

Harry Turner - 95

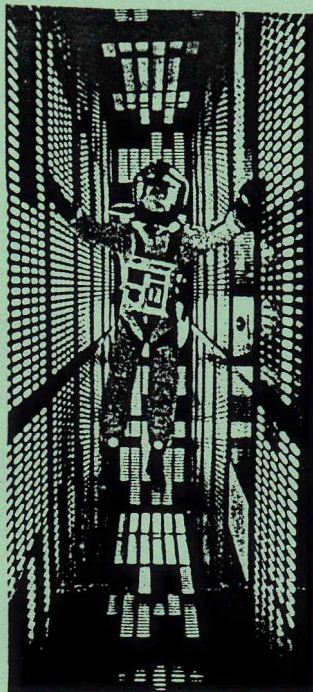
THE SLIPPERY SLOPE, or DAISY, DAISY

A LONG TIME AGO (20 yrs) at a Westercon far away (Vancouver, BC) I was walking back from lunch with Dawn Plaskon to the VBC towers.¹ She was still pubbing her ish at that time, doing "theme" zines centering around one topic per ish. She had decided to do one on aging, & asked me for an article, figuring I myt have a different perspective from her (then 20-30ish) peers. She put it very diplomatically, so I wasnt the least insulted, altho I was still a young whippersnapper of 59 at the time. I was somewhat bemildred, however, bcoz I didnt feel "old"; in fact, I was looking forward to being a sexagenarian.

I never did the piece, nor did she do the zine. Now she is gone, & Im still here, coming up on the big 8-0, feeling just a bit old, & its time I did the bit. I thot about her request from time to time, but it wasnt until I hit that period of grief & depression back there bfor I met Shirley, that it suddenly struck me that yes, this is the way it feels--when you suddenly cant remember an old friend's name, or something that you put down just a moment bfor, has completely disappeared! I felt great sympathy for HAL 9000 when Dave Bowman was pulling his circuits, one by one, & that is the perfect opening for this amusing musing. See illo.

Thats a hard act to follow, but lest you think that Im going gentle into that good Alzheimers night, let me hasten to add that fighting entropy does seem to do some good. Extra repetition of names, appointments, events to be attended etc seem to solidify the otherwise tenuous circuits.

As for the physical body, a similar strategy called Exercise is called for. I really missed the semi-weekly basketball games withe rest of the aging faculty when I retired. I have no interest in weights, calistenics or jogging, & my knees are pretty well shot anyway. Putting too much



"Dave. Stop.
Stop. Will you.
Stop, Dave.
Will you stop, Dave.
Stop, Dave.
I'm afraid.
I'm afraid, Dave.
Dave.
My mind is going.
I can feel it.
I can feel it.
My mind is going.
There is
no question
about it.
I can feel it.
I can feel it.
I can feel it.
I'm afraid."

strain on them myt do more harm than good. If only we had a senior center like the one my friend John Waible has in Woodburn, OR, I'd be in that olympic indoor pool in a NY minute, doing laps. There is the Sea Ranch golf (of) course just south of Gualala, but its expensive; theres equipment to buy, membership, lessons, etc. Up to now, Ive rationalizd that Id rather be spending my time reading at least some of that (standard joke) "shelf of 200 books that I absolutely must read by next week," or nattering at the keyboard as Im doing now.

HAL's plaint, "My mind is going. I can feel it. I'm afraid," applies not only to the mind, but to the body as well. I am about 20# overwate, & have been most of my life. In my 20s, I workd as a ware-houseman for Procter & Gamble, & was in perfect shape for my skeeton & body type: 175#, mostly muscle. Then I changed jobs in the course of migrating to CA, went to school², became a teacher, etc. I like to

characterize it ruefully joking, "I stopt working like a horse, but I continued to eat like a horse, and very soon I started to weigh like a horse." That was OK, but sometime in the last ten years I have become painfully aware that I am not just carrying 20# of flab, but that the muscle that once carried it easily is itself turning to flab; ergo, that 20# is becoming more & more of a burden. Sometimes when Im in front of a mirror, something goes click & my sense of wonder kicks in. Who is that old man looking back at me? Why is my skin hanging loosely on my arms that once lookd more like arms than sticks?

