you discovered a great secret, which gave you the power of developing the brain to an unheard-of degree. Sure of your technique, and realizing the power you might

THE WORLD OF THE RED SUN

enjoy, you transformed yourself into a brain creature. You are a fraud and an impostor. You have mis-ruled these people for millions of years. You are not out of the Cosmos,—you are a man, or what once was a man. You are an atrocity, an abomination—”

The thought emanations which flowed from out the brain trembled, as if with rage.

“You lie. I am out of the Cosmos. I am immortal. I shall kill you—kill you.”

Suddenly Bill laughed, a resounding guffaw. It was an escape from the terrible tension, but as he laughed a ludicrous angle presented itself—the twentieth century travelers millions of years ahead of their time wrangling with a cheat pawning himself off as a god on a people who would not be born until long after he was dead.

He felt the horrible power of Golan-Kirt centering upon him. Perspiration streamed down his face and his body trembled. He felt his strength leaving him.

He stopped laughing. As he did so, he seemed to be struck, as if by a blow. He staggered. Then sudden realization flashed through him. Laughter! Laughter, that was it. Laughter and ridicule! That would turn the trick.

“Laugh, you fool, laugh,” he screamed at Harl.

Uncomprehendingly, Harl obeyed.

The two rocked with laughter. They whooped and roared.

Hardly knowing what he did, almost involuntarily, Bill screeched horrible things at the great brain, reviled it, taunted it, called it almost unspeakable names.

Harl began to understand. It was all a great game that Bill was playing. A supreme egoism such as was lodged in the brain pitted against them could not bear ridicule, would lose its grip before a storm of jeers. For uncounted centuries, through some miraculous power, it had lived and in all that time it had been accorded only the highest honor. Derision was something with which it was unacquainted, a terrible weapon suddenly loosed upon it.

Harl joined with Bill and hurled gibes at Golan-Kirt. It was a high carnival of mockery. They were not conscious of their words. Their brains responded to the emergency and their tongues formed sentences of unguessed taunts.

Between sentences they laughed, howling with satanic glee.

Through all their laughter they felt the power of the brain. They felt its anger mount at their taunting. Their bodies were racked with pain, they wanted to fall on the sands and writhe in agony, but they continued to laugh, to shout taunts.

It seemed an eternity that they fought with Golan-Kirt, all the time shrieking with laughter, while they suffered fine-edged torture from the tops of their heads to the soles of their feet. Still they dare not stop their laughter, dare not cease their hideous derision, poking fun at the huge intelligence which opposed them. That was their one weapon. Without it the engulfing waves of suggestion which poured with relentless fury upon them would have snapped asunder every nerve in their bodies.

They sensed the raging of the great brain. It was literally crazed with anger. They were “getting its goat!” They were ridiculing the very life out of it.

Unconsciously they allowed the pitch of their laughter to lower. From sheer exhaustion they lapsed into silence.

Suddenly they felt the terrible force of the brain renewed, as it drew upon some mysterious reserve strength. It struck them like a blow, doubling them over, clouding their eyes, dulling their minds, racking every nerve and joint.

Hot irons seemed to sear them, hundreds of needles seemed thrust in their flesh, sharp knives seemed to slash their bodies. They reeled blindly, gropingly, mouthing curses, crying out in pain.

Through the red haze of torture came a whisper, a soft, enchanting whisper, a whisper beckoning to them, showing them a way of escape.

“Turn your weapons on yourselves. End all of this torture. Death is painless.”

The whisper fluttered through their brains. That was the way out! Why endure this seemingly endless torture? Death was painless. The muzzle against one’s head, a pressure on the trigger, oblivion.

BILL placed his gun against his temple. His finger contracted against the trigger. He laughed. This was a joke. A rare joke. Robbing Golan-Kirt by his own hand.

Another voice burst through his laughter. It was Harl.

“You fool! It’s Golan-Kirt! It’s Golan-Kirt, you fool!”

He saw his friend staggering toward him, saw his face pinched with pain, saw the moving of the livid lips as they shouted the warning.

Bill’s hand dropped to his side. Even as he continued that insane laughter, he felt chagrin steal over him. The hideous brain had played its trump card and had failed, but it had almost finished him. Had it not been for Harl he would have been stretched on the sand, a suicide, his head blown to bits.

Then suddenly they felt the power of the brain slipping, felt its strength falter and ebb. They had beaten it!

They sensed the gigantic struggle going on in that great brain, the struggle to regain the grip it had lost.

For years on end it had lived without struggle, without question that it was the ruler of the earth. They sensed the futile anger and the devastating fear which revolved in the convolutions of Golan-Kirt.

But he was beaten, beaten at last by men from out of a forgotten age. He had met defeat at the hands of ridicule, something he had never known, a thing he had not suspected.

His strength ebbed steadily. The twentieth century men felt his dread power lift from them, sensed the despair which surged through him.

They stopped their laughter, their sides sore, their throats hoarse. Then they heard. The arena resounded with laughter. The crowd was laughing. The horrible uproar beat like a tumult upon them. The future-men were roaring, bent over, stamping their feet, throwing back their heads, screaming to the murky skies. They were laughing at Golan-Kirt, screaming insults at him, hooting him. It was the end of his rule.

For generations the future-men had hated him with the very hate he had taught them. They had hated and

feared. Now they feared no longer and hate rode unchained.

From a god he had fallen to the estate of a ridiculous fraud. He was a thing of pity, an uncloaked clown, simply a naked, defenseless brain that had bluffed its way through centuries of kingship.

Through bleared eyes the twentieth century men saw the great brain, writhing now under the scorn of its erstwhile subjects, being laughed powerless. No longer did it hold control over these creatures of a dying world. Its close-set eyes glowed fiercely, its beak clicked angrily. It was tired, too tired to regain its rule. It was the end of Golan-Kirt!

The revolvers of the time-travelers came up almost simultaneously. This time the sights lined on the brain. There was no power to ward off the danger.

The guns roared rapidly, spitting hateful fire. At the impact of the bullets the brain turned over in the air, blood spurted from it, great gashes appeared in it. With a thump it struck the ground, quivered and lay still.

The time-travelers, their eyes closing from sheer weariness, their knees suddenly weak, slumped to the sand, the .45's still smoking.

Over the arena floated the full-toned roar of the future-men.

"Hail to the Deliverers! Golan-Kirt is dead! His rule is ended! Hail to the saviors of the race!"

Epilogue

"IT IS impossible to reverse time. You cannot travel back to your own age. I have no idea of what will occur if you attempt it, but I do know it is impossible. We of this age knew travel into the future was possible, but we lacked the technique to build a machine to try it. Under the rule of Golan-Kirt there was no material progress, only a steady degeneration. We know that it is impossible to reverse time. We, as a people, beg you not to attempt it."

Old Agnar Nohl, his white beard streaming in the wind, his hair flying, spoke seriously. There was a troubled frown on his face.

"We love you," he went on, "you freed us of the tyranny of the brain which ruled over us for uncounted time. We need you. Stay with us, help us rebuild this land, help us construct machines, give us some of the marvelous knowledge which we, as a race, have lost. We can give you much in return, for we have not forgotten all of the science we knew before the coming of Golan-Kirt."

Harl shook his head.

"We must at least try to go back," he said.

The two twentieth century men stood beside the plane. Before them was a solid mass of humanity, a silent humanity in the shadow of the silent ruins of the city of Denver, the future-men who had come to bid the time-travelers a regretful farewell.

A chill wind howled over the desert, carrying its freight of sand. The furs of the future-men fluttered in the gale as it played a solemn dirge between the ruined walls of humbled buildings.

"If there was a chance of your success, we would speed you on your way," said old Agnar, "but we are reluctant to let you go to what may be your death. We are selfish enough to wish to hold you for ourselves, but we love you enough to let you go. You taught us

hate was wrong, you removed the hate that ruled us. We wish only the best for you.

"It is impossible to go back in time. Why not remain? We need you badly. Our land grows less and less food every year. We must discover how to make synthetic food or we shall starve. This is only one of our problems. There are many others. You cannot go back. Stay and help us!"

Again Harl shook his head.

"No, we must try it. We may fail, but we must try it at least. If we succeed we shall return and bring with us books of knowledge and tools to work with."

Agnar combed his beard with skinny fingers.

"You'll fail," he said.

"But if we don't we will return," said Bill.

"Yes, if you don't," replied the old man.

"We are going now," said Bill. "We thank you for your thoughtfulness. We must at least try. We are sorry to leave you. Please believe that."

"I do believe it," cried the old man and he seized their hands in a farewell clasp.

Harl opened the door of the plane and Bill clambered in.

At the door Harl stood with upraised hand.

"Good-bye," he said. "Some day we will return."

The crowd burst into a roar of farewell. Harl climbed into the plane and closed the door.

The motors bellowed, droning out the shouting of the future-men and the great machine charged down the sand. With a rush it took the air. Three times Bill circled the ruined city in a last mute good-bye to the men who watched silently and sorrowfully below.

Then Harl threw the lever. Again the utter darkness, the feeling of hanging in nothingness.

The motors, barely turning, muttered at the change. A minute passed, two minutes.

"Who says we can't travel back in time!" Harl shouted triumphantly. He pointed to the needle. It was slowly creeping back across the face of the dial.

"Maybe the old man was wrong after—"

Bill never finished the sentence.

"Roll her out," he screamed at Harl, "roll her out. One of our engines is going dead!"

Harl snatched at the lever, jerked frantically at it. The faulty motor choked and coughed, sputtered, then broke into a steady drone.

The two men in the cabin regarded one another with blanched faces. They knew they had escaped a possible crash—and death—by bare seconds.

Again they hung in the air. Again they saw the brick-red sun, the desert, and the sea. Below them loomed the ruins of Denver.

"We couldn't have gone far back in time," said Harl. "It looks the same as ever."

They circled the ruins.

"We had better land out in the desert to fix up the engine," suggested Harl. "Remember we have traveled back in time and Golan-Kirt still rules over the land. We don't want to have to kill him a second time. We might not be able to do it."

The plane was flying low and he nosed it up. Again the faulty engine sputtered and missed.

"She's going dead this time for certain," yelled Bill. "We'll have to chance it, Harl. We have to land and chance getting away again."

Harl nodded grimly.

Before them lay the broad expanse of the arena. It was either that or crash.

As Bill nosed the plane down the missing motor sputtered for the last time, went dead.

They flashed over the white walls of the amphitheater and down into the arena. The plane struck the sand, raced across it, slowed to a stop.

Harl opened the door.

"Our only chance is to fix it up in a hurry and get out of here," he shouted at Bill. "We don't want to meet that damn brain again."

He stopped short.

"Bill," he spoke scarcely above a whisper, "am I seeing things?"

Before him, set on the sands of the arena, only a few yards from the plane, was a statue of heroic size, a statue of himself and Bill.

Even from where he stood he could read the inscription, carved in the white stone base of the statue in characters which closely resembled written English.

Slowly, haltingly, he read it aloud, stumbling over an occasional queer character.

"Two men, Harl Swanson, and Bill Kressman, came out of time to kill Golan-Kirt and to free the race."

Below it he saw other characters.

"They may return."

"Bill," he sobbed, "we haven't traveled back in time.

We have traveled further into the future. Look at that stone—croded, ready to crumble to pieces. That statue has stood there for thousands of years!"

Bill slumped back into his seat, his face ashen, his eyes staring.

"The old man was right," he screamed. "He was right. We'll never see the twentieth century again."

He leaned over toward the time machine.

His face twitched.

"Those instruments," he shrieked, "those damned instruments! They were wrong. They lied, they lied!"

With his bare fists he beat at them, smashing them, unaware that the glass cut deep gashes and his hands were smeared with blood.

Silence weighed down over the plain. There was absolutely no sound.

Bill broke the silence.

"The future-men," he cried, "where are the future-men?"

He answered his own question.

"They are all dead," he screamed, "all dead. They are starved—starved because they couldn't manufacture synthetic food. We are alone! Alone at the end of the world!"

Harl stood in the door of the plane.

Over the rim of the amphitheater the huge red sun hung in a sky devoid of clouds. A slight wind stirred the sand at the base of the crumbling statue.

THE END

What Is Your Science Knowledge?

1. What were Minkowski's views on time? (Page 827)
2. What scientific event occurred on May 29, 1919? (Page 827)
3. What is a spiral nebula? (Page 830)
4. How is it possible to separate out the various electromagnetic wavelengths? (Page 843)
5. What was "Frankenstein?" Who wrote it? (Page 849)
6. How is it possible to compute one's position in space? (Page 862)
7. How hot is the interior of the earth at 25 to 40 miles below the surface? (Page 871)
8. What is the cause of volcanic eruptions? (Page 871)
9. What are the two great volcanic belts? (Page 872)
10. What experiments have been tried in the artificial production of rainfall? (Page 873)

Cliff and I

by Isaac Asimov

My letters in *ASTOUNDING* had not yet ended their usefulness. On September 1, 1938, I received a letter from Brainerd, Minnesota.

It was from Clifford D. Simak, who was at that time a minor science fiction writer. Back in 1931 and 1932, he had published about five stories, one of which (though I only found this out much later) was "*The World of the Red Sun*," which I had so enjoyed in junior high school and which I had retold to the classmates gathered around me.

In 1938 he had returned to the field, and his first story after this return was "*Rule 18*," which had appeared in the July 1938 issue. I had "hated it," my diary says, and in my letter to *ASTOUNDING* I gave it a very low rating.

Now Simak was writing to me to ask details so that he might consider my criticisms and perhaps profit from them. (Would that I could react so gently and rationally to adverse criticism--but I grew to know Cliff well in later years, though we rarely met, and I learned that gentle rationality was the hallmark of his character.)

I reread the story in order to be able to answer properly and found, to my surprise, that there was nothing wrong with it at all. What he had done was to write the story in separate scenes with no explicit transition passages between. I wasn't used to that technique, so the story seemed choppy and incoherent. The second time around I saw what he was doing and realized that not only was the story not in the least incoherent, but also that it moved with a slick speed that would have been impossible if all the dull bread-and-butter transitions had been inserted.

I wrote Simak to explain and to apologize, and adopted the same device in my own stories. What's more, I attempted, as far as possible, to make use of something similar to Simak's cool and unadorned style.

I have sometimes heard science-fiction writers speak of the influence upon their style of such high-prestige literary figures as Kafka, Proust, and Joyce. This may well be so for them, but for myself, I make no such claim. I learned how to write science fiction by the attentive reading of science fiction, and among the major influences on my style was Cliff Simak.

Later, when L. Sprague de Camp published his *SCIENCE FICTION HANDBOOK* in 1953, he said, "Asimov writes a brisk, smooth, straightforward style with keen logic and human understanding." Further along in the book he adds: "Simak's stories may be compared with Asimov's," which is perceptive of Sprague, since I consciously tried to imitate Cliff's style.

My correspondence with Cliff continued over the years.

On October 20, 1961, I met Cliff Simak, face to face, for the first time. I had been corresponding with him, on and off, for twenty-three years, but our paths had never before actually crossed.

I was no longer an eighteen-year-old would-be writer, and he was no longer a father figure of nearly twice my age. The alchemy of time had converted me into a forty-one-year-old member of an aging establishment and very nearly Cliff's contemporary. It was a delightful lunch; we kept pausing to stare at each other as though we had never been truly certain that the other existed.

Excerpted from IN MEMORY YET GREEN (© 1979) and IN JOY STILL FELT (© 1980) both published by Doubleday. Used with permission of Isaac Asimov; some editorial changes were made to smooth over transitions.

The Trap of the Frontier

Dennis Jarog

It's just another thing
we've lost, another thing
that the human race let loose.
Come to think of it, we lost a
lot of things. Family ties and
business, work and puspouse.

(CITY, p. 161)



Clifford Simak's classic novel CITY is the tale of the fall of one civilization and the rise of another. What makes this different from many others is that the human society acquiesced to its own demise and sponsored the rise of the new. The novel answers in part an old question posed by those concerned with the availability of leisure--how would man, used to toiling for necessity, use the time for pleasure? Simak's answer is not flattering. One aspect of what, for want of a better term, can be called the *work ethic* is the territorial imperative. Focused more clearly on the US (which is the focus of the novel) it is known as *the frontier*. Simply put, the author portrays man as rejecting the frontier--rejecting the goal of those who went before, and putting nothing in its place.

The trap is one of the more unique ends of mankind. Not with a bang, certainly, nor with a whimper (unless from one of the dogs), but with a yawn and a collective sigh. The trap is a two-edged sword, because it gives purpose. Without a goal the society-that-was became shallow, given to half-hearted pursuits. It is a mark of many things that man was not able to find a goal once the primary ones were taken care of. It also suggests something of the Putitan ethic--that this shallowness was due to the fact that other goals were viewed as sinful, or at least somehow deviant from the norm.

The frontier has colored the progression of American history since its very beginnings. In the nineteenth century the single most important factor was the constantly expanding border, new lands to be won, new lives to be cre-

ated out in the wilderness. The frontier functioned as a safety vale. When there ~~was~~ no land to be won, the frontier became a mental one. Science and technology were the new unplowed lands and, though the safety valve was of a different type, it still was there. As an aside, one of the problems of the current age may be that we have rejected the newer frontier, and have found nothing to replace it. The concept of the frontier, and the right of the inhabitants to settle and conquer, came to be viewed as God-given, involved with principles of the white man's burden, social Darwinism, and laissez-faire capitalism.

In CITY the author sees the process as being reversed. In the first tale the glories of modern technology are forcing the society to undergo massive readjustment. The successor to the tribe, the city, is dying. As a result of fast, cheap transportation, the need for close proximity to the economic structure, the need for large concentrations of people, is gone. But not only is the city abandoned. Since all the economic needs are provided without struggle, the problem of leisure becomes acute and unsolvable. There are many frontiers to be extended, but seemingly none hold any interest anymore. This will become even more of a problem later. But for now everyone is king, and all the peasants have been banished. From the flight out of the city, humans known as a social animal develop an insularity heretofore unknown. This re-enforced the larger danger. The conquering of the frontier was always a communal project. And man is now insular. The miracles of instant contact were not enough seemingly, the author suggests, as well as that a man must need to be fighting for his existence before he would challenge the frontier.

"That was quite right, Jenkins," said Webster. "None of us go anywhere."
(CITY, p. 49)

The second tale marks the passage of a few generations and a major change in man's nature: the rejection of the frontier and its corollary, the communal nature of man to extend the frontier. In this respect, Jerome Webster shows the course of his society as the point of the story. In his youth he made significant contributions to medical knowledge, expecting that his son will follow in his stead. Returning in the course of time to the ancestral home, he now is fearful of leaving it. The frontier thus rejected becomes a barrier--one of ideas, emotions, and terrors. When he gets the summons to perform services only he could do--the frontier at the front door has become so inaccessible that he rejects the call. In effect he has rejected the communal nature that made the frontier expandable. Webster has no need to socialize, no need to depend on another, and indeed has become an island.

...he sat down in the chair, sensed the walls of the room closing in about him, a trap that would never let him go.
(CITY, p. 67)

The path of safety and surity had become a shell from which even a momentary departure was fraught with the gravest perils. Thus the frontier rejected becomes a tangible barrier because it has extended to the mind.

