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# Redd Boggs' SPROONESS

## MEETINGS WITH EMINENT PERSONS (1)

"Monsieur," the famous gentleman-rogue said, "I ask you to identify the kind of blue flower that was found at the scene of the crime."

"Lupine, Arsene," I said.

"And what sort of crime do you fancy was committed here?" he asked.

"Arson, Lupin," I replied.

## LAUGHTER OUT OF THE DARK

"Ride si sapis." -- Martial

Mystery Fiction and Science Fiction encountered one another in an illimitable space.

"Well now," Mystery Fiction said, with a sad smile, peering through the darkness at his friend, "the last time I saw you, long since, you were dressed carelessly, even shabbily, with an open collar, ragged trousers, and barefoot. Now -- why, you dress in the garb of a second-line business executive. You're even sporting a necktie, heaven save us, although it's hardly in perfect taste. You're so neat and well-appareled and solemn of mien! Even your beard is trimmed and combed."

"Ah," Science Fiction said majestically, "you remember me when I was but a callow youth. Now, my friend, the literary critics take me seriously."

"Consider the source!" Mystery Fiction said with a sour chuckle. "Science Fiction, such pretensions! Aren't you aspiring to be something you really aren't? Tell me, where are your cross-garters?"

Science Fiction chose to ignore the remark since it was too obscure to comprehend without inquiries that would be beneath his dignity. "Once, only Damon Knight, William Atheling Jr, Arthur Jean Cox, and a bare handful of others wrote of me as though I were literature of some sort." He cleared his throat, and amended, "At least they seemed to suppose that once in a while I might be."

Mystery Fiction stood silently for a moment. Science Fiction studied him curiously and decided that his colleague was becoming a little threadbare, a little old, a little tired, even a little ugly in the manner of Dick Deadeye.

"I was about to say," Mystery Fiction remarked, uncomfortably aware of the scrutiny, "that once the literati took me half-seriously too."

There was hardly a literary man in the English-speaking world that would think of going to sleep without reading a chapter or two of Sherlock Holmes or of novels by Raymond Chandler, Rex Stout, Agatha Christie...."

Science Fiction affected a yawn. "Yes yes. And President Roosevelt read you for relaxation when he was in the White House. I've heard all that, Mystery. But did you know that there's a special unit for Science Fiction in the Modern Language association? There are scholarly journals devoted to the study of the literature, new and old. Have you seen the recent issues of the M.L.A. annual bibliography?"

Mystery Fiction shook his head. "No, but I have a strange feeling that you're going to tell me all about it."

"The M.L.A. bibliography lists an amazing number of important articles about Science Fiction, so many you would hardly believe it. They all analyze significant aspects of the literature with penetrating critical vision. For instance, there's an essay on 'The Concept of the City in Adolescent Science Fiction.' And one on 'Science Fiction Theory: Internal and External Delimitation and Utopia'...."

"Wonderful!" Mystery Fiction said.

Something in his tone of voice gave Science Fiction a moment's pause. He listened to the echo, decided there was nothing suspicious, and resumed. "Then there's 'Nietzsche's Influence on the Superman in Science Fiction Literature,' 'The Forms and Functions of Science Fiction: A Theoretical Study of Its Dualistic Nature and Its Depiction of Alien Worlds.' There's 'Science Fiction Myths and Their Ambiguity,' and 'Reciprocity and Exchange in Science Fiction,' and 'Reason and Mysticism in Fantasy and Science Fiction.'"

He paused, but Mystery Fiction made no comment, contenting himself with a small smile. He went on, but with diminished enthusiasm. He didn't like that smile. "There are many essays on Science Fiction and religion, such as 'Religious Dimensions of Representative Science Fiction,' 'Apocalypse and Science Fiction: A Dialectic of Religious and Secular Soteriologies,' 'Religion and Science Fiction: A Dialectic of the Unproven.' There's a lot of writing about Indians, or I mean Native Americans, and Science Fiction, and all sorts of material about women in the genre: articles about Ursula LeGuin in plenty, analyzing her Jungian archetypes, androgyny, determinism and free will, 'Taoist Magic,' cyclical renewal, and her 'Song of Inmost Feminism'...."

"But nothing, I take it, about Clare Winger Harris," Mystery Fiction interrupted. "I remember, Science Fiction, when we met before, a

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long time ago, that you complained about your sincere followers. You told me that they were taking themselves too seriously and had to be reminded that Fandom is Just a Goddamn Hobby. Maybe these alleged scholars ought to be told -- if you will pardon me, my friend -- that Science Fiction is Just Goddamn Escapist Fiction, exactly as Mystery Fiction is. Don't give yourself airs. Do you think pornography is literature? There are literary studies of pornography."