The other day I decided to move a box; a box of fanzines that was still sitting where I put it in 1991 (just the other day!) when I moved up here for keeps. I cd hardly buj it, & had to bring into play all my old trix of levering, balance etc that I had learnd as a warehouseman in order to persuade that box to do my bidding; that box that I had brot in from my truck so nonchalantly just a short while ago. Oh yes, Dave. I can feel it. My body is going too.

However, there is an upside to getting old. You can say anything you damn well please, & there's nothing anybody can do about it. The worst they can do is kill you, so youre losing about 10% of your life, max. Of course there are extreme examples yall will want to confront me with, so dont bother; Ill concede.

And contrary to the politically correct, I think I detect a slyt increase in civility, at least to the elderly, & that from young people, whom I had previously perceived from hippie times as rather insolent. "Dont trust anybody over 30." Remember? I suppose when they got to be 30 themselves, it became a whole different story. And of course, I tend to see anybody under 50 as a "kid." All the doctors look like Doogie Howser. *sigh*

I must confess that I enjoy all the little perks that are accorded to "seniors" these days. 10% off at the supermkt on Mon, reduced theater tickets, bus fares, air fares, etc. I know some people just past 55 who bridle a bit when offerrd some discount or other, but I never did. Some time ago at an airline check-in counter, I was carded!

This bland Stepford doll didnt believ I was 65, & her mask was perfect. Usually they simper a bit, so I know theyre saying non-verbally, "flattery is part of my job." Made my whole day. I walkd down to the boarding gate with a spring in my step.

So thats what its like, Dawn. Wish you were here--& a whole bunch of other people, like Seth & John & Sam Moskowitz. I suppose some of you will want to know if I think theres anything on the other side. No, that lyt at the end of the tunnel is really a locomotive heading my way. I comfort myself with the fantasy of walking into the bar of Purgatory Hotel & finding Terry Carr, Charlie Burbee & Elmer Perdue waiting for me to continue our discussion of the moldiness of figs & the fuggheadedness of media fen. I dont think Ill go for putting a thimblefull of my ashes on a rocket & joining the other oddballs like Tim Leary, since they are only in Earth orbit wch will eventually decay. I want to be aimed in the genral direction of M22, a globular cluster in Sagittarius that I have gazed at many a summer nite. With 100,000 stars, an avg of 1 LY from each other, I think its a good bet for the first interstellar civilization to have gotten started. Even if I cdnt talk to them, Id like to go & look . . .

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1. Dawn was a Barea fan of the 70s, well known to many of the older members of this apa.
 2. LA State. 1951-55.

Ω



PS: The following isnt actually part of the growing old segment, but I want to include it here, & thus be done withe gloomy stuff. (BOF ALERT!) I had thot that another part of my body deterioration was simply geriatric, but from Karen's account of her Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) & the symptoms around Seth's death, I find I am not alone.

I was first stricken withis way back in 1965 (20/20 hindsight) when I was on sabbatical in Lansing, MI. ~~Abominable~~ abdominal pain lasting 12-24 hours, apparently from gas pockets, rather ordinary constipation. I put it down to "food poisoning" as I had eaten some dubious sea food in a restraunt. A couple of years later came the painful breakup with my first wife, along with considerable physical gut pain, altho no devastating severe pain as in the first instance. Then I went thru a part of adolescence at age 50 that I had mist bfor; dating etc, & finding out that women came in astonishing variety. The pains cleared up & I felt fine, so I put down the previous troubles as "psychosomatic." All the more so when my second wife died suddenly, & later a third marriage blew up, my best friend died & I lookd for answers in the bottom of a bottle, but no more pain occurred.

Then sometime in the late 80s I was hit hard on the way to a V-con, but fortunately I was with son Pete in Seattle. My moaning & groaning became too much for him & he cald the ambulance. Unfortunately, I was taken to Virginia Mason emergency & landed there in the middle of a triage, gunshot wounds etc. When they finally got around to me they gave me a colonic irrigation, wch was not the most fun I ever had with my pants down. That did take care of most of the pain, however. The internes, all three of them having nothing better to do at three in the morning, decided to check out my gall bladder. I think they wanted to play with some new hitek electronix they hadnt used bfor.

I lay there dopily staring at the screen, while they fiddld & twiddld with things and

even askd me at one point if I had had my gall bladder out, since they cdnt find it.