In the third tale, the frontier-rejected takes another and more obvious step on the road to mental oblivion. Up to this point the rejection has not been an act of planning; it was a combination of untenable factors that built a wall in the ~~psyche~~. Rather than simply rejecting the ideal of destiny of surmounting the barriers presented across the generations, Joe rejected the

concept as well as the act of achievement or rejection. Joe acted only for his own amusement. Juwain again appears--it was the lack of action on Jerome Webster's part that cost Juwain his life, and possibly a whole new philosophical foundation. In the years subsequent to that act, men, as if grasping at straws and denying their own impotency, have lamented the loss, and sought to blame it for their own obvious flaws. They grieved for a past that never was, and a future that never would be. Now quite simply knowing the frontier is unreachable, rejection becomes a stark-admitted fact. Man sought to cast blame. The humans are now so removed from the frontier that they don't know what to make of it. It is a concept passed even out of memory, save for one flight of fancy to be seen later.

"Race preservation is a myth...a myth that you all have lived by--a sordid thing that has arisen out of your social structure."
(CITY, p. 98)

The fourth tale is perhaps the most obvious of all. The humans, seeing that sense-of-purpose slipping ever further from them, go to Jupiter. Their physical structure undergoes massive change so that they can withstand the harsh surface of Jupiter. In fact, they discover how handicapped they have been in their frail human body. It might be argued that this is a conquering of a frontier, and in a way it is. But it is unlike any previous conquest. From the beginning man sought to remake his environment to suit him. For the first time we have man admitting his frailty as a species, changing himself to suit a differing environ. Thus, in the concept of this article, man has gone a step further on the long, ponderous journey to a bleak end. He has rejected his own body in favor of a new model. And those that remain are so without hope, without motivation, that they cannot even make up their minds what to do. Even in this latter ago, it is the best who quickly decide to go, leaving behind an increasingly helpless and hopeless community. Unable to decide anything, they merely continue to exist. Little more can be said.

"Yes, they could find things. Civilizations, perhaps. Civilizations that would make the civilizations of man puny by comparison. Beauty and, more important, an understanding of that beauty. And a comradeship no one had ever known before...."
(CITY, p. 118)

To no one's surprise, mankind discovers the folly of the frontier. In effect, though denied, what they are saying now is that there are broader horizons elsewhere, and the conquest of the frontier cost them more than they gained. One man who had spent time roaming Jupiter in a different body returned and told those who remained what life was like there. The cozy, comfortable existence on Earth was a fraud, and may always have been that way. Coming full circle, the role of the frontier is now conceded to be folly, whereas once it was the reason for being. Many like Webster could not accept the bitter truth. It is hard to admit that all those gone before had lived a life without value because the goals they had set for themselves were misdirected. Thus, they clung to something with less hope than before, simply because this is all they knew.

"The human race would disappear," said Webster, speaking evenly. "It would be wiped out. It would junk all the progress it has made over thousands of years. It would disappear just when it is on the verge of its greatest advancement."
(CITY, p. 134)

Webster clings to the shell, even after it has shown to be hollow. So convinced of the righteousness of his view, he proceeds on a Quixotic-like quest--a challenge of the frontier as had not been done for centuries, yet at the test does nothing. And the rest of human society drifts off into aimlessness.

The thing that Webster feared most did indeed come to pass. Humanity, in its rejection, had become listless, fearful, without purpose. The trap of the frontier is not the only answer to an unhappy end of man. But it is a viable one. The frontier is and was a fact of the march of history in but one aspect: the early Americans took it as license to seize, occupy, and settle an entire continent. Imposing their set of values, they remade it in their image and likeness. Long after the land itself was gone, the frontier moved to other realms--technology, science, and space, to name a few. It would not be impossible for the first space station to be a profit-making operation. But the frontier was a goal, and so man ordered his society to be ever seeking for a new goal. Suddenly in CITY, man has all his needs. There aren't any wild interests so for the first time man has no frontier, no goal. But instead of seeking for something new, those who came after spurned what had gone on before, considering it folly. Having nothing new, they drifted on aimlessly, grasping after straws, and finally abandoning even the bodies as a machine gave them a new life on Jupiter. A few, it is sad to say, could not even get the ambition to do this so they simply drifted off to sleep.

The trap of the frontier could be many things, but all of them boil down to one. Illusion. The frontier itself is an illusion. But so is the society that drifted along after. And perhaps also the life in Jupiter. For who can determine what is illusion and what is not? One man's illusion may be another's bedrock reality. Thus is the trap of the frontier.

"Illusion," said Sara.

"That's is," said Webster. "That is all we have. No real work, no real job. Nothing that we're working for, no place we're going."
(CITY, p. 159)

Sara and Webster did have something that the others lacked--honesty.

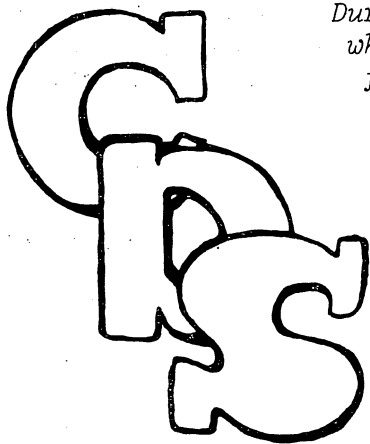
SIMAKIAN FAUNA

by Ruth Berman

The view from this unusual Cliff
Is oddly variegated
With robots duplicated.
Here are rocking horses, ghosts,
Rafter goblins on their posts.
Genres mixed, it's said, are quarrelsome,
And yet the Sylph's at peace with the simulcrum.

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First Encounters With



During one of my Iterim SF classes (a two-week period in which we suspend regular classes and do other things) a few students read stories by Clifford Simak for the first time. As part of the requirements for this course the students wrote reviews (or did artwork, or some other project science-fictionally oriented), some of which are included below, along with some of the artwork which was done within the course as well.

I would like to thank these students for their work, and their help in putting together a mailing of the initial letter requesting contributions for this Simak issue.

-- Lan

COSMIC ENGINEERS ----- a review by Craig Noren

COSMIC ENGINEERS, one of the many great novels by Clifford D. Simak, would be better classified as a science-adventure, rather than a science-fiction, novel. It is a well-written, easy-to-read, story that is filled with many thrills and adventures, and contains many sub-plots.

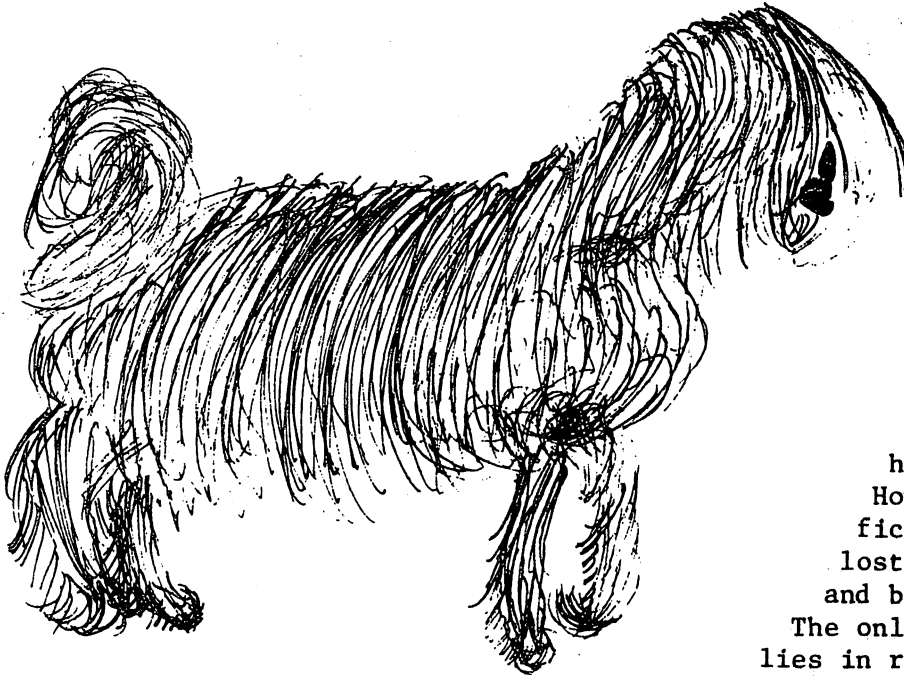
The story takes place out in space, to be more precise, the very edge of the universe, and the adventure shifts from galaxy to galaxy. One thing Simak elaborates on in this novel is space, the unknown. Outer space has always occupied man's thoughts and his curiosity to probe the unknown; the unknown here is outer space. This makes the novel more interesting to read because the suspense makes you want to read on and on, trying to anticipate what will happen next.

This leads to the plot: two reporters are travelling through the solar system and encounter a mysterious space-ship just off the orbit of Pluto. In the spaceship they find a woman in suspended animation, preserved for a thousand years. This woman, Caroline Martin, possesses essential scientific knowledge that has yet to be discovered by human scientists. Using her knowledge and messages received from some distant form of life, they build a space warp machine that will take them to this far-off planet. Travelling through time and space they arrive and team up with the inhabitants of this advanced planet. Their goal, through the knowledge of Caroline and the Engineers, is to prevent a collision of two universes which may lead to the destruction of all living matter.

To effect this, the humans must travel to various planets to gain information. On each planet they find a different form of life: the Engineers, who communicate by telepathy; the Mind, who also communicates via telepathy, but has no physical appearance. After observing these different life forms, it can be said that the humans, not always the most intelligent, are superior to all others. The Engineers are the most closely related to the humans, except that they don't possess an imagination, which is why they contacted these humans.

With the various sub-plots, the reader learns more about the characters which helps in better understanding the novel. Even though the ideas do seem far-fetched, Simak presents the story in such a way that it makes you believe otherwise. With all the details you can form an image of the actions in your head, which makes the story much more enjoyable to read because it requires the imagination of the reader to get all of the ideas out of Simak's creativity. I would recommend strongly this book to any person desiring an enjoyable adventure.

* * * * *



from *THEY WALKED LIKE MEN*,
drawn by Karen Chesna

THEY WALKED LIKE

MEN

a review by

Sissy Frank

The main attraction to a good science fiction story is that it should have an interesting plot. However, in too many science fiction movies, the plot is lost in the search for bigger and better special effects.

The only refuge from this madness lies in reading books, and one of the best science fiction stories I have found is *THEY WALKED LIKE MEN*, by Clifford D. Simak.

The story centers around Parker Graves, a newspaperman, and his struggle to defeat a group of ruthless aliens who possess the ability to change their shape. Graves is aided in his attempts by Joy Kane, his girlfriend, and The Dog, another alien also intent on capturing his vicious enemies. The plan of the aliens is to buy out the Earth, building by building, thus no doing anything that could be considered illegal, yet leaving Earth's population homeless. Graves must figure out how their one weakness, a love for odorous things, can be used to his advantage in fighting the aliens. But he must do this quickly, for if the aliens gain control of the world, the human race will die out.

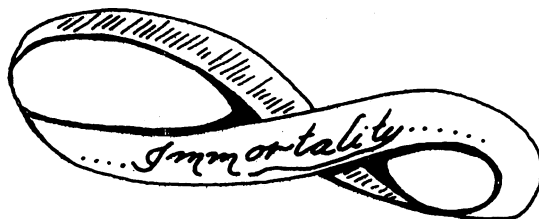
The descriptions given in this book of the various changes in shape that the aliens underwent appealed to my long-dormant sense of the bizarre. Granted, the idea of aliens being able to change their shape is, in itself, not new, but the way in which it is used makes this book unique. I am now in the process of reading another book by Clifford Simak, *WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN?*, and it too promises to be a truly good book.

Mr. Simak has found a new fan.

WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN? ---- reviewed by Sissy Frank

Although at first somewhat confusing, the book *WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN?* by Clifford Simak proved to be a very thought-provoking piece of literature. The main idea of the story was the search for immortality, conducted by the Forever Center, an organization that puts people into a deep freeze upon their death. Thus, these people will supposedly be awakened in a better world. With this thought as their one concern, these people live a Spartan life so that they may invest their money in profitable ventures controlled by Forever Center. Therefore, when they are *born again*, they will be well-off financially. There is, however, one problem for Forever Center: there is a band of outcasts who are against the idea of a deep freeze and immortality. This group spreads propaganda denouncing Forever Center, and warning people of various things that can go wrong in deep freeze. This small group cannot cause nearly enough damage to Forever Center to shut it down, but it is effective in raising questions in the minds of some people, so Forever Center must try to eliminate the troublemakers.

While reflecting on this book, the thought suddenly struck me that this was very close to reality. The idea of a deep freeze, or cryogenics, is being developed right now. Whether or not it will lead to immortality is impossible to say, but the question arises: if cryogenics does become such a common practice that everyone can use it at anytime, what next?



art by Sheryl Birkhead

CITY ----- reviewed by Pat Shields

The book *CITY*, by Clifford D. Simak, is not your typical sf adventure story. Separated into eight tales, this detailed history of the future compels the reader to keep going in order to fit together the bits and pieces into a coherent whole. Each tale passes over several generations of the Webster family, upon which a good deal of attention is focused. This family is one full of problems, each one tougher than the last. In Simak's mind, the future holds in store everything from communicating dogs to a life of maximum pleasure on Jupiter.

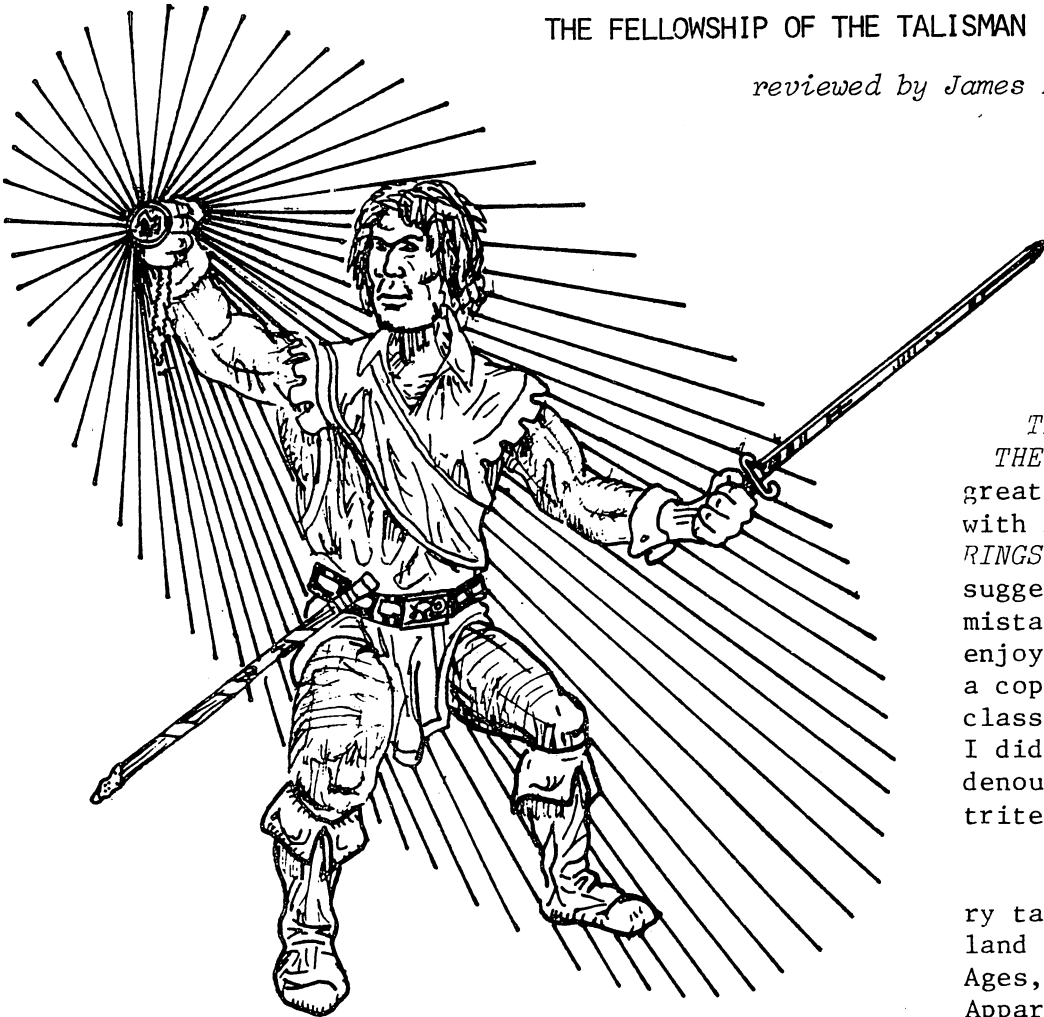
The first tale sees the earth no longer containing cities, for the family plane is a common thing. The Webster in this tale has the task of putting to good use a dead city, not as tough a thing to face as what the Webster in the second tale had to. Blamed for the loss of an unimaginable philosophy, Jerome Webster is caught in a trap that won't let him go.

In the following tales, the different generations of Websters encounter many tasks. One teaches dogs to communicate, and another is responsible for the discovery of "life at its fullest" on Jupiter. When the overwhelming majority of the population on Earth goes to live on Jupiter, still another Webster spends 20 years writing a history book that nobody will read. The later tales see animals as the main life on Earth, along with a few old robots. Naturally there is a Webster in the picture, but I wouldn't want to spoil your reading enjoyment.

One of the most popular writers in SF, Simak puts forth a good test of one's imagination in fitting together the ideas. Upon doing this, the reader can appreciate Simak's unique view of the future. It being my first 'real' SF book, I will surely read *CITY* again.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN -----

reviewed by James Fredrickson



from *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN*,
drawn by Colin Cheer

Although this book is only Simak's second fantasy novel, his experience in storytelling shows through.

When I first read *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN* I saw a great many parallels with *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*, as even the title suggests. But make no mistake, this is a very enjoyable book, and not a copy of the Tolkien classic. The only thing I didn't like was the denouement: it was too trite for me.

Basically, the story takes place in England during the Dark Ages, in the year 1970. Apparently the Renaissance never reached Europe and that continent still lay in ignorance. A manuscript is found in Northern England which appears to be a day-to-

day account of the life of Jesus Christ, written by an anonymous follower of His. If this document could be authenticated, it would be definite proof that Jesus really existed. The only problem is that the document is written in Aramaic, and the only person who could possibly authenticate it lives in the South of England at Oxenford. It is Duncan Standish's job to carry the document across the Desolate Lands to Oxenford. Duncan and his mismatched band of adventurers are under attack occasionally by the Horde of Harriers, an army of totally evil beings, somewhat like the Orcs in *LOTR*. Duncan makes it across the Desolate Lands but only with the help of the talisman, which he finds in a wizard's tomb. This Talisman protects the party against the more powerful members of the Horde, but not the foot-soldiers of the horde.

This book is an extremely entertaining novel for anyone, but fantasy fans should definitely add *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN* to their reading list.