"But these are real critics and scholars!" Science Fiction insisted with wounded pomposity. "They are studying me analytically, not trivially. There's a whole book, for instance, on Language Study and Science Fiction. You should read an essay called 'New Worlds Through Old Forms: Some Traditional Critical Tools for Science Fiction'; then you wouldn't try to shrug all this activity away. Or better yet, you should look at the bibliography called 'Masterpieces of Science Fiction Criticism'.... What did you say?"

Mystery Fiction was uttering strange strangled noises. "Publish or perish!" he managed to say before he choked again. "Masterpieces -- !" He bowed his head and bit his lip. Then suddenly he turned and stumbled away. His shadowy figure melted into the darkness. Science Fiction stood alone, listening in puzzlement to the peals of laughter that came back to his ears out of the night.

#### A NOTE ON THE HEADING

Gretchen used to accuse me, teasingly, of marrying her only to have a resident fan artist on hand whenever I needed a heading or an illustration for one of my fanzines. At any rate she performed loyally in that capacity for all the 17 memorable years we spent together. Only a few weeks before she died, she designed the heading for The Cosmic Glitch, August 1981. At the time she was a patient in the Intensive Care unit of Alta Bates hospital. She had to prop herself up in bed and use a ballpoint pen, and her lines were a little shaky. (Later she complained that I had not adjusted and repaired the heading before printing it. She never lost her artistic eye.)

Probably the first fan illustrations she ever did for me were those for Bete Noire #10, autumn 1964, when we had been together only a few weeks. This issue, containing my Pacificon report and her accompanying drawings, did not see print till ten years later. In November 1964 she designed the heading for Spirochete -- the heading I still use. In fact, for this issue as well as issue #26, I have run the heading from a stencil that she herself cut for Spirochete #3, 4 December 1964. For some reason the stencil was saved all this time, and I feel it appropriate to use it again, more than 19 years later.

#### THE BROKEN BOUGH

The trees along The Alameda in Berkeley lose their leaves in autumn. Most trees in California, even broadleaf trees that are deciduous elsewhere, remain eternally green here because the weather year-around is mild, and frost and snow are almost unknown. A few native trees like the massive iron oak obstinately cling to their leaves all year long, even in the high Sierra where winters are severe and snow-swept. Other trees -- alders, willows, the California dogwood, some

species of oaks, and others -- are leaf-losing despite the temperate winters. The trees on The Alameda must respond to a subtler impulse than the chill of the season to start shedding leaves. Perhaps it is the shorter hours of daylight or the longer angle of sunshine after the autumnal equinox.

The same trees begin to green up again in February, but late in November the street has a midwestern look: the drifts of brown leaves in the gutter, the barren branches overhanging the street, and the daylight turned dull silver by the gathering clouds of the early winter storms that sweep into the Bay area from the Pacific. If you could close your eyes to the California-style architecture of some of the houses along the street -- many structures look much the same as urban homes do all across America -- you might imagine yourself driving down a street in Chicago or Minneapolis.

The trees line each side of the street from Solano avenue southwardly to just beyond Hopkins street. They are large beautiful trees with generous spreading crowns. Some of them are 60 or 80 feet tall, with thick knobby trunks and heavy branches that start at least ten or twelve feet above the ground. Their leaves resemble those of the maple, three-lobed, pale green above and paler on the under side, large, rather thick, and velvety. By September the lofty branches take on a bronze tint that contrasts with the vivid green on other trees nearby. The trees of The Alameda are California sycamores, perhaps, or London plane trees which are of the same genus.

The trees in Berkeley that shed their leaves in autumn seldom turn the bright colors that make September and October so beautiful in Iowa and Ohio. Little by little their leaves subside to a delicate brown and after a while twirl quietly into the gutter. The change is almost as unobtrusive as that of other trees around town that constantly drop and replace leaves, a few at a time, all year long.

Now the trees on The Alameda are all bare, except for a lonely bough here and there that was broken in some forgotten wind during the past spring or summer -- we so seldom have rough weather here -- and still hangs by a few dry splinters up against the sky. On these few dangling branches the leaves remain, as thick as they were in March or July, but dark and sere now, rattling harshly in the wind. Cut away from the main source of nourishment long ago in their prime, the leaves on these branches never developed the abscission layers that at the proper time separates them from the twig where they grew and flourished. They will persist, brown ghosts of summer verdure, among the gaunt branches, till another wind, as strong as the one which broke the bough, blows out of the Pacific this winter and tears them away one by one or wrenches the whole bough from its last hold on the tree and tosses it to the gutter some blustery night.

Till then I cling forsakenly and flutter in the last breeze of the evening against the sky, the sky colorless after the sun has set and before the stars have burned through: against the wide gates of emptiness and nothingness.

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The Ob-Gyns will get you if you don't watch out.  
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