Finally a nurse came by & showd them how to do it. My GB was OK. (If you want to find out something or get something done in a hospital--dont ask a doctor, ask a nurse.) I was put to bed & went on my way in the morning, altho I arivd at Vcon in very shaky condition. I was on the program, & only another attack wdv stopt me. Thats how strongly I feel about keeping promises. I arrivd just barely in time, found the right room abt 5 past the hour, but my heart sank as I saw it was full & thot they had just gon ahead w/o me. I asked a nearby gopher if there was some mistake, & he said, "Naw, its just that Sam Moskowitz ran over. He's doing the history of fandom in real time."

After that it seemd like Id get one every year. I think Ive written abt the first one that hit me when I movd up here & the ambulance ride from hell. That was supposd to be a kidney stone, but now Im not entirely convinced. The next one I tuft out alone. It was pretty bad, but at least I didnt have to hassle with three burocraacies (RCMS (Redwd Coast Med Services), Medicare and Kaiser) over a \$1000 med bill & not much help. When it struck again I made sure I had some percodan wch pretty well took care of the pain until the diarea came & took care of whatever was cozing the trubl.

The past year Ive had abt every test & exam the drs & I can think of, but w/o much progress, & the attax are becoming more frequent & severe. I had a bad one just after Corflu, & it scared hell out of me when David Bratman cald me with the bad news abt Seth, bcoz it sounded very much like what I was just recovering from. Three percodan barely touchd it, but then I learnd that Seth's case was a virus of some kind & I have never had a fever or any flu-like symptoms. (In conexn w ab pain, i.e.) I shd give Kaiser credit that at least theyve ruled out cancer, ulcers, polyps & similar nasties. Abt a week later (around Easter) I

had another that wasn't quite as bad, but I became rather aggressive with Kaiser & said I wanted an appointment with a surgeon, since the GE dr had mentioned in passing that I had a pretty large gallstone.

My only complaint with Kaiser is with their phone system, which really sucks. I tried to get Dr H, the GE man, but he was unavailable, so I left a message with the advice nurse for him to call me back as soon as he returned. He never got the message. I followed up a couple of days later, & got an appointment with my regular doctors (B) sidekick, Dr B2. Dr B2 hadn't really been briefed on my case, & was all set to put me back on square 1 with xrays, barium & all that other jazz. I insisted I'd already been through that & was ready for the next option, which was maybe surgery.

So OK, a couple of weeks later I saw the surgeon, Dr K, with whom I was impressed. Unlike most of the surgeons I've heard about, who are ready to slice & dice at the drop of a stethoscope, he questioned me thoroughly & listened(!). I got the impression that he was a bit pissed at Dr H, & said he would make sure H called me, (I still hadn't heard word one from H at this point) & that I apparently had IBS & surgery was uncalled for.

Dr H called twice in a couple of days, but I was out & just missed him by about 5 min. He explained a few things on the machine, said I had IBS & would send me a pamphlet on it, which he did. Said pamphlet was quite thorough, put out by the International Foundation For Bowel Dysfunction (IFBD), & answered about all the questions I had, so I've yet to call him back. The bottom line is that IBS is incurable, but not life-threatening. It isn't "all in your head" but is stress related for some people. If I have room and time I'll reprint the How Do You Cope part, & for those who may be interested, like let me know & I'll send you a copy of the whole schmeer. I'll be watching my diet more carefully from here on, & the good news is that IBS sufferers should avoid cruciform veggies & I don't like broccoli anyhow. END BOF ALERT.

Dont Mess with Gaia!

Add to Crazy Art's Theories on Evolution etc: I suspect we are approaching the event horizon of a behavioral sink, which

will be Gaia's reaction to our careless overpopulation. Warning signs from Gaia include Bosnia, Rwanda, ebola, AIDS, increase in crime (especially among the young--very young), global warming, hitek terrorism & increase in the gay pop. I regard the latter on the + side, although I can't be sure that the increase is in greater proportion to the general increase or if it's just a mass exodus from The Closet. Ending gay bashing in all its forms would seem to be one of the easier ways to attain pop control, to say nothing of the moral issues involved.

Gay bashing is just the start of it. Since the gays are fighting back, the far right has found a new target; just plain old parent & school bashing. They've finally found a way to get at daycare & preschool outfits that show the faintest hint of "permissiveness," under the guise of "child abuse" & "Satanic Cults." The Little Rascals case in Carolina & the Bakersfield CA case are as bad as anything that happened in 1692. Add the stoning of the woman in Afghanistan to the list of offenses against Gaia. Or is it perhaps Gaia's revenge? Here we go, slouching toward Jerusalem. Please turn off the lights & close the door on your way out. I'll notify the rats & raccoons who've been waiting impatiently in the wings for some time now.