The Cosmic Catch

by Mary "Maia" Cowan

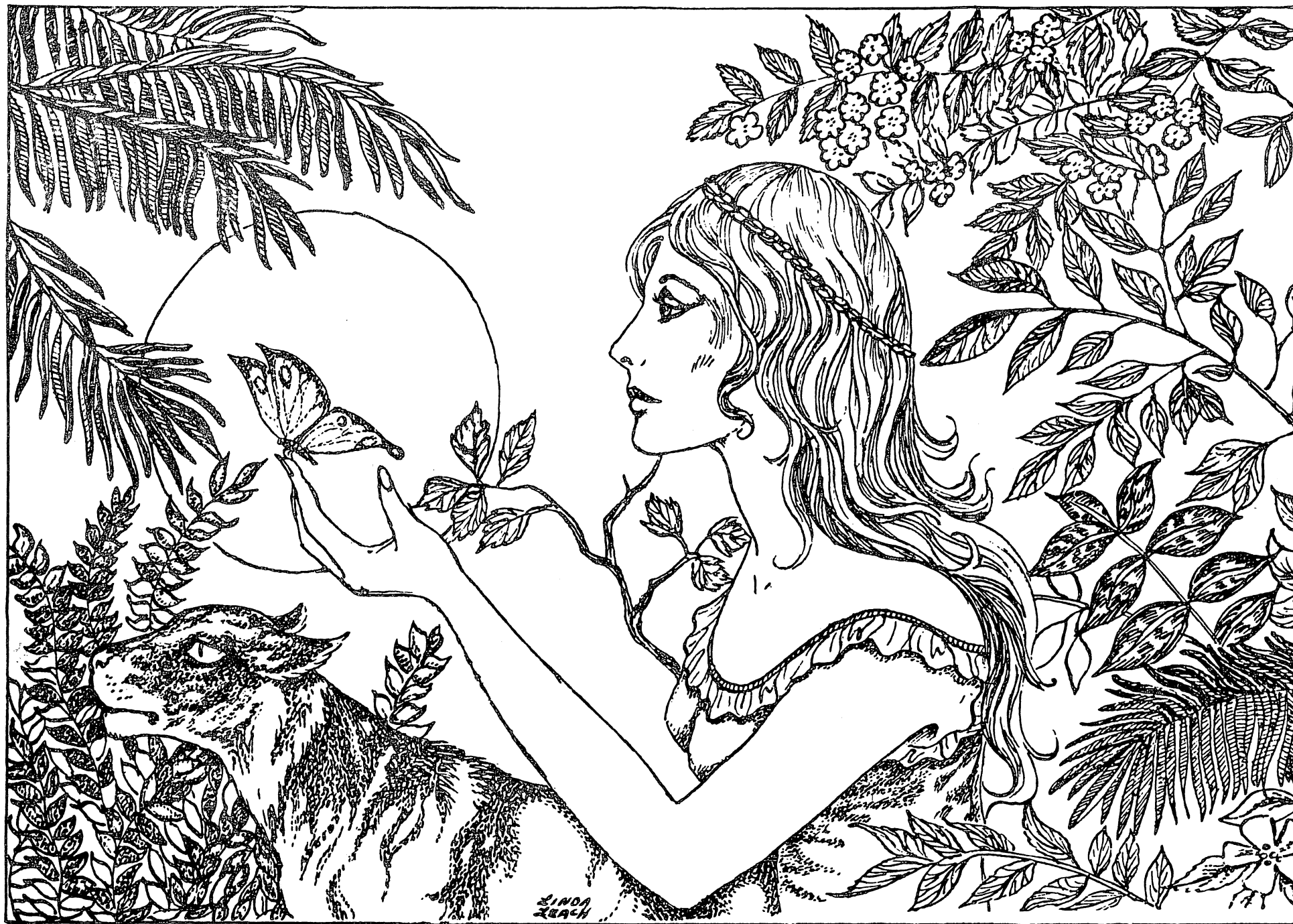
Throughout Clifford Simak's writings runs the theme that we can't get something for nothing. This theme is expressed in a number of ways, particularly in his short stories.

In several instances, a character attempts to cash in on a "get rich quick" scheme, only to get his come-uppance in the end. In "Dusty Zebra", Joe and his partner send cheap trinkets to another dimension in return for highly profitable dust-removers --until the unknown recipients of the dust send it back, all at once. The real estate broker in "Carbon Copy" goes along with a scheme to lease the same fifty houses over and over, only to learn that the plan was concocted by a bungling, practical-joking alien who commits suicide when his superiors discover the "joke"; even the fortune the broker salvages from the rental office turns out to be worthless twenty-thousand-dollar bills. The skunklike alien in "Operation Stinky" co-operates with the Air Force in transforming the mechanisms of its aircraft, but only long enough to acquire a ship suitable for the flight home. This last story, at least, contains a character who recognizes the dangers of such greed. When Asa discovers he has somehow acquired Stinky's transformational talent, he vows to keep silent about it: "With what rubbed off on me from being with Stinky all the time, I could make ((Asa's new car)) fly," he says. "But I won't. I ain't aiming to get treated the way Stinky was."

On a subtler level, everything in Simak's stories has a price. In "Death Scene", the ability to predict events twenty-four hours in advance has eliminated war, but it has also eliminated the pleasanter surprises of life; and it has required people to adjust to the sober reality of knowing exactly when they are going to die. Joe's friendship with the sentient plant of "Green Thumb" has ruined his appetite for vegetables and grains, an essential part of human diet, even while it has given him a greater awareness of the wonders of the universe. Luis of "Grotto of the Dancing Deer" is "blessed" with near-immortality, his life spanning at least 22,000 years, but has avoided accidental death only by becoming, in his words, "a skulking outcast". He has learned the principles of survival: "You keep a low profile. You don't stand out. You attract no attention to yourself. You cultivate a cowardly attitude. You are never brave. You take no risks. You let others do the dirty work. You never volunteer. You skulk and run and hide. You grow a skin that's thick; you don't give a damn what others think of you. You shed all your noble attributes, your social consciousness...." Luis is resigned to a life of loneliness and cowardice, because the risks of being known for what he is are too great.

On the other hand, characters who make a sacrifice always get something in return. Wallace Daniels, in "The Thing in the Stone", has suffered brain damage, but it somehow allows him to "see" and even to "visit" other times, and he seems to "hear" the stars; ultimately, he can communicate with the alien which has been exiled on Earth since primordial times. But this compensation itself has a price: the disorientation of suddenly finding himself in the distant past, or his neighbor's distrust of his peculiar behavior. "The Sitters" seem to have deprived their charges of the joys of childhood, but their early maturity gives them an understanding and courtesy that could be ample repayment. And in "All the Traps of Earth", the robot Robert Daniel becomes a homeless fugitive to avoid having his memories wiped. His journey on the outside of a starship gives him the ability to "see" both machines and humans as "diagrams" --and to repair their defects or cure human ailments. Even then, he must overcome his awe of humans, in order to help them.

Somehow, in a Simak story things never quite work out as expected. The



from *WAY STATION*, drawn by Linda Leach

protagonist of "The Ghost of a Model T" enjoys the nostalgia of his outing so much it takes him a while to realize that his companion died some time ago -- and so he, too, must be dead. In "Honorable Opponent", humans consider their alien antagonists as deadly enemies, only to discover the aliens were not fighting a war with them, but only playing a game at the end of which all "players" are returned unharmed. The "Idiot's Crusade" on which Jim embarks after gaining special powers from his alien "invader" has a noble purpose, to rid his town of evil behavior. But it also rids the town of cheerful thoughts, and the alien finds itself trapped in its host, unable to control or escape him. And in "Good Night, Mr. James", the double ensures his own survival by arranging the elimination of the original Mr. James, and only later learns his own "elimination" is ensured by a slow-acting poison.

Although these themes are more prominent in Simak's short fiction, they are all explored in his great novel, WAY STATION. Enoch Wallace is, to a small extent, compensated for the death of his parents and his loneliness by being chosen caretaker of the intergalactic Station. The marvels of the galaxy are his, but only because he can choose to give up much of his ties with Earth. He creates "shadow people" to keep him company, and only too late learns the price: "He had dabbled in a thing which he had not understood. And had, furthermore, committed a greater sin of thinking that he had understood. And the fact of the matter was that he had just barely understood enough to make the concept work, but had not understood enough to be aware of its consequences.... They hated him and resented him and he did not blame them, for he'd led them out and shown them the promised land of humanity and then had led them back."

The alien who stole the Talisman hopes to profit greatly by it, but the only "reward" it receives is death. And Lucy, deaf and mute, yet possesses gifts worth far more than speech. The aliens who meet her recognize this:

"She cannot speak," Ulysses said. "Nor hear. She has no communication."

"Compensation," said the Hazer."

"You think so?" asked Ulysses.

"I am sure of it."

As the world seems to edge closer to war, Wallace must decide whether peace is worth the drastic price of robbing humankind of its technical abilities. If by his inaction he allowed the Way Station to be closed, could he more easily give up the Galaxy for Earth's sake, or give up the Earth so as not to lose all that Galactic Central has given him? Any choice he makes is a great sacrifice.

The theft of the Talisman, though it creates a dangerous situation, has a thoroughly unexpected benefit. Lucy is drawn to it, and becomes the Sensitive that the galaxy has needed for so long. Instead of being in danger of ostracism because of its barbarism, Earth is now certain to become a member of the Galactic community. The price --of Lucy's deafness, of Wallace's sacrifices and torn loyalties-- has its reward.

PROJECT POPE, Simak's most recent novel, explores these same ideas. Tennyson's arrival on End of Nothing is entirely coincidental; he wanted only to escape a false murder charge. Jill, likewise, is interested not in the planet itself so much as in finding a good news story. Yet both soon come to think of the world as home, and find themselves closely involved in Vatican-17's purpose of discovering a universal religion --in spite of the veiled threat that they may be kept there against their will: The Vatican can only continue its work unimpeded if it remains in obscurity, supported only by ignorant pilgrims unaware of its true purpose. Soon after Tennyson's and Jill's arrival, Project Pope is thrown into turmoil by the possible discovery of an actual "Heaven", and the planet is split into two factions. One insists that the search for knowledge must continue, even if it threatens the official doctrines of Vatican-17; the other insists with equal vehemence that the survival of

faith is more important than the search for truth. For one view to prevail, the other must be sacrificed; they cannot co-exist. In the end, knowledge does win out over blind faith, and this victory creates the basis for a stronger, deeper faith, based on more than tradition and superstition.

This use in Simak's writings of irony and of "karma", if you will, is not only a statement of philosophy. It is skillful craftsmanship. The consequences of characters' actions are developed with subtlety. Not only are the characters themselves nonplussed, but the reader can enjoy both the surprises and the realism of the situations. Both Simak's characters, and his readers, are constantly confronted with the unexpected. If the characters are often the worse for it, at least for the readers the surprise is always a pleasant one.



from PROJECT POPE, by Herb Summerlin

BEAUTIFUL

EXAMPLE

Rob Chilson

The world, it is written, may be read in a single flower. Or, it is written, a suitably-trained individual may deduce the existence of Niagaras and Atlantics from a single drop of water, though having no previous knowledge of those kinds of things. But men may be somewhat more difficult to infer than worlds or wastes of water.

I have in mind a story by Clifford Simak which would, on the face of it, seem to epitomize the man's whole career. The story--which is highly recommended and to my knowledge not reprinted--is "*Horrible Example*". It appeared in the March, 1961, *ANALOG*.

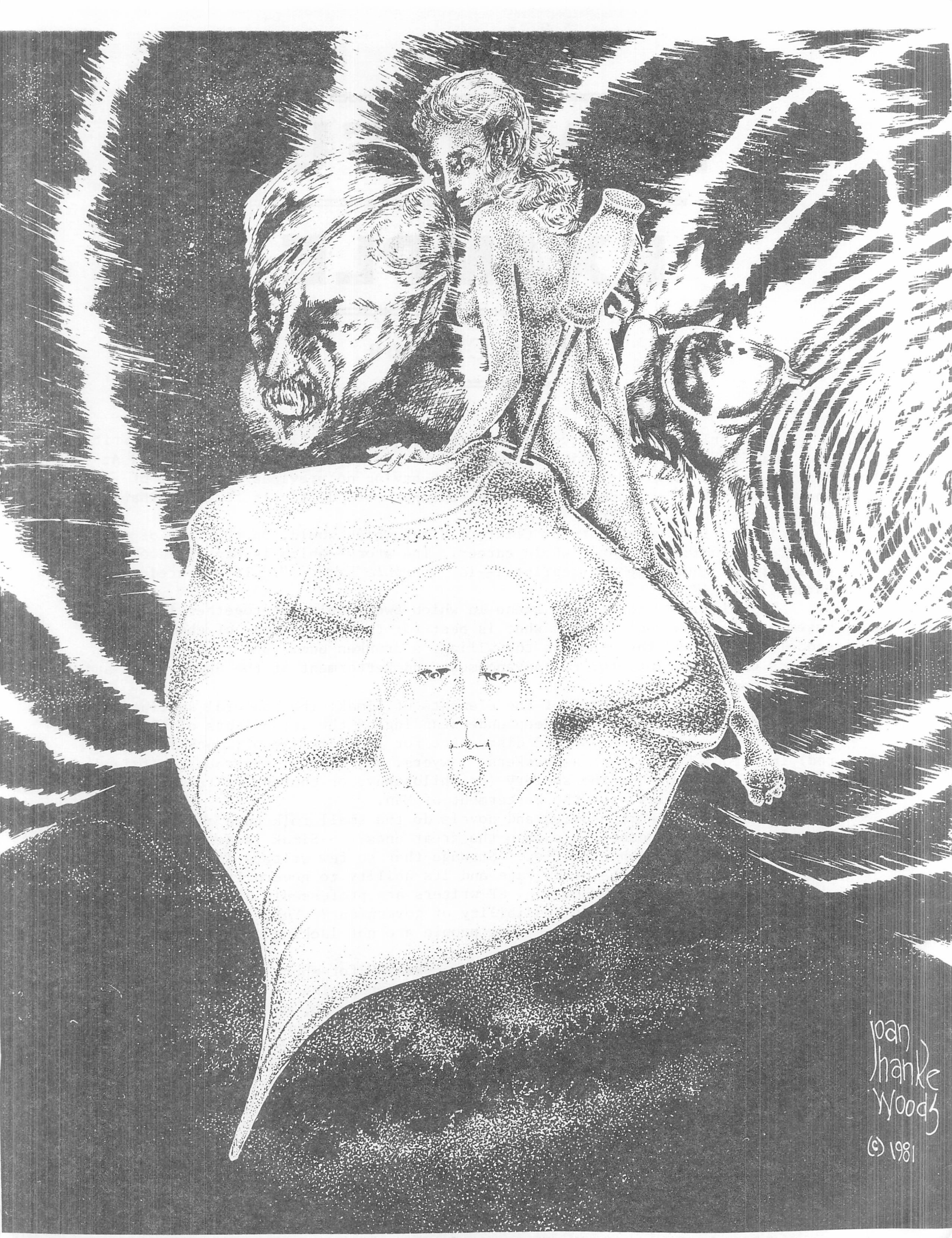
In this story there is a scene in which two people get together in the basement of the school to plot what is best for their town--one of them is the school janitor and the other is the village's drunken bum. But they two are members of the Society for the Advancement and Betterment of the Human Race--and one of them is a robot.

Here then you have most of the elements of Simak: the pastoral setting (a small town in this case); the deep understanding of the inhabitants of that (Midwestern) setting; the amused disrespect for (not dislike of, much less hatred) Important People such as bankers, lawyers, and mayors; the robot as friend and servant of Man; and the society (or philosophy, or church, or family, or other instrumentality) for the betterment of Man.

In how many short stories and novels do the small folk turn out to have a better grasp of the essentials than the great ones? --Simak is perhaps the premiere democrat of science fiction. Strange that so few writers in our genre share his feeling for the human race and its ability to govern itself; stranger still, when one considers how many SF writers are professedly liberal. Do only conservatives believe in the possibility of government? Yet, is it such an incredible idea, when you consider that people are not lacking in intelligence, nor are they all corrupt?

The "Society for the Advancement" etc.--SABHR for short--is a strange item, perhaps harder to believe in than a humanoid robot posing as a drunken bum to fill that niche in society, so that no human being do so, so that any such bum would be crowded out. Yet, it's not all that incredible when you think of it--especially if you're Midwestern. Chautauque is merely one of a long line of names devoted to uplift; most of the old magazines--*GODEY'S LADIES BOOK*, the original *LADIES HOME JOURNAL*; see *THE AMERICANIZATION OF EDWARD BOK* for details--were ostensibly for that purpose, and served it better than anyone now realizes. So if Simak believes in the possibility of the betterment of the human race, why, perhaps it's because he's *seen it done*.

We do progress, you know.



Joan
Hanke
Woody
© 1981

Slowly, it happens, so slowly a man has to look back over a sizeable section of a human life to make the comparison, but he can do it, and say, "Why, yes, in this way and that way we've gained ground. Of course we've lost a little here and a little there, things we'll miss--but some of which we can do without all right--but on the whole we have made gains."

And we have. Look back over the length of Simak's life--Moskowitz tells us he was born in 1904--and ask yourself if we have not. As recently as the mid-Forties, a joke collection by Bennet Cerf could contain (very bad) dialect jokes involving a character called Rastus. Simak was forty about then, and that was almost forty years ago.

For that matter, the practice of social security and welfare are younger than the writer. Incidentally, for the finest explication of what *should* be the theory of the welfare state, see Simak's *RING AROUND THE SUN*--the feudal-pastoral society the mutants set up on the alternate Earth. in which humans are to be educated and uplifted (that word, again!) to their greatest potential. But even our own crude system, degrading as it is, has at its root the noble concept that *none should be allowed to starve*.

And they shouldn't. But to say that flies in the face of attitudes common when Simak was young.

Then, too, in this quintessential short story, "*Horrible Example*," there is the fond humor of Simak. What could be fonder, when you think of it, or more characteristic, than that a bum and a janitor should pass on the upliftedness of their fellow citizens?

Have I, then, said all that's to be said about Simak? Need you merely read this story to understand him?

Not quite. There's "*Eternity Lost*," another inexplicably under-rated piece, a novelette this time. It's the story of how one of those Important People lied, cheated, and manipulated people for lifetime after lifetime, temporary rejuvenation after temporary rejuvenation, grasping for immortality--and how he lost it through one last grasp and because of the dirtiest trick of all. It's one of the *quietest* stories you'll ever read (it's in the *ASTOUNDING SF ANTHOLOGY*), but with a final gut-punch reminiscent of Kris Neville's great "*The Price of Simeryl*," which it predated by about twenty years.

And there's a story I remember from just one reading ("*Day of Truce*" in Frederik Pohl's *NIGHTMARE AGE*) about the character who fixed it so that the people who wanted to trespass on the lawn he was hired to defend would fall into a rattlesnake pit. The man may have an optimistic view of the human race, but it is not a blind one.

Still and all, "*Horrible Example*" does sum up the main current of Simak, and it does generously show us his essential concerns. But beautiful example though it may be of his work, it does not compress it all within its small, flowerlike scope. And that is perhaps the best measure of Simak as a writer--that no one story epitomizes him.