From Marilyn Vos Savant

How many humans can inhabit the Earth and still maintain a decent standard of living, without having a seriously adverse effect on the environment?

—Steve Gross, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

This depends on what we consider to be a decent standard of living. In my own opinion, mere subsistence is not nearly good enough, and the upper-population threshold has already been reached. Even now, the Earth is badly damaged, but to bring the average diet of Third World countries in line with that of the U.S., their food supply would need to increase by more than 400%. Without a major technological breakthrough, this is not possible. It is also not a minor, isolated problem. More than 75% of the world's population lives in developing countries.

Over the next 100 years, deforestation will continue, more topsoil will be depleted, and water supplies will grow increasingly polluted as the population doubles. (By then, an even greater percentage will be living in Third World countries.) At that point, the world population is expected to stabilize. However, this does not mean planetary resources will be stable. They will not.

I believe technology will come to the rescue even if it means that someday much food will closely resemble feed instead. And will there be a decent standard of living then? I think so. But it would be much better if our population were to stop growing now.

THE PELBAR CYCLE

by Paul O. Williams

Del Rey Ballantine 1980-5

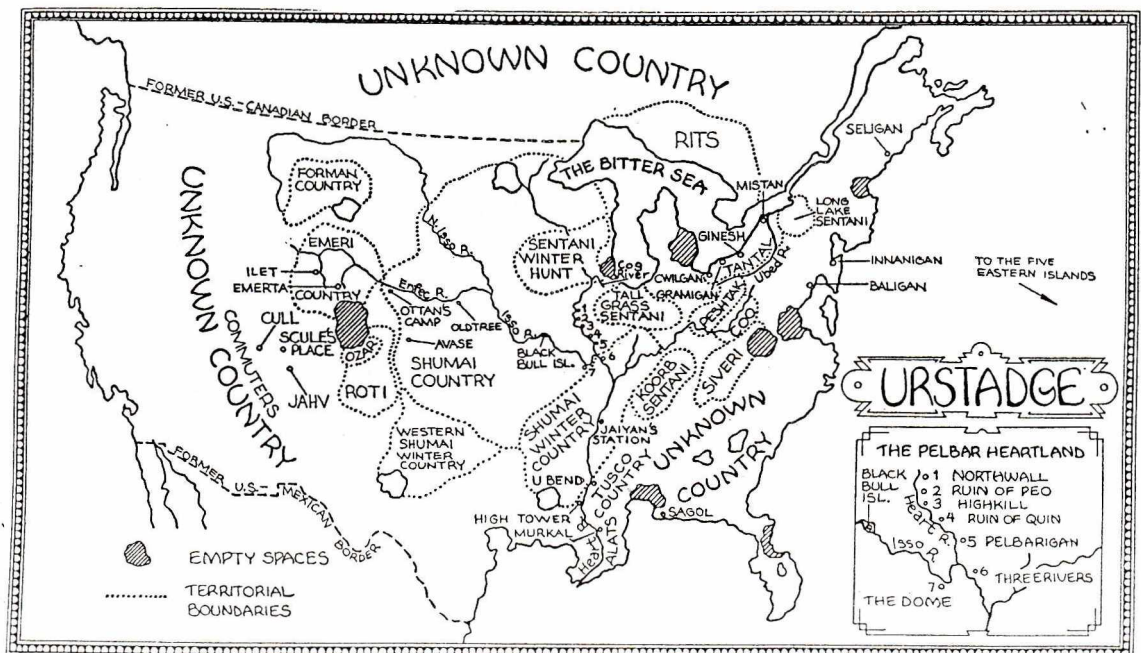
Original paperback

- Seven vols: 1. *The Breaking of Northwall*
 2. *The Ends of the Circle*
 3. *The Dome in the Forest*
 4. *The Fall of the Shell*
 5. *An Ambush of Shadows*
 6. *The Song of the Axe*
 7. *The Sword of Forbearance*

First, dont confuse Paul O Williams with Paul S Williams, creator of *Crawdaddy*, & tons of work on & for Philip K. Dick. The author of The Pelbar Cycle is a professor of English at Principia College in Elsah, Illinois. He mustv fallen in love withat part of the country, bcoz TPC is laid along 100 miles of the Mississippi, approximately from Quincy to St. Louis (see maps), altho the adventures of the main characters take them all over the continent, mainly what was once the USA, in the heptalogy called "Urstage."

The epic opens about 1000 years in the future, after a meteor storm sets off a nuke xchange & most of the world pop is wiped out. Unlike most post holocaust tales, where the action centers around the hero & the good guys winning a military victory of some kind over the bad guys, who can represent commies, fascists, rednex, eggheads (or plug in the scapegoat of your choice), the heroes of Pelbar are battling tribalism & its tendency to rip the fragile fabric of civilization, or in this case, to prevent it from even being rewoven..

Aside from Williams' choice of the "heartland" as the savior of civilization, I found his depiction of the forces of unity v chaos pretty credible. My personal bias is that coastal peoples are much more likely to save humanity (if it is to be saved at all) than inland peoples, who by their location tend to be more isolationist & xenophobic than those living near large bodies of water, bcoz of the greater likelihood of contact & cooperation with others not exactly like themselves.



As the story opens, the Pelbar have maintained a semi-feudal, semi-democratic union of three medieval walled cities along the Heart River (the Mississippi). Their cultures range from relatively liberal in the North (Northwall) to very conservative in the South (Threerivers). Pelbarigan is the central & most cosmopolitan "city" & a mediative force between her sisters.

"Sisters" is an apt word here, since the base culture of all three is matriarchal, & thus lends more interest to the books than the usual post holocaust (PH) epic. However, Jestak, the "preliminary hero" of the first book, is male, since it is almost *sine qua non* that in a PH story the one to set big cultural changes in motion must be a rebel, & a dominant female wdnt be likely to fill that role, any more than a dominant male wd in a patriarchal culture.

Jestak is a native of Pelbarigan, who is sent on a journey to the east, hopefully to open trade with Innanigan (the remnants of New York & the Old Culture, of wch nobody knows anything, including the Inanigani--inane again? My pun; sorry). He was supposed to get educated & return in two years, but it takes him six. He discovers there is a whole lot of country, of wch Pelbar, in their hi-security castles, are totally ignorant. They are aware of the two naboring cultures, the Shumai to the west (fair-haired, & blueyed, but I guess culturally representing Sioux Americans) & the Sentani to the north & south, possibly representing the Iroquois, altho Williams' geography doesnt correspond very well to my National Geographic map of Amerind tribes. There is mutual hostility & mistrust btwn these three peoples, altho there is a limitd "truceweek" in the fall when some trading is done.

In Innanigan, Jestak makes friends with a Shumai, as both discover that the other is not a demonizd stereotype. They are cheated by the capitalistic easterners, but finally gather enuf resources to start the homeward trek. However, they are captured by the ferocious Peshtak, but saved from torture by the even worse Tantal, a Nazi-like culture that has bcome established south

of the "Bitter Sea" (what remains of the Great Lakes). They are enslaved, but finally escape & make their way back.

As they near Northwall, Jestak rescues a young Shumai woman, Tia, from drowning. Later, after he arrives at Northwall & explains his long absence, he learns that Tia has been captured by a far western people, the Emeri. Impulsively, he plans to go rescue her, but Sima Pall, the female Protector (chief administrator) of Northwall denies him permission, since he must instruct the people in what he has learned & repay their investment. Politix is involved as well, but J is determined, so a deal is worked out that he is to bring back horses wch will b a significant help to Pelbar farming & industry.

So he not only gets the horses, but rescues Tia, & deposes an evil dictator in the bargain. No sooner has he returned, when he is called on to save Pelbar from a threat that they, in their sheltered castle life, can scarcely imagine.