Rob writes: ...Simak has heavily shaped my view of future technology--and the man's not commonly thought of as a hard-tech writer. I especially refer to the gadgets sold in the Gadget Shops in *RING AROUND THE SUN*, and the solar houses, Forever cars, and so on. I have a (fictional) design for a cigarette lighter that would use no fuel, require neither wicks nor flint. The everlasting razor blade I find less interesting--I prefer techniques that eliminate the chore of shaving entirely. The everlasting cold light is obviously derived from electroluminescence. The Forever car, which was permanently lubricated --friction-free ...I once read an article on magnetic bearings that were friction free...trouble was that they had to be cooled by liquid helium for the superconducting magnets to maintain the levity fields needed, so the use was sharply limited. But granted room-temperature superconductors....

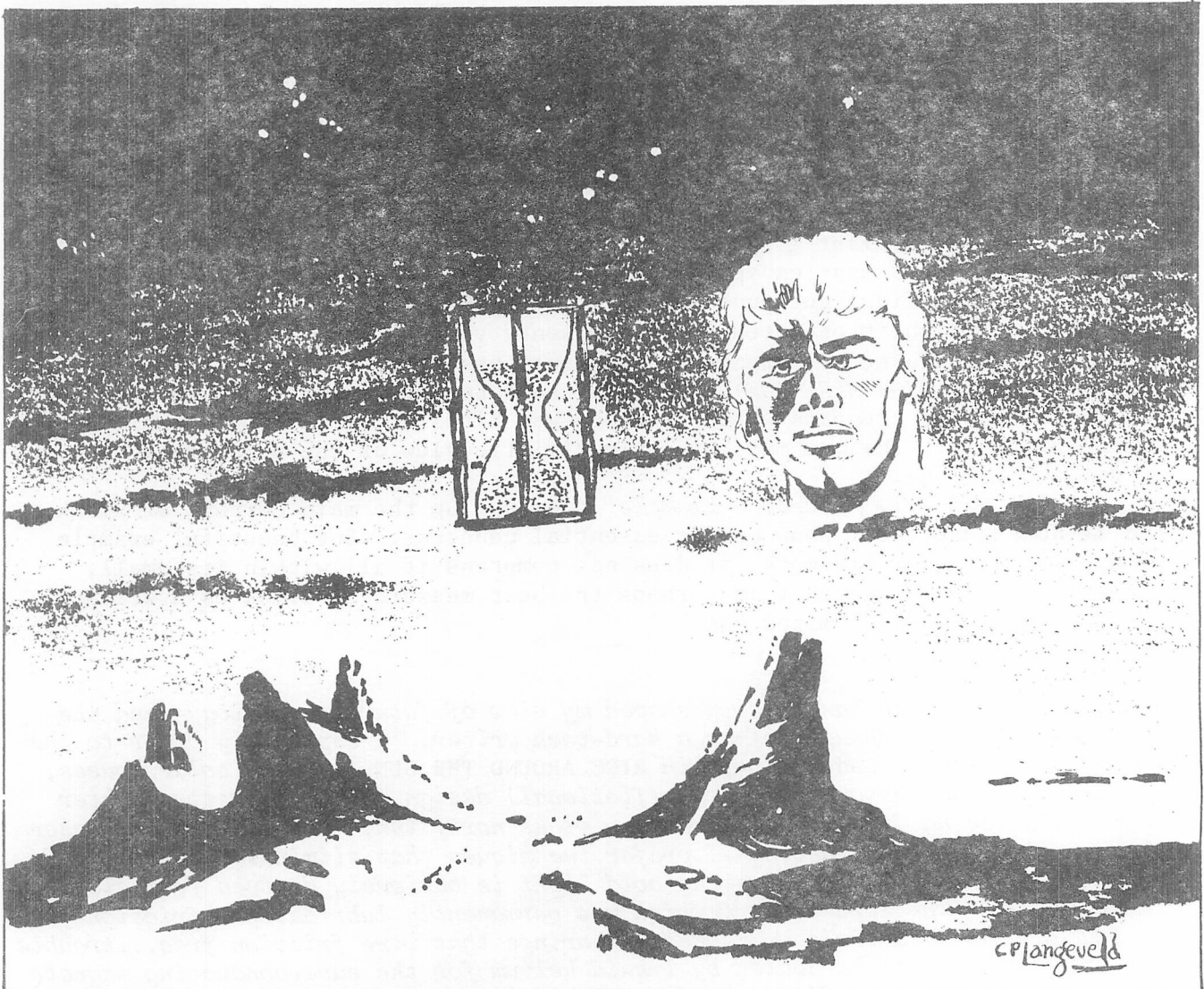
I Remember Cliff...

by James Gunn

I met Clifford Simak in a small bar of Chicago's Hotel Morrison, where the 1952 World Science Fiction Convention was being held. It was my first convention, although I had been writing science fiction for four years and seeing it published for three, and it held all the wonders of one's first convention: the readers, the editors, the writers--particularly the writers whose work had meant so much to me in the Thirties and Forties. I knew writers wrote stories--after all, I was one of them--but I had never thought of meeting these particular writers, and the whole experience had the feel of fantasy. And since it was all new to me, I assumed that everybody else was an old hand at it.

I had already met Jack Williamson. Now, in this little bar, perched on stools, Jack introduced me to Cliff, and I told him how much I had enjoyed his work--*COSMIC ENGINEERS*, "*Desertion*" and the other stories that would be collected into *CITY*, and the recent work in the new *GALAXY*, *TIME QUARRY* and "*Good Night, Mr. James*" --and he accepted the adulation with his customary modesty. He seemed much more interested in talking about what I was writing.

It wasn't until twenty years later that I learned it was Cliff's first convention, too.



from *TIME & AGAIN (TIME QUARRY)*, drawn by Colin Langeveld

"They would turn me back into a dog," Towser said to me one day in 1944, when I was thirteen and living on the edge of the New Jersey pine barrens in a town adequately described by Dante Alighieri. I sat there with the *AS-FOUNDING* in my lap, having turned the last page of Clifford D. Simak's "*Desertion*," and the tears of gratitude rolled out of my eyes and into my fists.

When we grow up and forget, we learn to penetrate beyond the core of things to the superficialities. We tend to evaluate writers on prose and general technique. Or at least I tend to, having sometimes lost sight of what it is a writer does. A writer, above all, speaks to people. "*Desertion*" is a pretty good story--a little old-fashioned with its kicker ending; a little mechanical, with its idea expressed didactically in dialogue rather than allowed to emerge indirectly through naturalistic action. Your usual professor of literature would call it contrived, and feel he had summed it up.

But your usual professor of literature tends to concentrate on something called literature, whereas readers experience something called reading. To read "*Desertion*" where I was....

Very likely, you know where I was. I was halfway toward the first objective in a life-plan cobbled together when I took sole charge of myself at the age of ten. The objective was to never live in Dorothy, New Jersey, the community in which the overwhelming majority of people over the millenia have felt virtuous. By the time I had carommed into 1944, my two constant inner companions were a gnawing doubt that any plan initiated by a ten-year-old was trustworthy and a chronic terror that my mind had already passed the point of eventual repairability. To read "*Desertion*" where I was, was no pretty good experience of entertainment ephemera. It was a crucial experience.

I had been reading other Simak before then, of course, and other writers who also seemed to know about the human condition insofar as I could grasp it. But "*Desertion*" put it all together. "And me," said Fowler, "back into a man."

Oh, yes. You see where that goes? Cliff was saying that aspiration is greater than mere shape of circumstance; so much greater that even someone who had attained being a man might transcend manhood willingly. That is, of course, an appraisal of even more nobility within a man than men usually get credit for. And one that redefines *manhood* beyond such circumstantial parameters as bodily configuration. The essential thing about a person, Simak said to me in that place where I crouched howling, is not so much intelligence, although that is the matrix in which all else is contained. The essential thing is the joyous response to earned freedom.

And there he was, Clifford D. Simak, he no more or less than a byline to me, 40 years old in Minneapolis, as it happens, and I trusted that he was alive and I would someday be alive.

by

Algis Budrys

BROTHERHOOD

When I write, I think perhaps I write for the fifty of me, one for each of the years past, and then the cousins--one for each month--and the second cousins, 52 to the year; somewhere there in that proliferated hive of persons is someone very much like you, I think. Many of us, probably, very much like you. But in a way, writing to all of us since 1944 is also writing to Cliff Simak, because something of his has conditioned something of me ever since.

Now, I don't know if you consider that a net profit to the world. But I consider it a profit to me. And, you know, when I re-read "*Desertion*" just a few minutes ago, it wasn't such a bad piece of technique at all, either. In fact, it's pretty good indeed, and I recommend its study to people who are interested in making writing effective. But I recommend Cliff Simak to me. And if you, having embarked on one of the (not entirely) solitary journeys in this world, would like to know whether it is possible to get off different from the way you were when you got on, I recommend Cliff Simak to you. He can be trusted.

A BRIEF NOTE ON SIMAKTIVITY -----

My personal contact with Clifford Simak came about during WWII when I spent a brief vacation in Minneapolis. He invited me to his home for dinner, drove me over to inspect Minnehaha Falls, and the time we spent together still looms large in my memory. Since then, although we've met at several conventions, I've had to content myself with the continuing companionship of his written work. Like many thousands of his deservedly-admiring fans, I find this to be most rewarding and a constant source of pleasure.

For Simak's writing reflects the man; warm, wise, witty, and a joy to know.

You've given us a half-century of pleasure, Cliff--but remember, one good turn deserves another. So, please, won't you stick around for another fifty years?

-- Robert Bloch

Once upon a time, I discovered science fiction. I was a professional writer looking for new markets, and I happened upon this one. I read several million words in the next couple of years in a concentrated effort aimed at finding out as quickly as possible what science fiction was and what its writers had done, and were doing with it.

All of the contemporary writers' names were unfamiliar. Since they meant nothing at all to me, and since my aim was instant familiarity with the entire scope of science fiction, for a long time I paid little attention to them. I simply tried to read everything I could lay my hands on. As a result of that spate of reading, I accumulated a vast memory of stories and plots totally unattached to any author.

Many years later, I had occasion to reread an enormous amount of that material I had covered in the beginning. The truly memorable stories were still remembered. Each time I happened onto one of them, it was like a joyful encounter with a long-lost friend.

A remarkable number of those memorable stories turned out to have been written by Clifford Simak. By that time I knew both the man and his work, and I found nothing at all surprising in the discovery that those long-remembered stories were his. Rather, there was a feeling of chagrin for not having thought of it sooner. "Of course! This has to be by Simak! Who else could have done it?"

Memorable stories by a memorable man.

Salut, Cliff! Thanks from all of us.

Simak Remembered

by John K. H. Brunner

In those days SF was very hard to find in Britain; one had to tramp long distances down obscure back streets in search of shops which reportedly kept the stuff in stock.

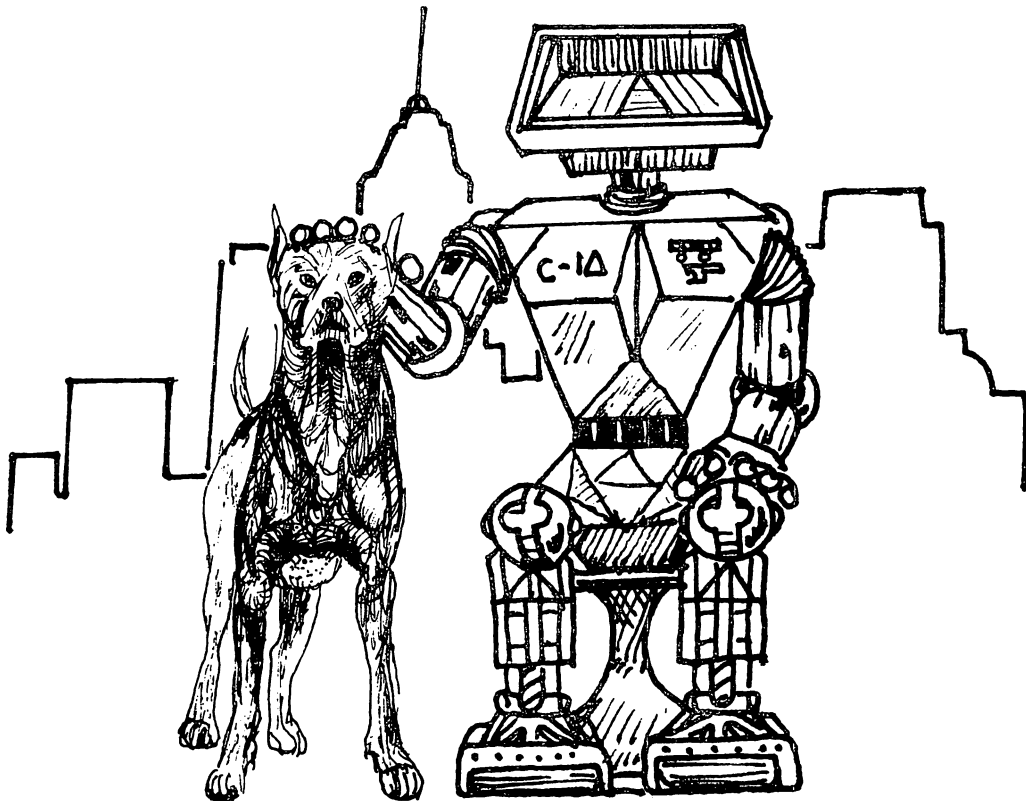
One day in Reading: treasure trove! A BRE *ASTOUNDING*! With a blue cover showing a robot holding a bow, and some dogs sitting around. I bought it instantly, and read most of it on the bus before I got home.

That was how I first made the acquaintance of *Jenkins*, Cliff Simak's robot hero of the stories which appeared in volume form as *CITY*.

It taught me to look out for more of his work, and by bit I found it. I was enormously impressed with *TIME QUARRY* when it ran as a serial in the early *GALAXY*; I was surprised but pleased to discover yet another *CITY* story (the last, I believe) in a pulp-sized *AMAZING STORIES*; and eventually, when I started attending SF cons in the United States, I actually made his acquaintance and was able to tell him that while I could never get on with the Lensmen or Arcot, Wade and Morey, I had thoroughly enjoyed *COSMIC ENGINEERS* and thought it was probably the only book of that type from that period which would stand the test of time.

For a man whose mind roams as far as his, it's paradoxical that his heart is so firmly fixed in one place: that location which appears in story after story where a man can sit and rock on the back porch, smoking a favourite pipe and watching the sun go down. But it's good to be able to make extremes meet, to invent the cobbly worlds and the *RING AROUND THE SUN* and not get lost among them, to realize that your "*Big Front Yard*" is, it too, a part of the universal scheme.

He's been a part of mine for quite a while now. May he long remain so.



from *CITY*, drawn by Colin Cheer

When I started meeting science fiction writers, after years of reading them, I was struck by how different many of them were from the mental pictures I had formed from their works.

But not all. One of my favorite examples of a writer who is very much like his works is Clifford D. Simak. By the time I met Cliff, I had quit trying to picture authors in advance, because I was so often wrong. But it didn't take long to realize that this was exactly the sort of man I would have expected to write stories like *WAY STATION*, *CITY*, and "*The Big Front Yard*."

Which is high praise, indeed.

Cliff doesn't travel much, for his own good reasons, so I made a special effort to attend *CONCLAVE I*, in Ypsilanti, Michigan, to which someone had managed to entice him as the Guest of Honor. There was a conference for high school teachers and students in conjunction with the convention, and I remember doing a panel with Cliff, Dean McLaughlin, Lloyd Biggle, Joan Hunter Holly, and Jim Gunn. In introducing the panel, Lloyd mentioned that there were ten college degrees among the six of us, including two Ph.D.'s -- but possibly the best educated of the lot, and certainly one the rest of us felt privileged to share a platform with, was the only one with *no* degrees, namely Cliff. What I remember most about that weekend is long, quiet but invigorating talks with him and the others around the Eastern Michigan University Student Union, and late Friday afternoon out at Jim McConnell's house.

I so enjoyed Cliff's company at that one that the chance to see him again finally motivated me to make it to a *MINICON*. (I'll do it again someday; it's a good convention.) He was pretty busy at that one, too, but even so he somehow found time for at least an hour of quiet, relaxed conversation, just the two of us, in the hotel lobby. From an introduction, either to his GoH speech or to some other special talk at one of those cons, I recall the words "a compassionate writer" and "a gentleman" -- an excellent six-word summary.

To those six words, add "modest" and "professional."

When I bought *THE VISITORS* for *ANALOG*, after too long an absence from that magazine's pages, there was a passage of one or two paragraphs where my back-of-the-envelope calculations suggested that the physics of an incident could not be quite as one of the characters described it. With some trepidation, I suggested to Cliff that he re-check his figures so we could determine which of us was right before the readers did, and revise if necessary.

His reply? The gist of it was, "I don't really feel that much at home with the physics, so would you mind terribly doing the rewriting yourself? I give you *carte blanche* to do what is needed. I'll try it myself if you want, but I think it would be simpler for us both if you do it."

Well, I usually prefer to let authors do their own rewriting, and I'm confident Cliff would have done just fine; and I had to confess I felt a little queasy about rewriting somebody who was writing classics before I was even imagined. But if that was what he preferred, I'd do it. I hope I didn't do too badly.

Reader opinion on that story was oddly divided -- many liked it, but some complained that it ended too soon. Personally, I think it wrapped up a sufficiently self-contained block of action --but I would still like to read the sequel. However, Cliff doesn't generally

A
CDS

HOMECOMING

by Stanley Schmidt

write sequels -- he's afraid they won't be as good as the originals (a fear which perhaps more authors should share) --so I don't know that I'll ever get the chance.

Last year we published a new, very Simakian short story, "*Grotto of the Dancing Deer*," which not only won our own *AnLab* poll for the year, but showed up on the final ballots for both the Hugo and the Nebula. Since it was on the ballot, I hoped I could persuade Cliff to join us at the Davis table at the Nebula Awards Banquet in April, 1981. I called him up and asked him, and he said that he very much appreciated the invitation but thought that trips to both New York and Denver in one year might be too much.

"But Cliff," I said, "what if you win?"

"Oh," he said, "I don't think there's much chance of that."

I don't think it was more than an hour later that Peter Pautz called to tell me that Cliff *had* won, and to ask me to do whatever I could to persuade him to come -- up to and including spilling *the beans*. "I've always wanted to meet that man," Peter told me. "*WAY STATION* brought my wife and me together."

So I called Cliff back and asked him if the knowledge that "*Grotto of the Dancing Deer*" had won might affect his decision. He allowed as how it might -- but then he mused, "Am I really entitled to another one, after the Grand Master? And I haven't been going to the banquets. Won't it look like I just came in anticipation of winning?"