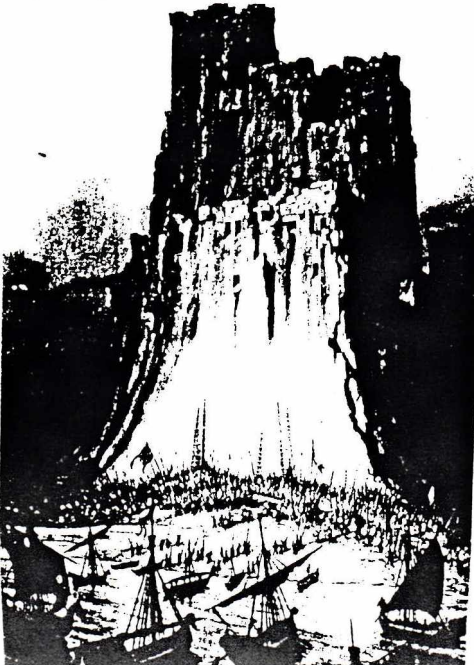
The Tantal have a talent for technology, & have rediscovered sailing & gunpowder. Under the threat of Tantal invasion, the Pelbar, Shumai & Sentani form an uneasy alliance, & are barely able to beat off a Tantal fleet wch comes down The River & attacks Northwall, hence the title of vol I. As the book closes, the alliance is strengthened, & bcoz the Tantal breached the thick, supposedly impregnable walls with their cannon, the Pelbar, at least Northwall, become more open & receptive to new ideas. We hear no more of Jestak until vol 7, & then in a minor role.

The real heroes of the saga are introduced in the second book of the series. Ahroe & her husband Stel have a troubled marriage bcoz of the rigid traditionalist attitudes of her clan, the Dahmens of Pelbarigan, & bcoz Stel, a free spirit, refuses to accept the male subservient role the culture demands. Ahroe's kin plot to get rid of the rebel, but the resourceful Stel evades a planned "accident" & flees to the midwinter prairie, thinking that Ahroe had gone along with the Dahmens. But Ahroe

loves him, & follows, determined to bring him back, even if she has to beat some sense into him with the flat of her Guard Captain's sword.

Unfortunately, Ahroe finds out she is pregnant & morning sickness slows her down. Stel also has contrived some skis, which help him to go faster. There's quite a bit of fortuitous technology in TPC which I didn't buy, but sort of went along with, since it wasn't outrageous enough to really spoil the story. But please, don't tell me that even a Viking with long familiarity with the craft could, on the run with pursuit only a few hours behind, produce a pair of skis good enough to pay off for the crucial time spent making them! To compound the felony, it's the first time he's ever tried skis, but he puts it right up as he goes along.

There's also a lot of talk in the seven books, but for the most part I didn't find it boring, because it was necessary to develop both character & background. Only a few of these "conversations" were mere expository lumps. On the whole I felt that the author handled these difficult devices better than any except Heinlein.



For example, take the *ursus ex machina* whereby Stel gains insight & comes to some peace with himself. Had Williams thrown this in just for its intrinsic interest. I would grouch about it, but the trek(s) of Stel & Ahroe are not merely picaresque (or picturesque either) although they are both. As Stel compulsively trundles on into the Rockies, he comes upon a miniature Pelbarigan, which blows his mind. It turns out that a generation earlier a man named Scule had been exiled by the same Dahmen family, but with more reason than had been used with Stel. His "crime" is left ambiguous, however. What is important is that Scule had lived there in bitter isolation, becoming quite mad. He fancies Stel has been sent to drag him back to Pelbarigan for further punishment. He cleverly traps Stel in a stone room he has built especially for this purpose.

Stel's ordeal lasts through most of the winter, during which he has a satori, as Scule, using thirst & starvation, repeatedly tries to extort a "confession" from him. Stel's epiphany is realizing that he was becoming like Scule, & resolves not to, no matter what trials he has to endure. And he has plenty as it turns out. First, the huge grizzly he had avoided before discovering Scule's hermitage, comes out of hibernation, very hungry. (Yes, the *ursus* I mentioned above). It manages to batter down Scule's heavy door (although why it hadn't done it through forty years before, we are left to wonder) & kills the hermit, then starts working on the little hideout which Scule had used to taunt Stel, & occasionally feed him. With a little luck, Stel manages to leap out as the bear comes crashing down, then hacks at its paws with his sword as it tries to get back into Scule's chamber. Disabled, the bear is easier to kill.

Having done this, Stel tries to help his tormenter, who isn't quite dead yet. Stel, Ahroe & other Pelbar repeatedly do this typically American "Christian" act throughout the series, reinforcing what I think is Williams' message, that a civilization (tribe) that is hung up on fear, revenge & hatred of the "other" is doomed, but one that is not so rigid must still be powerful enough to lead the deluded cultures out of their traps. So Scule's trap becomes a parable for our present situation.

However, I don't think this is just another "White Man's Burden" story. It is more subtle than that. This subtlety is achieved in its length, as the protagonists visit an astonishing variety of cultures that have sprung up in the wake of the debacle. Stel, like Jestak before him, is unconsciously a missionary who must bring his unspoken message to every culture he can.

By coincidence, I just read a review of Robertson Davies' posthumous book of essays, *The Merry Heart*. This Canadian is quoted as making what I consider a quite perceptive estimate of what it means to be an "American."

The United States "assumes that it must dominate, that its political and moral views are superior to all others, and that it is justified in interference with countries it thinks undemocratic, meaning unlike itself. It also has the unhappy extravert (sic) characteristic of seeing all evil as exterior to itself..."

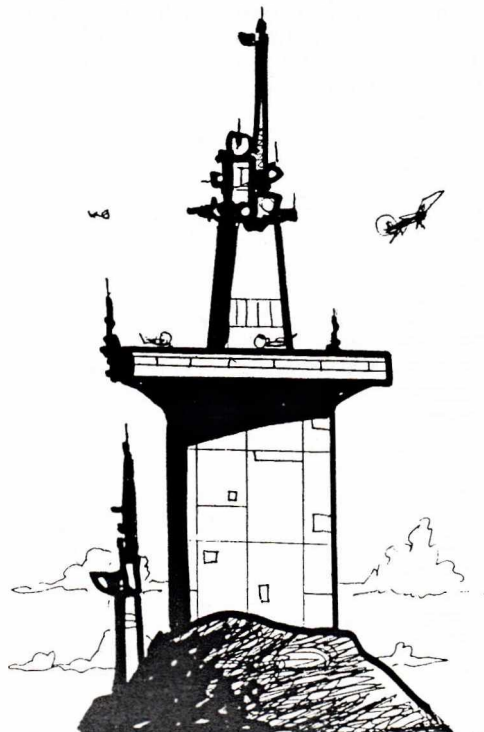
Because the way of the Pelbar is contrasted, not with one or two cultures, but with the ways of many, and not just with words & lectures, but with what the characters do, the epic makes a strong case. Nor is symbolic Middle America portrayed as perfect as it (or whatever culture a given author sees as ideal) is in most sf; it is shown warts and all, as in its treatment of individuals like Stel & Ahroe.

Stel goes on with no clear quest in his mind, but decides that trying to get to the legendary "great western sea" is as good a way as any to keep from suicide from meeting so many rudimentary peoples. When at last he meets The Commuters, a people who would rather talk & listen than fight, & who get all excited because he has new paper, he at first is put off by the usual xenophobia of the first two young men he encounters. When their father shows up with a quite different attitude, Stel doesn't even trust him.

"I don't trust you. I have trusted too many people--the Dahmens, McCarty, Scule, the goatherders. I am lucky to be alive. Take your horses and go. I will keep my paper. You keep your treachery."

McCarty was a psychotic, radiation-raddled old crone who dominated the Ozar, a small group of descendants of a plane crash somewhere east of Denver at "the time of the Great Fire." They had made the mistake of venturing into one of the empty spaces & staying too long in it. Only one woman, Fitzhugh, had avoided the nuked area, kept her hair & her sanity, & maintained a semblance of order, keeping the zombie-like radiation victims hoeing their beans & catching a few fish. They were too weak to do anything else, but served to rescue Stel from the Roti.

The Roti were a strange, dark-skinned tribe, totally given to rote, or ritual. They chanted a lot & sacrificed people who had blue eyes, mostly Shumai, until Stel came along. I think there's a clue in their most repeated chant when tracking a victim: "Diu heer es nu may nezumi iro," but I'm damned if I can figure it out. Maybe one of you can. They only gave up when Stel wandered into the Ozar compound. They backed off,



fearing the gaunt, hairless radiation victims as having something contagious.

After leaving Scule, Stel comes upon a ruined town wch myt have been Aspen & rescues a woman with a broken leg & a little girl. With great labor, he carries her back to her people, the goatherders, only to be met with the usual hostility. Only the little girl tries to bridge the communication gap. Stel proceeds on his weary journey, & finally meets Crazy Elseth, who is divinely crazy in much the same way he is, carving what she & the Commuters know of history on a canyon wall. It will take her the rest of her life, but she doesn't care. It is only of zenlike importance that she does it. This strikes a chord in Stel, & he repairs her scaffold bfor it falls down, in spite of her objections. Physically she reminds him of Ahroe, & he is getting interested until her oafish brothers arrive on the scene, leading to the speech above.