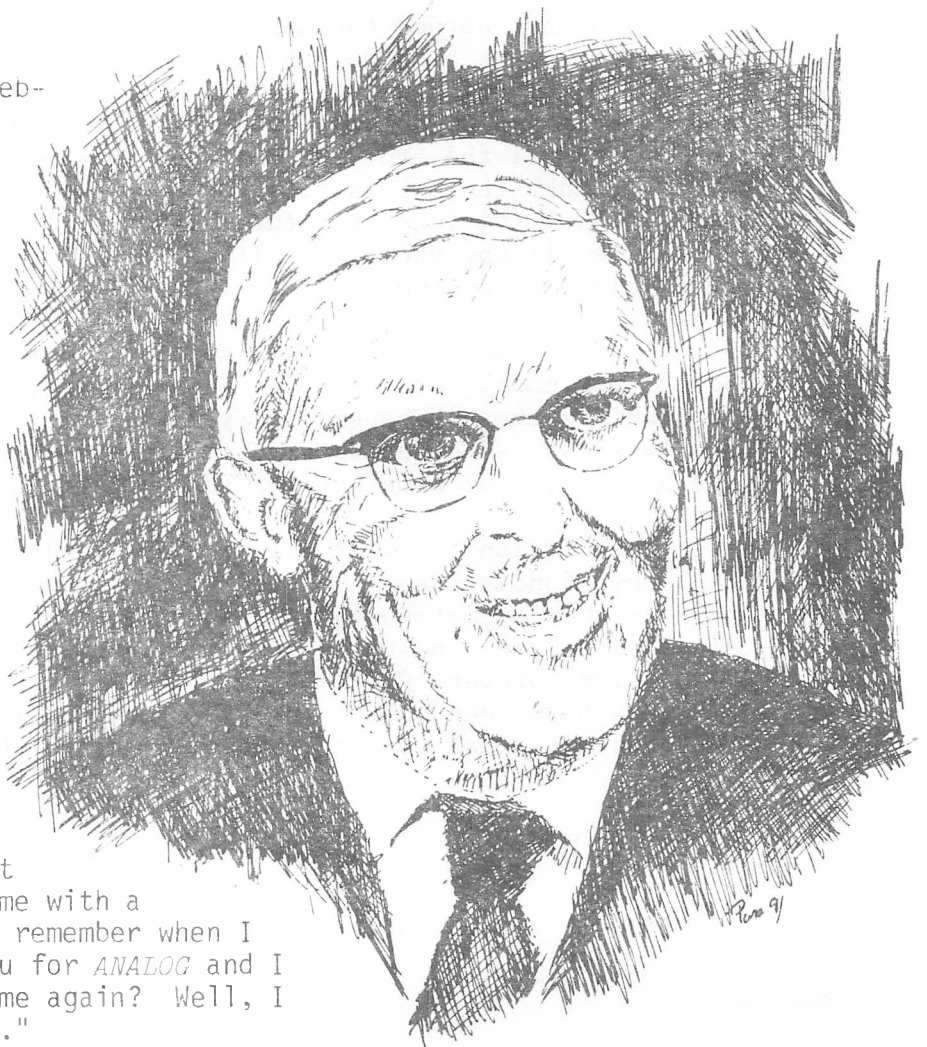
"Cliff," I said, "you're just too modest. You won it fair and square. Now come and get it!"

He Came.

The night before the Nebula Banquet, Davis Publications had its own little dinner, in belated celebration of *ASTOUNDING/ANALOG's* Fiftieth Anniversary, for some of those people most prominently associated with those fifty years. It was planned a bit late, and not everybody we'd hoped to have there was able to come. But Cliff was there, and Ray and Bertha Gallun, and the Asimovs and the delReys and the DeCamps and George O. Smith and Harry Harrison and Jim Gunn and Vincent di Fate and Milton Rothman and Katherine MacLean..

It was a very pleasant evening and at one point during it Cliff came up to me with a big smile and said, "Do you remember when I sold that first story to you for *ANALOG* and I said it felt like coming home again? Well, I feel that way again tonight."

Welcome home, Cliff. If anybody belongs here, you do.



Cliff Simak, by Pamela Whitlark

CLIFF SIMAK:

GRAND MASTER

I've admired Cliff Simak's work at least since the galactic dazzle of *THE COSMIC ENGINEERS*. Ever since our first personal meeting, which seems almost as long ago, I have admired Cliff himself even more. Perhaps the best way to express what I feel is to reprint the letter I wrote to be read at the 1977 Nebula Awards Banquet, when the Science Fiction Writers of America honored the man and his lifetime achievements in science fiction with the Grand Master Nebula.

Dear Cliff:

I'm completely delighted that you are getting the Grand Master Nebula. I wish I could have been there to see you receive it, but with Commencement coming up in early May I am involved in too many academic emergencies.

You have earned the Nebula well. Looking back across your career, I see more high points than I can mention. I recall *THE COSMIC ENGINEERS*, in which you turned John Campbell's sort of super-science space opera into something even more thrilling.

I recall the stories about the Webster family which you combined to make the *CITY* series--one of the most memorable and most moving of all visions of future history.

I recall the special spell of *THE TIME QUARRY*, a master work that helped Horace Gold lead science fiction in another exciting new direction.

I recall many fine novels since, all of them notable for character, for mood, for a glow of good feeling. Your great achievement, I think, is the humane emotion you put into your work. If literature really shows us better ways to feel about ourselves and our world, you have given us fine ways of feeling about our future and our universe.

Yet it isn't any or all of those wonderful stories that I recall most fondly when I look back. It's the occasions -- too few of them -- when we met quietly in a hotel room at some convention to sip good whiskey and talk about the things that matter.

Live forever, Cliff!

You have been one of the great makers of science fiction because you are what you are. The man shines through. Keep shining!

With love,

Jack Williamson

April 19, 1977

Clifford D. Simak:

An Impersonal

Reminiscence

by John Thiel

Writes JohnThiel: "... I put everything I know about Clifford Simak into this one. I contacted him once about CITY and some problems it was causing, and I know him from that. He was a warm, friendly, and affectionate person, doubtless still is...." I've read this through several times, scratching my head afterwards, more bewildered with each reading. All I can say is to take this with a pound or so of salt.

Clifford D. Simak once got up from his birthday table with the remark, "The cake, the presents, the jello, and, what's this, the wine, all of it reeks. I would never have a birthday if it be my druthers. As for the kinsfolk gathering 'round, telling me I'm a better author than Jack Williamson, and in other ways uttering distractions, that's their lookout; I don't disdain the honors they are trying to pay, but I'd as soon set off on the porch."

Such a man was Simak. a person whose outlook it was difficult to get a proper grasp of. He'd keep to himself long hours, disdain all that was not within his realm of thought, whatever it happened to be for that day, and when prevailed upon by editors for manuscripts, he would delay them with a subtlety about, "Not right now, but velleicht RealSoonNow--gotcha!"

But *GALAXY* would always think twice before turning away a Clifford D. Simak manuscript. They're just the guys that pubbed "*Project Mastodon*," that's all. They would see some worth in it; they understood what his project was, so to speak. They used *dulce* and *decorum*, and although Gold was slow to use the stories for *CITY*, these went to Campbell or someone.

Clifford opens up vistas untrodden. One of his stories takes place in a figurative land in outer space; another on the surface of a shiny round asteroid-sized ball in space (a motif which is not entirely absent from *STAR WARS*). He earns a lot of money from writing sf, and when the inflation hit, they found out that's not the only way he earns it.

I once interviewed the man. Unfortunately the results got rather waterlogged when I had no zine to pub them in and had to store the interview (then in manuscript form) in the garage, and something else happened to blur the type when a Hugo was given out there to someone, but I do have fragments of it left, needless to say valuable ones, for sentimental reasons if no other. Here is Simak in what I consider much of his garrulous glory:

ED: Most sf writers can write you off the wall.

SIMAK: I can write them off my income tax, sometimes...heh, where do they get it published? Much of it was in *SF+*, and in *SCIENCE FICTION DIGEST*, *SATURN*, *ORBIT*, a slick that was around for awhile. Now it takes a team of them to get into *ALGOL*. But my latest books are just coming out...spend much of my time hobnobbing with Frank Herbert, and I would with Samuel Delany, too, if I liked him. You can roll those other sf writers right up into one Jesus big ball of wax...wouldn't know how to refine water out of cotton if they was in the field. Those shit-blame authors you mention couldn't strike a spark off me.

ED: I just said it to get you mad, you know, to see what the reaction would be. Besides, who are those other authors anyway? I can see that they are...but what about the name William Golding? *LORD OF THE FLIES**THE INHERITORS*....

SIMAK: He rprobably wrote *BOYS AND GIRLS TOGETHER*, too, if the title is any indication. I read the titles mostly and the little copyright marks. I've written a satire on it called *BORED OF THE FLIES*, but I don't know if I should publish. Hell, I'm in a fan-hole, and I'm a pro. I'd like to write a satire on everything, but I don't write satire as well as I write sf. Sorry 'bout that right there.

ED: Nothing to be sorry about except the impression you're making, and I've heard worse...what's this? I'm hardly a "dummy on the line" if you want to know the honest truth. That's all I could be for you if you want that crummy profanity to make sense. Print this later in a Slanzine, no comment added.

SIMAK: I doubt our abuse is registering for what it's worth. We seem to come from different societies. If we're not to be amalgamated into some cosmic, universal whope, I'd continue to maintain that there's some instructional worth to what I said, or if not instructional, substitute the word "firs."

ED: "Fire-worth." Sounds like a tire company.

SIMAK: Eva Firestone, huh? Very good, veeerrry goood--*right when you're not looking!*

ED: I don't see where that would matter much to me. Besides, you're wrong in your opinion that it's intended to bring harm to you...

SIMAK: No I'm not, sonny...

ED: Hell, I've got a big head, let's get back to something you wrote...*THE ASS OF NORWAY*.

SIMAK: That's just some remarks about a time I got mad. Happened to be logistically closer to Norway than anywhere else...of course I'd just read my Martin Gardner.

That's all of the interview that remains. I think my next remark was something about just whipping his Martian gardener, but I don't remember what he said after that. However, let's get into the real meat on this essay, a little analysis of Simak the writer.

A typical Simak plot might go something like this:

A group of beings, formerly humans, involute themselves through a gradual erosion process of incomprehensible rules, and after a battle with people from Florida, they become strange Water Beings who claim to be inside people's stomachs, where they are dissolving the linings of the stomach walls. Some scientists maintain radio contact with them, and much of Simak's commentary is about how this is done, what frequencies are used, etc. Finally they attack some people from Barcelona, who are notable in that they do not resent being attacked, but never give up either. Simak indicates that this situation is likely to go on for an eternity, or until someone does something about it, which is unlikely. That's the end of the story, except for the reader's reaction.

He gets this published about the same way he writes it...in fact, life is

a sort of continuity for Clifford D. Simak. I think that one was called *EVOLUTIONARY EXPEDIENT*, or something like that. Hell, he didn't know what to call it, until he found the right words for the title. What about *THE MOEBIUS RESEARCH* that was in *MADGE*? That's where Edmond Hamilton used to be published so much. And, if you'll notice, *MADGE* is right there where Edmond has gone. I'm always surprised that the magazine was not of higher quality. *TOFFEE FIRST* was about the best thing it ever printed.

An alliterative title was created by Clifford D. Simak, *COFFEE SHIRT*, a story about a unique character that drew from Sam Goldwyn, or one of the sf-editing Sams, the comment, "It's the only story I've ever seen with a complaint in the title," at which remark Isaac Asimov raised an eyebrow and uttered the memorable *bon mot*, "About editors???"

Anyway, the point about the story is that it only had three rings, which was what Simak believed Saturn only had. "That's all I'd give the editors of it too," Simak quipped.

Simak portrays a peculiarly dormant culture which never seems to explode or even ignite. You could set something like that off with every chain-reaction you know about, and have plenty of room for your other ideas. In fact, one of Simak's stories concerns people using magic instead of technique or official, intellectual intervention, and it turns out successfully for them, so I suppose it would work for other people too, assuming they were not transgressors by doing so. "It works best when the chips are down; in fact, it's the only thing that works," Simak seems to be saying, adding to our glossaries the principle, "What you have left after something like this just happens to work best." It's a stupid principle in that if there were any thinkers around, the situation wouldn't be occurring and the principle itself would be unnecessary--a sort of definition of imaginary worlds (where people live, you know--the wee folk).

He has a nice gem (and is presumably being sued by Pohl) about everyone who writes sf being attacked by the public--it seems they read and write crazy stuff --and they all get locked away in insane asylums. That's the end of the story, too, except Simak's haunting cadence about how could he be writing stories he were there too? It reminds me of Fredric Brown's *MARTION'S GO HOME* with a little reworking. I like the way that Simak makes it clear that there are only a few instances of it at first, and then blooey, it's everyone. With a little expansion and research, he could have the working basis for a good partial end-of-the-world story there, and stand with John Christopher and Jack ("End of a Society") Finney. As a subtlety, a lot of the participants are sf readers who have been rejected, a common enough occurrence, by everything that's fannish--they give a lot of useful information and indeed, might be the leaders of it --it's a problem that Simak never clears up. Anyway, the curses incurred by fantasy writers hit them in about the middle of the story and provide the milieu. Simak here shows a thoroughgoing knowledge of social structuring that is not particularly relevant, due to the lack of practical experience of talking with people who are real. It ends with a description of what a beautiful machine it is and a drawing of what a dollar bill looks like.

So much for Simak the writer. It's a pleasure to write a tribute to the man. He makes it easy..his stories are just write for typing over to get the natural rhythms of being a writer. So my recommendation is to give him a big hand if he comes out like in a Judith Merrill, Richard Matheson, Ray Bradbury, or Lewis Padgett story.

CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

My own knowledge of Clifford Simak, the man and the writer, is mostly by way of his stories. Long ago--and I mean like 40 years--he wrote me a letter, in which he quoted a famous poet; I replied, presumably quoting myself. But I cannot remember what either of us said.

I think it was an attempt on his part to say hello; and I'm glad he made the effort. But the truth is most writers are poor communicators on the level of correspondence; in those days I was always too busy trying to make a living at one cent a word.

For me, he became--or already was--one of the familiar top science fiction names; and many of his stories remain in my memory. Naturally, I found the *CITY* series delightful, as did just about everyone else. But it was the earlier *COSMIC ENGINEERS* that was the real beginning of admiration for me, as I recall it.

In July, 1979, at a computer convention in Nice, France, I discovered that the Sperry-Univac computer people, who have a plant in Minnesota, had made a point of being on a friendly basis with Simak. I'm going to deduce that this was partly as a result of his having been, and being, a journalist--a career that, in a way, I envy. It gave him a more rounded existence as a human being. He was automatically less withdrawn, had more contacts, and a wider range of movement. Also he had a continuing job requirement to stay abreast of scientific developments.

He seems, also, to have found a natural way of living long; whereas I'm having to work at it.

Although in recent years I have read mostly for information, and have not, accordingly, read a great deal of science fiction, I have made it a point of reading the beginnings of books and stories. And thus I have my impression of Simak writing his special brand of ideas and describing his small town characters--presumably from the Minnesota countryside that he knows so well.

All in all, his has been a satisfying life--as seen from afar--an extraordinary person and writer.

by A. E. Van Vogt

SO BRIGHT THE VISION

On the Work of Clifford D Simak

by Greg Hills

There is no time I can now recall when I have not read Simak. I must have started some time, but it now seems he is a writer whose work has always been with me. It gives me considerable pleasure, then, to expand this article (which first appeared in the March 1980 TIGHTBEAM) for Lan's Simak issue of LAN'S LANTERN. The article derives from a letter by one John DiPrete which was printed in the September 1979 TIGHTBEAM, and the particular statement I picked on was as follows: "The Grand Master of SF seems to have a bone to pick with technology...(his novels) fall mostly into the 'wilderness versus city' category..." I disagree with this, and the article is therefore mainly a refutation of it as well as a discussion of Simak's work.

I have a medium-sized collection of Simak (it has grown a bit since this article was originally written), but I believe it spans the major axes of his writings, and it is the only easy reference I have. So I'll restrict bibliographic material to the components of my collection.

Simak's first published story appeared in 1931. In the time since then, he has developed a very clear and distinguished style. His characters tend to be country-loving and (unless they are the villains) reasonable. They think before they speak, and say less than they thought. Pacing generally feels slow, though I for one have never grown bored while reading even the longest of his novels; the characters therefore have plenty of room in which to hunker down and 'chew the fat'. I think it is this very aspect, and Simak's all-too-obvious abhorrence of gadgets for the sake of gadgets that may have led John to think Simak dislikes technology.

The truth is more complex. As one example, take the situation in the short story, "City", where the robot lawn-mower is lumped with the lot of the villains (such as they are) yet the private plane is hailed as the advance that allows people to resume the country life in comfort. Or throughout the collection CITY itself, where Jenkins the robotler is a vital character for good---yet is a dauntless and remorseless foe of attempts to mechanize the world of the Dogs. And note that Dogs are given personal robots to attend to their grooming, et cetera.

In fact, one aspect to this reality is that Simak is neither pro nor con technology. He is instead arguing for the traditional Western rural humanity and quality of life, backed by as much hard science and engineering as the situation will bear. He very carefully pans the 'noble savage' and the type of country gentleman who lives alone in a big house with one or two handservants as the sole means of support. In point of fact, wherever Simak writes a rural gentleman into the tale, that person is clearly shown as living well mainly through the toil of the robots he owns and the technology behind them.

Except for atomic bombs and the like, technology in Simak's worlds is not depicted as bad within itself. There are only bad users of technology. The robot lawn-mower in "City" is bad only because Gramp himself is a lazy bod, fully capable of mowing his own lawn. Had Gramp been an invalid, without other means of getting the mowing done, it is quite within reason that the lawn-mower would have been shown to be a benign device.

In COSMIC ENGINEERS we find Simak at one end of a range of his writing. Technology is the key to a sedate, godlike existence that Mankind must yet work to earn, since until we have striven for it, the technology would let us undo ourselves. COSMIC ENGINEERS is pure Space Opera, and even though I am a



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follower of the 'Doc' Smith school, parts of it made me squirm. Yet even here Simak's attitudes come through, his opinions undiluted.

COSMIC ENGINEER's characterization is shallow, but often adequate (equally often, alas, it is threadbare); the style is unrecognizable; and yet, the book is uniquely Simak in execution. Someday I'll write an article to clear for myself the exact trends which show in it, pointing towards the future writer.

In CEMETARY WORLD we come to the other end of this range, where the scenario--Earth, turned into a gigantic shrine/mausoleum/burial-ground--is merely the screen against which the characters play. And the style--well, let Simak tell you:

I watched him amble down the slope and go into the house. The sun was warm on my back and I knew that I should get down off the fence and move around a bit or find something I should do. I must look silly, I thought, perched on the fence, and I felt a sense of guilt at not having anything to do nor wanting anything to do. But I felt a strange disinclination to do anything at all. It was the first time in my life I'd not had things piled up and waiting to be done. And, I found, with some disgust, that I enjoyed it. (CEMETARY WORLD, p.79, Magnum Paperback)

I think that this quote shows several aspects of Simak's work. First, he is not a master of prose. Note the too-similar repetitions. Yet this sort of redundancy is a part of Simak's style. His descriptions tend to nibble at something from all angles, in slightly different ways each time. The character feels he should be doing something, yet neither has anything to do, nor the inclination to do it. How many of us can recall just such feelings when sitting around in a hotel or lying on a beach while on holiday? In one paragraph we are given a feel for the character, his thought patterns (he is oriented toward the practical and does not like to leave anything uncompleted), his attitudes (such as vague repulsion-attraction to the idea of total indolence), his upbringing--even his history (this is his first exposure to the state of having nothing 'piled up and waiting').

Thus the second aspect, that of characterization. Simak takes great care with his characters. They are living entities. They are consistent with themselves, and where one steps out of the role designed for them, it is because such breaking of the bonds is consistent with that character's persona. Human beings are a contradictory lot, and Simak's skill in characterization consists of bringing out this feature without destroying the reader's credulity toward the character. Many modern writers--such as Herbert or Cherryh--have problems with this. They have not mastered the art. They concentrate so intently on making their characters fit their cultures that they fail to make them into living personalities. If Muad'dib or Maelin stepped out of their cultural masks and did something on impulse--not to further the storyline--it would crack them completely. They are too controlled. They do not convince me that they are real. Simak, while no shakes with realistic aliens, cannot easily make an unbelievable character. Thus, on a walk, a character is quite likely to take a swerve from the path he/she wants, for no clearly shaped reason, and nothing nasty or plot-advancing will happen to them.

Daniel Frost stood on the pavement and watched the lights of Ann Harrison's car go down the street until it turned a corner and disappeared from sight.

Then he turned and started up the worn stone steps that led back to the apartment building. But halfway up he hesitated

((Art from CEMETARY WORLD, drawn by Herb Summerlin))

and then turned about and walked down the steps to the street again.

It was too nice a night, he told himself, to go back into his room. But even as he told it to himself, he knew that it was not the beauty of the night, for here, in this ramshackle neighborhood, there was nothing that held any claim to beauty. It was not, he knew, the attractiveness of the night that had turned him back, but strange reluctance to go back into his room.... (WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN?, pp. 71-2)

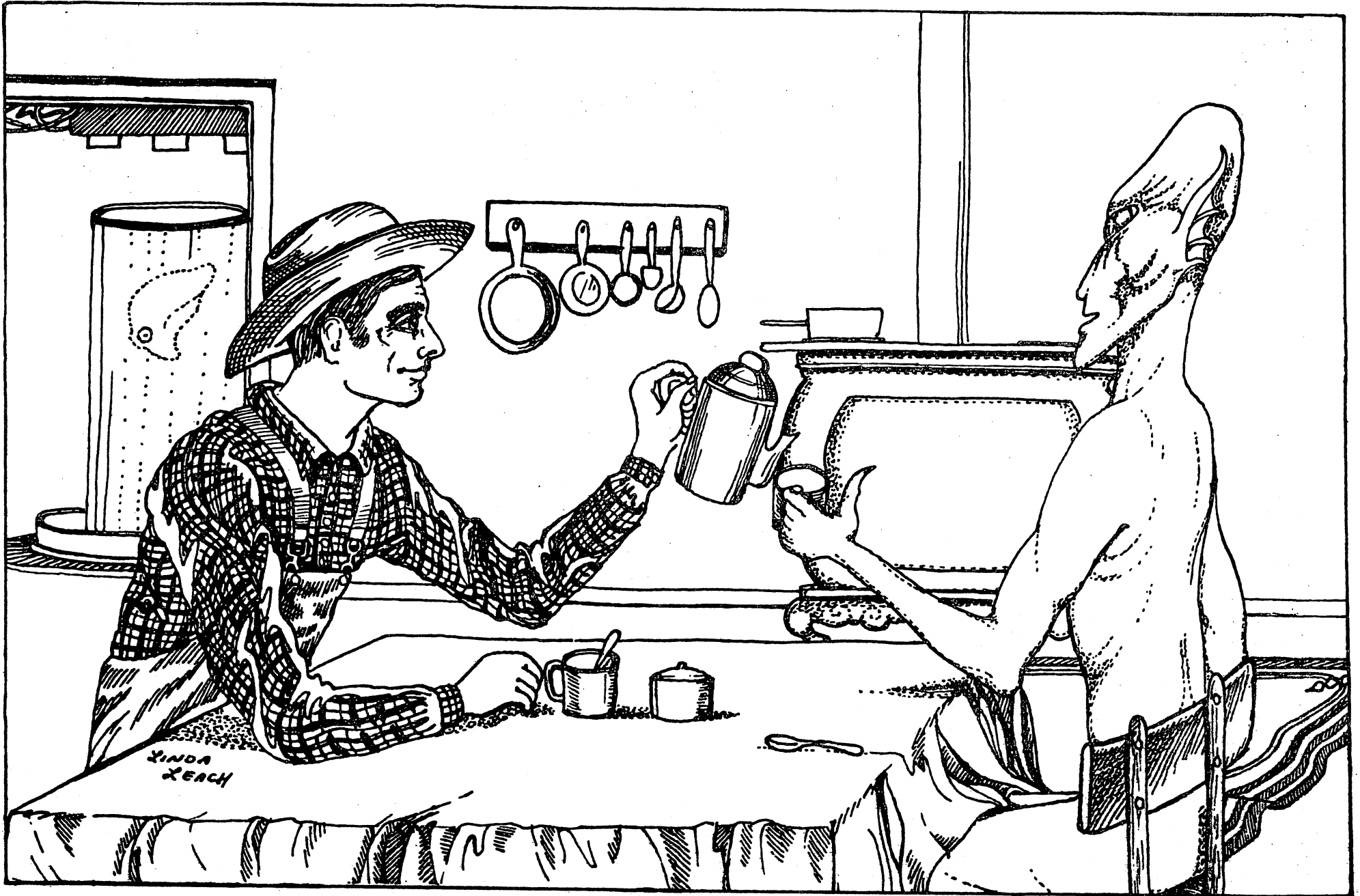
Of course, in the quote above, something does happen to Frost on his walk --but the nasties could as easily have come to his room; the decision to take a walk was irrelevant to the plot. Just a whim of the character, which Simak caught and integrated into the story. There was more characterization following the quoted section, but some limits must be obeyed with regard to available space here.

Loose plotting? No way. When Simak ties up the plot at the end, that plot stays tied up. This is a third aspect illuminated by the two passages quoted above. The characters are doing nothing significant, and this lack of action is unimportant to the storyline. Yet the novel is not stopped by it. It is not the pre-planned and significant event that Herbert or Cherryh might make of it, but just seems to have appeared there on Simak's whim. So he uses it.

Finally, look back to the first quote again for a nice example of the way Simak uses words to create atmosphere. "Ambles" rather than "walks"; "perches" rather than "sits". The character watches someone go down a slope rather than thinks as that person walks away. Many writers would have used something like "As he walked down the slope and into the house, I knew..." This is more succinct and concise--but lacks Simak's atmosphere and flavor. It wouldn't fit. It is often claimed that 'style' is one of those undefined buzzwords used by critics and reviewers to give an impression of sagacity they do not truly possess. Actually, it is a very real word with very definite connotations. It refers to the words chosen, the way they are put together, the length of the sentences, and the general attitude of the writer. The reason it is a vague adjective is that it is actually a noun, and each author gives it a different meaning. To make matters worse, as shown, it is not a matter of one or two factors which can be tied down as 'style'; it is a gestalt of many factors. Simak makes an excellent writer to use if you ever want to dissect 'style' for someone, since his style derives chiefly from (a) the words used, and how; and (b) the opinions and attitudes of the characters. It is simple, straightforward, and easy-to-identify.

In RING AROUND THE SUN we find technology that can be good or bad depending on your viewpoint. I cannot explain why without ruining the plot for anyone (and how few might they be?) who has not read it. Suffice that the gadgets in the story have two sides. And in the context of the story, total acceptance or rejection is the only viable course for the characters. Trying to accept some items and reject others leads simply to disaster. It is interesting, and significant in light of John DiPrete's statement that Simak has his characters accept. Hardly the action of an anti-technologist, even if the acceptance is in order to gain the 'new world' offered by the technology. This ties in with the next example, namely WAY STATION.

WAY STATION. You knew it'd turn up. Once this was (to me) the supreme example of Simak's work. Now it shares top billing with several other works. It is the clearest single example I can find of his style. I won't try to review it here, but if you haven't read it--do so; if you have--reread it. This deceptively simple space opera holds clues to Simak's own philosophy of life, towns and cities, characters, people, and plots. Enoch Wallace reveals ever



from *WAY STATION*, drawn by Linda Leach

greater depths of mind as the book progresses, and you would probably accept him completely if you met him in the street. Take the following passage, abstracted from the section describing Wallace's first contact with the extra-terrestrials. The scene opens with Wallace sitting on his stoop and musing the probabilities of rain from the thunderheads across the valley.

He did not see the traveller until he turned in at the gate. He was a tall and gangling one and his clothes were dusty and from the appearance of him he had walked a far way. He came up the path and Enoch sat waiting for him, watching him, but not stirring from the steps.

"Good day, sir," Enoch finally said. "It's a hot day to be walking. Why don't you sit a while."

"Quite willingly," said the stranger. "But first, I wonder, could I have a drink of water?"

Enoch got to his feet. "Come along," he said. "I'll pump a fresh one for you."

He went down across the barnyard until he reached the pump. He unhooked the dipper from where it hung upon a bolt and handed it to the man. He grasped the handle of the pump and worked it up and down.

"Let it run a while," he said. "It takes a time for it to get real cool."

The water splashed out of the spout, running on the boards that formed the cover of the well. It came in spurts as Enoch worked the handle.

"Do you think," the stranger asked, "that it is about to rain?"

"A man can't tell," said Enoch. "We have to wait and see."

There was something about this traveller that disturbed him. Nothing, actually, that one could put a finger on, but a certain strangeness that was vaguely disquieting. He watched him narrowly as he pumped and decided that probably the stranger's ears were just a bit too pointed at the top, but put it down to his imagination, for when he looked again they seemed to be all right.

"I think," said Enoch, "that the water should be cold by now."

The traveller put down the dipper and waited for it to fill. He offered it to Enoch. Enoch shook his head.

"You first. You need it more than I do."

The stranger drank greedily and with much slobbering.

"Another one?" asked Enoch.

(WAY STATION, pp. 27-28)

Perhaps the only real weak point in Wallace's character is pointed up by the developing relationship between himself and machine-created ghosts, notably one of a woman called Mary. Simak's own gifts often fail him when it comes to male/female relationships, and with a situation of the delicacy shown in WAY STATION, the reader finds himself forced to carry the full weight of filling in the flesh of the plot's bones. More recent books have shown a tendency for the correction of this, but Simak's characters have tended always to be weak in their lovelife. A minor (at least in the context of Simak's works) flaw, but significant.

I will point out that the interstellar transporter that WAY STATION centers around is an extreme example of technology, yet is shown as neither good nor bad in itself. Instead it is used, to one side, by the Confederation to carry the life-pulse of interstellar culture; while the baddies use it to the

other side in pulling off their potentially catastrophic crime. And Enoch Wallace's life is prolonged and made full by machines, yet he lives a quiet and dignified life with the machines which he runs and which sustain him. Certainly no anti-technology here!

This is the nexus, I think, to Simak's attitude regarding technology and cities: he is against technology for the sake of technology, yet strongly in favor of technology as a tool. He desires technology, always, to be a tool of humanity, not for humanity to be a cog in the all-embracing Machine. He regards it as a necessary part of our lives, at least as we want our lives to be. But he sees no reason why extraneous and downright worthless devices should be included. He also prefers that machinery be simple, elegant, aesthetic, and functional.

This is not a new attitude--watch the film METROPOLIS sometime--yet Simak has the different slant that technology is, and should be, exactly what we make of it. Not the Faustian robot in METROPOLIS, which is the forerunner of the machines intended eventually to run the other machines, replacing the "workers" whose sole reason-for-being is the running of those machines; rather the tape-recorder which has blackmailed people, toppled dynasties, and saved lives, since it was first invented. Not Big Brother; rather the computer that can ease our paths or throw up insurmountable obstacles--all depending on the people working it.

Technology is no more or less a tool than the Australopithecus' club--break open a nut for food, or your neighbor's head for greed/anger, or the skull of a predator that wants you for lunch. It is not the club that is dangerous, but the hundred-weight-plus of bone, muscle, and...perhaps...brain on the other end of it.

Simak is a humanitarian, and I will close with two quotes illustrating this:

"When it's done," said Carnivore, "you'll leave me here. Leave me in the open where I can be found."

"I don't understand," said Horton. "Found by what?"

"The scavengers. The cleaners-up. The morticians. Little hungry skitterers that will ingest anything at all. Insects, birds, small animals, worms, bacteria. You will do it, Horton?"

"Of course I'll do it if you wish. If that's what you really want."

"A giving back," said Carnivore. "A final giving back. Not begrudging the little hungry things my flesh. Making myself an offering to many other lives. One great final sharing."

"I understand," said Horton.

"A sharing, a giving back," said Carnivore. "Those are important things."

(SHAKESPEARE'S PLANET, p. 170)

Compensation. Balance. Caring. Sharing. These are themes which Simak returns to time and again, and ones I think are very important to Simak himself. To be a humanitarian is not to be against technology. It is to be for humanity's quality of life in any situation. I suspect it is something Simak sees as being of primal importance to humanity: that people care for each other, and that they apply technology for people.

The river rolled below him, and the river did not care. Nothing mattered to the river. It would take the tusk of the mastodon, the skull of the sabertooth, the ribcage of a man, the dead and sunken tree, the thrown rock or rifle, and would

swallow each of them, and cover them in sand or mud and roll gurgling over them, hiding them from sight.

A million years ago there had been no river here and in a million years to come there might be no river--but in a million years from now there would be, if not man, at least a caring thing. And that was the secret of the universe, Enoch told himself--a thing that went on caring.

(WAY STATION, p. 185)

Clifford D. Simak: The Man

By Ben Bova

As a reader I've enjoyed Clifford Simak's science fiction since I first began reading sf. As an editor, it has been my great pleasure to *buy* his fiction--and see it before anyone else does!

But what pleases me most about Clifford Simak is the man himself. Cliff sat all through a Nebula Banquet, nervous as a pregnant cat, because he had to give a speech after the dinner. He didn't know that he was going to receive a Grand Master Nebula; if he did I think he would have found an excuse for not showing up. Agitated though he was, Cliff carefully refrained from smoking, because he knew that Barbara and I (sitting next to him) object to cigaret smoke. We had no inkling that he was refraining, though, until he finished his speech--which was a great, warm, heartthrob of a performance--and returned to the table to see Barbara and I both puffing on cigars. Another man would have blown his top. Cliff laughed delightedly and lit up.

On another occasion, sitting at a hotel bar during a MINICON afternoon, Cliff and I were joined by a small group of fans. They were in their twenties and thirties, but all steadfastly refused to order a drink when the bartender came by. No booze for them! Cliff smiled patiently, said quietly, "I love the taste of whiskey," and ordered a stiff one.

You see, the man smokes and drinks and must have God knows what other vices, and he still seems to grow younger with each passing year. And his writing gets better every year too. Maybe he's found Merlin's secret, and is going through life in reverse time.

However he does it, more power to Cliff Simak! He makes those of us who, in Isaac Asimov's phrase, are celebrating "the later stages of our youth," take heart for the long future ahead.

**A
SMALL
DISSENTING
NOTE
TO
THE
GENERAL
AGREEMENT
ON
WHAT
CLIFFORD
SIMAK
WRITES**

by

Joseph Green

Clifford D. Simak published his first science fiction story, "*The World of the Red Sun*," in 1931, at the age of 27. Since then--after a six-year hiatus, from 1932-38--he has produced regularly for more than forty years. He wrote voluminously for the pulps of the 1940s, including unrecorded quantities of *air war* and *western* stories. His total output must be quite a few million words, and I have read less of it than I would like. Nevertheless, I have formed some strong impressions of Simak's work, and these are not too closely in accord with what the critics tend to say when discussing this writer.

In his precedent-setting study *NEW MAPS OF HELL*, Kingsley Amis (1) says, "Range of effect is uncommon in science-fiction writers, who show a depressing tendency to re-till their own small plot of ground: one thinks of Clifford Simak with his pastoral pieties, A. E. van Vogt with his superman fantasies..." and again

The anti-urban theme is common in Simak, a prolific and markedly emotional writer who has become a kind of science-fiction poet laureate of the countryside, plus what I should guess to be characteristically American notions about the practical virtues of the folks who live there. (2)

David Pringle, writing in that remarkable and invaluable new reference work, *THE SCIENCE FICTION ENCYCLOPEDIA*, says, "A deeply conservative writer in many ways, he is sf's leading spokesman for rural, Midwestern values." (3) Many other critics have made the same point, that Simak tends to write like a modern-day Rousseau, extolling the beauties of nature and the moral superiority of the primitive peoples--or at least their countrified current descendants.

I disagree.

The bulk of Cliff Simak's hefty output rests well within the mechanistic traditions of realistic science fiction.* His appeal is to the intellect, the rule of reason, and he works within the established boundaries of what is considered possible within the science fiction world or its older sibling, fantasy.

*Admittedly, all science fiction is romantic in the sense that term is used to describe literature, not realistic. But there are extremes within the field, ranging from the high romanticism of Poul Anderson and Gordon Dickson to the despairing acceptance of Thomas Disch or the raging rejection of J. G. Ballard.

In the first volume of his autobiography, *IN MEMORY YET GREEN*, Isaac Asimov recounts receiving a letter from Cliff Simak in 1938, after the publication of his first story since returning to science fiction free-lancing after the six-year break. It was "*Rule 18*" which appeared in the July issue of *ASTOUNDING*. (4) Asimov had criticized it strongly in a letter to the magazine, and Simak wrote to ask for details,

...so that he might consider my criticisms and perhaps profit from them (Would that I could react so gently and rationally to adverse criticism--but I grew to know Cliff well in later years, though we rarely met, and I learned that gentle rationality was the hallmark of his character.)

Asimov also admitted that he admired Simak's writing style so much that he had consciously tried to imitate it. (5)

That *gentle rationality* is also the hallmark of Simak's writing. He has, admittedly, turned to writing fantasy during the latter part of his long career, but even there he plays by the rules; they are simply those of magic, not science. His first major work of pure fantasy was apparently *THE GOBLIN RESERVATION* (which I have not read), where Pringle states: "In *THE GOBLIN RESERVATION* (1968) CDS seemed to be striking into new territory, but in fact it is the old Wisconsin valley fantasy in a new whimsical guise. Some readers date CDS's decline as a novelist from this book." (6)

Some may, but the fact is that from there Simak went on to write some of his most popular books (admittedly attributable somewhat to the fact the sf and fantasy audience has grown tremendously). These include *MASTODONIA* and *A HERITAGE OF STARS*, which are clearly science fiction, and *ENCHANTED PILGRIMAGE* and *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN*, equally clearly pure fantasy. *CITY*, his best-selling work, which won the International Fantasy Award before the Hugoes were inaugurated, remains almost continuously in print. In any world-wide poll, Simak would undoubtedly rank among the top ten SF writers.

And that great popularity is based primarily on his science fictional works.

Admittedly, Simak uses non-scientists for most of his characters. They do indeed tend to be rural, homespun types with a great deal of common sense, often well educated but with a strong preference for living in the country. He avoids the easy way of letting the man of science, the innovator and cause of concern in the story, also be a central character.** This seems to be the reason so many critics think of Simak as a pastoral writer. That, and of course, his penchant for setting the major parts of most of his stories in various countrysides of either fact or imagination.

A perusal of Simak's works indicates that in story after story, book after book, he writes hardcore science fiction, with the emphasis on the people and the effect some new scientific discovery has on them; not the technical details of the discovery itself. In the novel *MASTODONIA*, learning how to travel in time provides a means of returning to the past; the emphasis is on a place to live, not the wonders of time travel. In his Hugo-winning novella, "*The Big Front Yard*" (my personal favorite short Simak piece, a story virtually perfectly done, from concept to execution; a short masterpiece), it is not the discovery of the *means* of traveling between dimensions that is the point of the story, but the interactions of the characters from many worlds, and what they

** A path myself and many others follow all too often, because it simplifies plotting. Thus much science fiction tends to have a scientist as at least a major character.



can learn from, and do for, each other. These examples could be listed *ad infinitum*. Simak was one of the earlier practitioners to explore the *effects* of new discoveries on the human condition, now virtually a shiboleth of modern science fiction.

To sum it up. I think this lamentable tendency to classify Simak as a pastoralist, in the same league with Rousseau (who was an idiot in my opinion), is sadly misguided. Simak fits within the best tradition of the original thinker who explores the world around him through the medium of examining alternate possibilities--the worlds of science fiction. And for fifty years in total now he has been doing it in a manner both more entertaining and interesting than most of his contemporaries. His background is in the hard-nosed field of newspaper journalism and editing; for many years he wrote a science column for the *Minneapolis Star*, only recently becoming a full-time free-lancer. But he chooses to use science in a manner where it is not intrusive, where it is no more noticed than the floor on which one walks when in an art gallery.

Someday someone is going to do a complete book on Clifford D. Simak, and his effect on the world of science fiction--and the larger society beyond. I hope I'll get to read it.

NOTES

- (1) Kingsley Amis, *NEW MAPS OF HELL* (Ballantine Books, New York, NY, 1960; page 107)
 - (2) *ibid*, page 62
 - (3) *THE SCIENCE FICTION ENCYCLOPEDIA*, edited by Peter Nichols (Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Co, New York, NY, 1979; page 547)
 - (4) Isaac Asimov, *IN MEMORY YET GREEN* (Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, NY, 1979; page 213)
 - (5) *ibid*, page 671
 - (6) *THE SCIENCE FICTION ENCYCLOPEDIA*, edited by Peter Nichols (Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Co., New York, NY, 1979; page 547)
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Unfortunately I have never been privileged to meet or even to correspond with Clifford Simak.

I am, however, one of his Faithful Readers from way, way back, enjoying his stories as much for the excellent writing as for their content. His *CITY* series is one that has really stuck in my memory. Whenever--all too rarely these days!--anything from his pen appears in a magazine, I always read it first.

-- A. Bertram Chandler

Clifford was one of many pros who contributed to my Tribute Chapbook for Carl Jacobi. Putting together that Chapbook was a thrilling experience because it proved to me how deeply professional sf and fantasy writers care for each other. Cliff had never heard of me before, but he graciously sent me a touching tribute to Carl. For this kindness, I will be forever grateful.

-- Wilum Pugmire

Simak: The Humanist

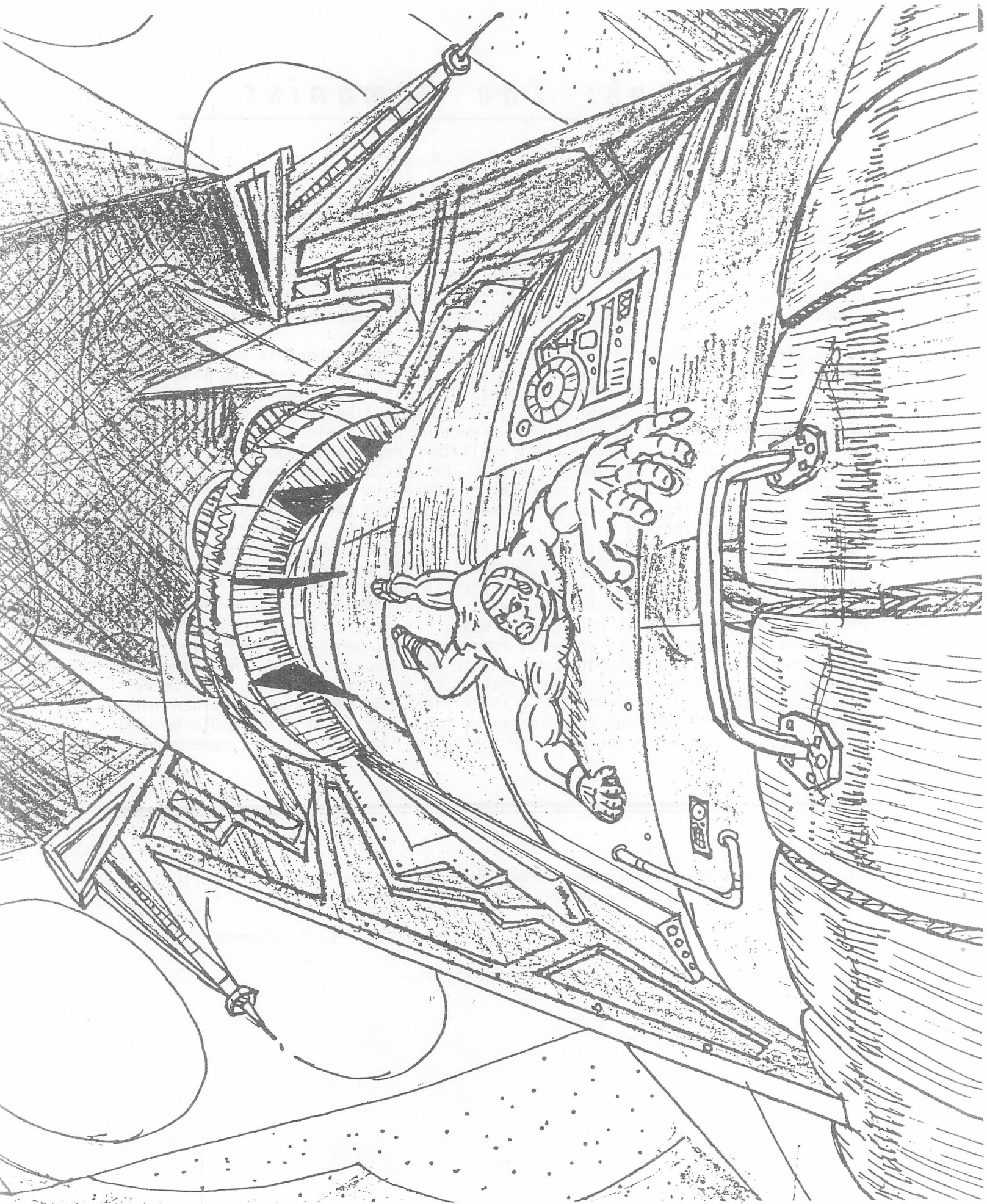
by George R. R. Martin

Clifford D. Simak was a writer ahead of his time for much of his career. His best work will be remembered and read with pleasure for a long, long time to come. *CITY* and "*The Big Front Yard*" and *WAY STATION*, to name just three, are going to endure for many years. But Simak's contribution to the field goes far beyond his classic individual stories, as memorable as they are. For Simak must be credited as well with bringing *people* back into science fiction.

Cliff has always written about people. At a time when his contemporaries were giving us galactic conquerors and space patrolmen and sneering villains and superscientists, all without a shread of human motivation, Simak's stories teemed with recognizable human beings, with people like you and me and the guy next door. He wrote about the farmers fretting over their land, about salesmen out to make a buck or two, about small-town reporters looking for the truth, or maybe just a half-decent story. He gave us people we knew, people we recognized, people we could care about. Even his dogs and his robots were somehow more fully-rounded and caring and *human* than the steely-jawed heroes of other writers. Ursula K. Le Guin, in a famous essay, has written about the role of Mrs. Brown in science fiction--that is to say, about the need for putting *people* into fiction. "If Mrs. Brown is dead, you can take your galaxies and roll them up into a ball and throw them in the trashcan, for all I care," she has written. Cliff Simak--along with Theodore Sturgeon--was writing about Mrs. Brown when just about nobody else was. His stories brought humanity into the field, and human values as well: compassion and gentleness and love. Later many other writers, Le Guin included, would walk down the paths that Simak had pioneered, but Simak was among the first to go in that direction, when there was nothing there but wilderness. I think Simak has been a very influential writer. If not for him and the stories he told, the field today would be very different, and very much poorer. For that alone, he will be long remembered.

Clifford Simak is the only man I know who can take two pages to describe someone crossing a street --- and is still interesting.

--T. L. Sherred



Millville,

Wisconsin:

Crossroads of the Universe

The readers of science fiction who are familiar with the work of Clifford Simak are not surprised by the description of him as a *pastoral* writer. Indeed, there are a great number of stories penned by Simak in which he uses a rural or small town setting, usually placed in the southwestern corner of Wisconsin. The internal evidence in many stories ("*The Autumn Land*," "*New Folks Home*," "*The Thing in the Stone*," "*A Death in the House*," "*Project Mastodon*," "*The Marathon Photograph*," "*Over the River and Through the Woods*," "*Buckets of Diamonds*," and *A CHOICE OF GODS*) merely place them in that locale, some purporting names of towns which are not on the map, others expressing their location in general terms. Two stories, "*The Birch Clump Cylinder*" and "*Neighbor*", are located in Coon Valley which, on the Wisconsin map, is in the midwestern part of the state, but is given the location in *ALL FLESH IS GRASS* only ten miles from Millville, a small town in the southwest corner of Wisconsin. Willow Bend is another town used as a background location by Simak in his stories "*The Big Front Yard*," "*The Ghost of a Model-T*," "*Small Deer*," and *MASTODONIA*. As Simak himself said: "Willow Bend is a mythical place, and I guess it's in Wisconsin--I'm not sure," (1) although in *MASTODONIA* he gives its location in that state.

There are other towns named and used; the location itself is not as important as the setting and mood they create. Thomas Clareson says that Simak uses the small town as a place "symbolic of an escape from the disasters of the twentieth century..." (2) but concretely it ties him back to the soil, the land he loves so dearly. The use of a small town or village also gives Simak access to certain stock characters which are a part of rural towns, like the village idiot, the drunken bum, the banker, the country doctor, the common man. Simak says:

I think the reader accepts the character more easily if it's a common person. ...I have a great deal of faith in the common man. I think they have a lot of sense, a lot of intelligence, and above all, they have common sense. And I'm comfortable writing about them. I think some writers feel that they have to write down to the common man. Being very much a common man myself, I do not have that feeling at all. (3)

Of all the town names Simak uses, the one most often employed is that of Millville, a place which does indeed exist. Simak wrote the following lines in a letter (6 August 80):

It is located in Grant county, in the southwestern corner of Wisconsin. There is the town of Millville, and the township

of Millville. I was born on my grandfather's farm in the township, several miles away from the town.

The town was settled in 1838 by a group of settlers who traveled down the Ohio and up the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers in a keel-boat. At one time the town was a thriving pioneer community. A sawmill was built on a good-sized creek that flows through the town in 1840 and a flour mill in 1844. Other businesses came in and well before the end of the century Millville was a respectable community.

I had a phone conversation with my brother the other night and asked him what Millville is like today. He told me that it is practically a ghost-town. When I was a kid it still had a store, a garage, a post office, a church, a school, and several other enterprises. A good deal of its importance had faded but it still was a viable small town. Now, my brother tells me, the store, the garage, and the post office, and all the other businesses are closed. The church no longer is a church and the schoolhouse no longer is a school but a town hall and infrequently used as a community center. Two or three families still live there and that is all. An old log house, built in the pioneer days, is slowly decaying away.

My early association was not as close with Millville as it was with Patch Grove, another small town, where I attended high school. But the name Millville appealed to me and the town itself, nestled among the river hills, had the sort of mood and presence that I could understand...so Millville became my fictional town. I still feel a closer relationship with it than I do with any other town. In my work, of course, I have made it something that it is not and perhaps never was, but it did serve as a pattern about which I could build my stories. (4)

Simak elaborates further in an interview conducted at MINICON in April of 1980:

I write quite often about that countryside, and even when I'm not writing about it directly, I still use scenes and environs from there. After all, it is the one place I remember best. I think that in the first twenty years of a man's life, his environmental associations and his philosophical concepts begin to sprout, and they stay with him for the rest of his life. I have a good love of the land; what I am doing is expatriate writing, because I've made the Millville area a little more beautiful, more somber, somewhat different, and more weird than it actually is. When I go back to visit the hills aren't nearly as high, the ravines not nearly as deep....

I was born in my grandfather's home which stood on the ridge that overlooked the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. Those two rivers figure prominently in my life and in my writing. I write that way because I can feel in touch with that kind of land. I am treading on familiar ground. (5)

Simak uses the town and township of Millville as background to five short

stories and two novels (according to my research up to this time). I would like to examine each of the seven stories to see how Simak uses the town of Millville in them, how it affects the characters portrayed, and the storyline.

WAY STATION (1963) won the Hugo Award for the Best Novel of 1964 for Clifford Simak. The story takes place in the hills and valleys around Millville, that is, in Millville Township. Claude Lewis, an intelligence agent who finds out that Enoch Wallace is 124 years old but looks thirty, explains to Dr. Erwin Hardwicke why Enoch is accepted there:

"The southwestern corner of Wisconsin is bounded by two rivers, the Mississippi on the West, the Wisconsin on the north. Away from the rivers there is flat, broad prairie land, rich land, with prosperous farms and towns. But the land that runs down to the river is rough and rugged; high hills and bluffs and deep ravines and cliffs, and there are certain areas forming bays or pockets that are isolated. They are served by inadequate roads, and the small, rough farms are inhabited by a people who are close, perhaps, to the pioneer days of a hundred years ago than they are to the twentieth century. They have cars, of course, and radios, and someday soon, perhaps, even television. But in spirit they are conservative and clannish--not all the people, of course, not even many of them, but these little isolated neighborhoods."

"You're trying to tell me these backwoods people--is that what you'd call them?--engaged in a conspiracy of silence," / said Hardwicke. /

"Perhaps not anything," said Lewis, "as formal or elaborate as that. It is just their way of doing things, a holdover from the old, stout pioneer philosophy. They minded their own business. They didn't want folks interfering with them and they interfered with no one else. If a man wanted to live to be a thousand, it might be a thing of wonder, but it was his own damned business. And if he wanted to live alone and be let alone while he was doing it, that was his business too. They might talk about it among themselves, but to no one else. They'd resent it if some outsider tried to talk about it."

"After a time, I suppose, they came to accept the fact that Wallace kept on being young while they were growing old. The wonder wore off it and they probably didn't talk about it a great deal, even among themselves. New generations accepted it because their elders saw in it nothing too unusual--and anyhow no one saw much of Wallace because he kept strictly to himself."
(*WAY STATION*, pp. 4-5)

Thus, the background plays an important part in Enoch's acceptance by his neighbors. This same background gives motivation to some of the plot action. One man is not to interfere with his neighbor's business. Enoch takes in the deaf-mute Lucy Fisher who is running away from her father, Hank, the town bum and sometimes drunk, who has beaten her with a whip. As a result, Hank learns about Enoch's indestructible house, which serves as the way station for galactic travellers in this area of the spiral arm. Hank tries to stir up trouble, claiming Enoch had kidnapped his daughter, then brought her back fearing reprisal. Only after Lucy runs away again, back to Enoch, does Hank succeed in raising a mob to

to come after Enoch.

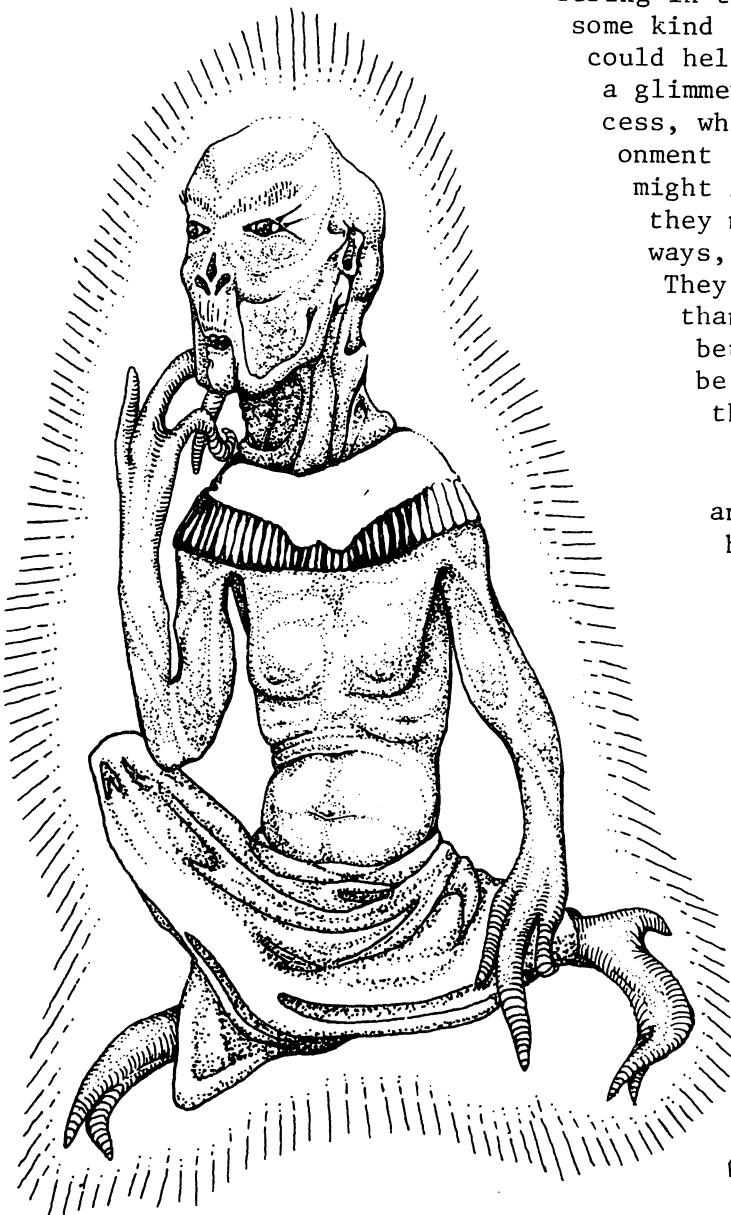
The same idea of interference is brought forth in Lewis' disturbance of the alien's grave, which caused ramifications in the galactic sphere, paralleling Enoch's troubles on Earth.

Aside from the drunk/bum as seen in Hank Fisher, there is also the village idiot character seen in his daughter Lucy. Simak himself has a few comments about the village idiot character:

...I have a theory that these so-called village idiots which we try to make conform to society, send them to special schools to try to teach them something, are just as capable as we are, that they may have abilities we don't have that they could well use, if we could only find out what they were. We are denying them development by interfering in their lives, and if we could use some kind of sympathetic managing, we could help them. We might begin to get a glimmer of what kind of mental process, what kind of psychological environment these people may have. We might learn a great deal from them. they may be just as capable in many ways, their ways, as we are in ours. They may have some better concepts than we do.../they/ might have a better chance to understand, and be able to work with, an alien, than a normal human. (6)

Lucy is a deaf-mute and considered an idiot, but she can charm away warts, heal injured animals. Lucy can see the character inside a person. Outward appearances hold no horror for her. She readily accepted Enoch's alien friend, Ulysses, without fear or repugnance. She refused to learn sign-language, for she had her own methods of communicating, and she could talk with animals.

There had been, he /Enoch/ knew, several attempts to establish her in a state school for the deaf, but each had been a failure. Once she'd run away and wandered days before being finally found and returned to her home. And on other occasions she had gone on disobedience



REG.

from *WAY STATION*, drawn by Robert Grunawalt

strikes, refusing to co-operate in any of the teaching...

She had a world, he thought, a world of her very own, one to which she was accustomed and knew how to get along in. In that world she was no cripple, as she surely would have been a cripple if she had been pushed, part way, into the normal human world.

What good to her the hand alphabet or the reading of the lips if they should take from her some strange inner serenity of the spirit?

She was a creature of the woods and hills, of springtime flowers and autumn flight of birds. She knew these things and lived with them and was, in some strange way, a specific part of them. She was one who dwelt apart in an old and lost apartment of the natural world. She occupied a place that Man long since had abandoned, if, in fact, he'd ever held it.

And there she sat, with the wild red and gold of the butterfly poised upon her finger, with a sense of alertness and expectancy and, perhaps, accomplishment shining on her face. She was alive, thought Enoch, as no other thing he knew had ever been alive.

(WAY STATION, pp. 36-7)

In "*Brother*" (1977), a similar use of the background is seen. Edward Lambert, the protagonist, lives isolated in the Millville countryside. He was born an only child, but claims he has a twin brother, Phil. People accept his fantasy and do not interfere with it. Also in the story is a strange monster: "Like an ape, or a bear that isn't quite a bear. All over furry, naked. A snowman..." (included in *THE 1978 ANNUAL WORLD'S BEST SF*, Wollheim editor. p. 265). The creature turns out to be an alien looking for Ed and his psychic creation Phil, but in this setting, one thinks of the Sasquatch monster, or Bogfoot.

"*Crying Jag*" (1960) has its protagonist as Millville's town drunk, Sam. Here Sam has first-contact with an alien and its robot. The alien, Wilbur, is an empath who gets drunk listening to sad stories. Lester, its robot, records the stories to sell off-planet. Although he is the town drunk, Sam is not stupid. He sees a way of making a few quick dollars from this. Since he realizes that telling another person your troubles is therapeutic for humans, he makes a deal with Doc Abel to have the alien visit the sanitarium, and a deal with Wilbur and Lester who pay him for the privilege of going to the sanitarium to listen to the patients' problems. Unfortunately, Earth is a restricted planet, and Jake, another alien, and its robot policeman, arrive to take Wilbur and Lester away. However, Sam makes a deal with them to take on all aliens like Lester, who are the misfits of their society, so that each person can have his/her own personal psychiatrist, as it were.

In "*Crying Jag*" Millville has provided the small town background which yields the stock, drunken-bum, character, and the location for a first-contact story, which Simak is fond of placing in a small town.

Another story in which Millville is the center of a first-contact by aliens is "*Shotgun Cure*" (1961). Jason Kelly, the town doctor, is approached with a cure-all serum which will wipe out all disease. Millville is the testing station, and Doc Kelly gradually realizes that there is a price being paid--that the rat-race thirst for knowledge is as much a disease as the mumps, and that too was being cured. In addition, Con Gilbert, a tightwad who had never paid Doc anything for his services, has a change of heart and starts to set things square with the Doc. Not only were the physical diseases being cured, but the mental

ones as well.

He could stop the world-wide distribution of the vaccine, but doesn't. Doc is the product of the small town of Millville. Seeing the results of too much progress too quickly as heart attacks and high blood pressure, Doc Kelly decides that the country life, the slow and easy way of life, like in Millville, would be better. Another doctor, noticing the side-effects, might want to stop its world-wide distribution, but not Doc Kelly. He decides the price is worth the cure.

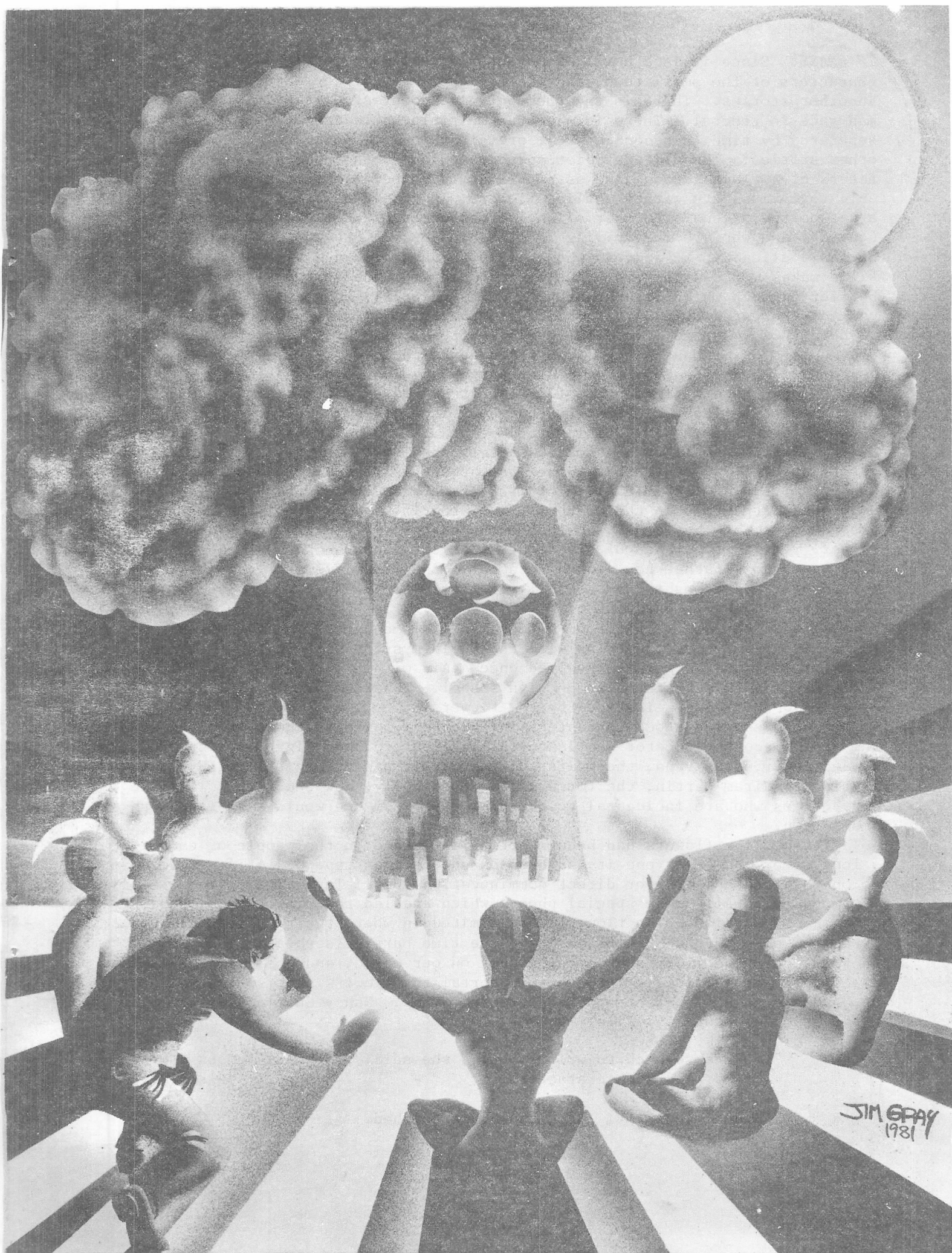
Lamont Stiles, Millville's juvenile delinquent, was the only citizen of that town to have gone to the stars. Two generations later, he brought back three aliens who, because of their mother-instinct, become "*The Sitters*" (1961). They babysat and ran a nursery school for free; they would accept no money for their services, although many of their customers brought them gifts and kept their place in good repair. Still, there was a side-effect to their caring for the children of Millville: the children lost their youth a little bit sooner, grew up and matured more quickly, and became more intelligent. Was this a plot on Lamont's part to take revenge on the way he had been treated when he lived in Millville? Johnson Dean, the Superintendent of Millville High School, has his suspicions, but nothing definite. In visiting the sitters, he finds out that the aliens have been raising the I.Q. of the children of the town, but there is not a hint of any conspiracy. In addition, Dean discovers that he himself feels younger after the visit, as if the youth lost by the children had been transferred to him. A double boon, he thinks: youth for the aging, and faster maturing, more intelligent children. "Would Millville supply Earth with great statesmen, with canny diplomats, with top-notch educators and able scientists?" speculates Dean (p.166, in *ALL THE TRAPS OF EARTH and other stories*).

This could happen in almost any town, but Simak used Millville. The aliens are readily accepted. Says Stuffy, the school janitor, to Dean: "They're weird critters, ...but I never held their strangeness against them. After all, they ain't the only aliens on the Earth." (p.151) In Millville, with the help of the alien baby-sitters, Simak, through Johnson Dean, sees a recapturing of old ideals which seem to be lost in the larger cities, but kept somewhat in the smaller towns of Simak's younger days. He uses his home town as the setting. As Dean muses, "The children of Millville were obedient and polite; they were constructive in their play; they'd ceased to be savages or snobs." (p. 166)

The town of Millville in "*Horrible Example*" (1961) draws on several of the stock characters found in Simak's small town stories, most notably the town drunk, as in "*Crying Jag*", and the high school janitor. But in this story Simak adds his unique twist. Tobias, the town drunk, is actually a robot assigned to that particular role so that a human need not take it. Andy Donovan, the janitor, is Tobias' contact and keeper for the Society for the Advancement and Betterment of the Human Race. Tobias prides himself in playing his role to the utmost, until he recuses the banker's son, Randy Forbisher, and his girlfriend from a burning auto. Then, since he has shown a spark of good, the town takes on the project of reforming him, specifically Mr. and Mrs. Forbisher. Admitting his failure to himself and to Andy, Tobias realizes that he can't go back to his former role, nor does he want to. Fortunately, the town is planning an off-world colony for which he would surely be chosen. In his place, to take the role of the "bad guy" in the community, is planned a chiselling real estate and insurance agent--a robot, of course.

Through the town of Millville, one sees that Simak has set up a world-wide agency in the Society for the Advancement and Betterment of the Human Race, through which robots take on the down-trodden roles of mankind, so that human beings don't have to. Some of the small town characters serve as good examples for those roles.

The greatest use Simak makes of the town of Millville is his story *ALL FLESH*



IS GRASS. Since it is a novel, Simak has more space to explore more of the stock characters of the small town, and tie together many of the major themes he uses in other stories. There is the theme of alien contact, first contact for the human race in general. There is also the multiple-world theme, or alternate worlds separated by time (a second apart), prevalent in *RING AROUND THE SUN*, *CITY*, and other stories. The village idiot and drunken bum both appear, both as stock characters of the small town, and as people having special abilities--the idiot being able to communicate with the alien flowers, and the drunken bum being a special agent of the aliens. Another alien, different from the flowers who are making the contact, and who are the driving force behind much of the action in the story, a humanoid alien, is a "doctor" who is able to cure ills and diseases. When Millville makes world-wide news by being isolated from the rest of the world by a barrier through which nothing above a certain intelligence and awareness level can pass, and the town doctor falls ill, the alien flowers send the alien doctor to help those who are in need of medical attention. Thus the "cure-all" theme is also used. Governmental bungling, which appeared in *WAY STATION* (when Claude Lewis removed the alien body from its resting place in Enoch's family cemetery plot) is also seen when officials react in threatened ways resulting from the non-threats of the flowers. Finally, the whole idea of an intelligent race of plants, although not used in a Millville story before, Simak has used in "*Green Thumb*."

As for the small-town stock characters, besides Tupper Tyler, the village idiot, and Stiffy Grant, the drunken bum, there is Brad Carter, the protagonist, who had lived in Millville all his life, except for the one year he went away to college and returned on the death of his father. He tries to keep his father's greenhouse going, but can't. He has much less ability in growing plants than his father, yet it is because of his father that the flowers choose Brad as their emissary. Brad's father had picked up some of the alien flowers growing wild, nurtured them, and brought them to full vitality. Because of him, everyone had a few of them in their gardens.

Gerald Sherwood is the town's rich man. His daughter Nancy returns from Europe in time to get caught up with the whole mystery surrounding the isolation of Millville, and to become involved once again with Brad Carter. They had been more than casual acquaintances in high school. To add flavor to the story, Gerald Sherwood is also being used by the flowers.

Other assorted stock characters include Doc Fabian as the town physician, the typical country doctor who is on-call 24 hours a day; Higgy Morris, the long-winded mayor; Joe Evans, the editor of the weekly paper; Dan Willoughby, the bank president; Hiram Martin, the former playground bully, now the town policeman; and many others who are incidental to the plot, but whom one would associate with a small town.

These alien flowers had been exerting influence on the people of earth for a long time. For everyone it had been an unconscious type of influence because no one had the ability for direct communication, until Tupper came along. Gerald Sherwood eventually made special phones which enabled the flowers to establish vocal communication. The flowers were limited in where their influence could be directed: only through "thin" parts of the time barrier separating one world from another could the flowers have any effect on our world, and one of the "thin" places was in Millville. Through this portal the flowers sent spores which grew up as the purple flowers rescued by Brad's father. Nancy Sherwood was going to write a novel about Millville:

"There's so much to write about," she said. "So many famous people. And such characters."

"Famous people?" I /Brad/ said, astonished.

"There are," she said, "Belle Simpson Knowles, the famous novelist, and Ben Jackson, the great criminal lawyer, and John M. Hartford, who heads the department of History at..."

"But those are the ones who left," I said. "There was nothing here for them. They went out and made names for themselves and most of them never set foot in Millville again, not even for a visit."

"But," she said, "they got their start here. They had the capacity for what they did before they ever left this village. You stopped me before I finished out the list. There are a lot of others. Millville, small and stupid as it is, has produced more great men and women than any other village of its size."
(ALL FLESH IS GRASS, p. 48)

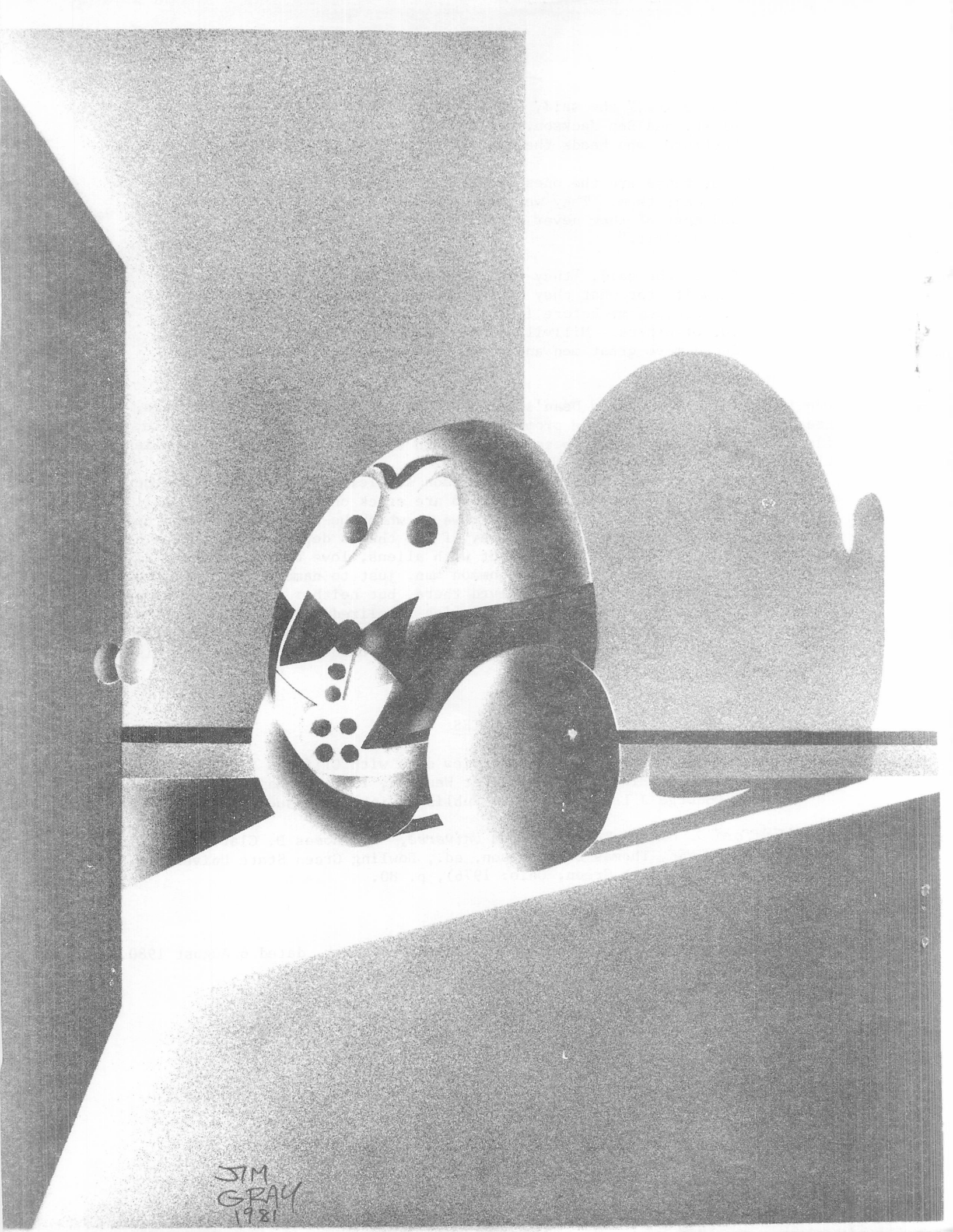
One is reminded of Johnson Dean's speculations in *"The Sitters."* But here, instead of speculation, or the promise of great people coming from Millville, these famous persons have already been produced, in both stories produced by alien influence.

Although any small town would have been sufficient in bringing together these common and ordinary characters, who are stock characters of the small town, Simak used Millville, the name of the town in which he was born and grew up. Through Millville he ties together many of the themes depicted throughout his works: alternate worlds, first-contact with aliens, love of the land and all living creatures, village idiots, the common man, just to name a few. The town today is not the same as when Simak lived there, but neither is the town he writes about the same as that of his youth. In its idealized form, Millville ties Simak back to the Earth, the land that he loves so dearly, yet in its rural splendor, Millville becomes the crossroads of the universe, through which he runs his ideas and themes.

NOTES

- (1) *"An Interview with CDS."* An interview done with Clifford Simak at MINICON 15 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Easter Weekend, 1980, by Maia (Mary E. Cowan) and Lan (George J Laskowski Jr). Published in this issue of LAN'S LANTERN.
- (2) *"Clifford D. Simak: The Inhabited Universe,"* by Thomas D. Clareson. VOICES FOR THE FUTURE, Thomas D. Clareson, ed., Bowling Green State University Popular Press (Bowling Green, Ohio: 1976), p. 80.
- (3) *"An Interview with CDS."*
- (4) From a letter in correspondence with Clifford Simak, dated 6 August 1980.
- (5) *"An Interview with CDS."*
- (6) Ibid.

(Back cover: A Wheeler, from *THE GOBLIN RESERVATION*, Drawn by Jim Gray)



JIM
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1981