After being persuaded by her father, Stel decides to help the Commuters, who are cattle people besides being nolej preservers, something like the monks at the abbey of St. Leibowitz. They have a problem withe Originals, a fundamentalist cult who have managed to preserve pure fundamentalism without much content xept sun worship. Theyve forgotten the Bible & its fundamentalism, Theyre quite sure that their "city," Cull, is the Original City from wch all other misguided cities came, & faithfully adhere to their sacred duty of singing up the sun each morning. They are relatively harmless, but like LA, sit astride the only water supply in that area, wch threatens the livelihood of the Commuters whenever there is a drout, wch is conveniently happening just as Stel arrives.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Black Bull Island, (Kansas City?) where Ahroe has been taken by some friendly Shumai, she spends the winter & has her baby son, Garet.

She first had to fight off & then kill a horny widower Shumai, but Hagen, an older Shumai, befriends her & goes along when he can't persuade her to give up her insane idea of finding Stel or at least his body.

Then we have Quen, a man of honor, as most Shumai are, quite difrent from Assek, the man she was forced to kill. Quen has the hots for Ahroe, baby & all, & cant understand her obsession with pursuing her worthless (in his eyes) husband. They have a battle royal bfor leaving, wch she loses, altho Quen doesnt rape her. He & two other competent warriors, plus Hagen, insist on going wither as far as Shumai borders, the foot of the Rockies. Thus they are able to protect her from the Roti, & discover from the Ozar that Stel is still alive & only a few weeks ahead.

McCarty has finally gone around the bend & immolated herself & most of the others in the carcass of the plane, leaving Fitzhigh & two others to carry on. Hagen has come down with a bad back & cant continue. After some unconvincing dialog, they agree to go to the southern ej of the nukd space with Ahroe bfor turning back. Hagen uses his seniority to get the two warriors to constrain Quen from foloing, & they finally leave Ahroe & baby Garet to go on alone, no coverd wagon or nuthin. Not bloody likely, but OK.

Ahroe decides not to attempt the hi pass withe baby & not sure whether Stel went that way or not, she goes farther south bfor turning west again. Thus she misses Scule's place & the goatherders, but instead runs into the Jahv, another female dominated society. At first she thinks this wd b a sympathetic place to stop & rest a while, but these are militant feminists, not content with just political & social power. They are truly sexist, thinking of men as repulsive beasts, properly kept in a stockade in degraded condition. A woman giving birth to a boy is pitied & sends the child to the stockade as soon as possible. Sort of Chinese in reverse.

Ahroe leaves at the earliest opportunity, but Rabe, the chief of the Jahv, follows with the intent to drag Ahroe

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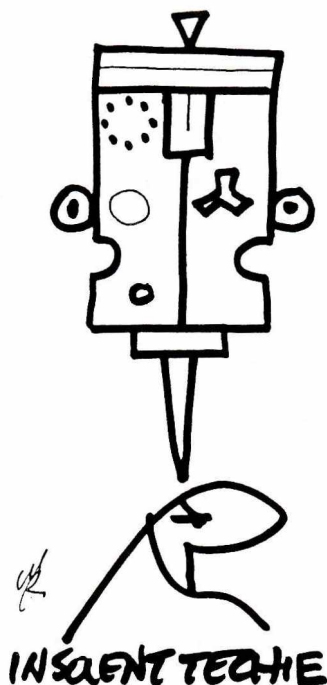
back & "save" her, whether she will or no. But even with the handicap of Gareth, Ahroe's discipline & training is more than a match for Rabe, who is soon trust up like a turkey, spitting & fuming her hatred.

"You are mad. I knew you were mad. You and your males. You and your soap. Dragging a male baby across the wilderness. Cuddling it like it was human."

Ahroe sighs & ties Rabes hands so she wd need help to get free, unties her feet, but keeps one shoe, so Rabe can get home after a while, but not folo. (Again this Christian thotfulness--reminds me of diddleydo Sanders, Homer Simpsons wonderful nabor). Ahroe arrives at Original City as the major conflict is heating up between Cull & the Commuters, fueled by the cattle peoples need for water, & Cull's ignorant refusal to share their plenty.

Ilage, the high priest of Cull, is a blithering idiot, & the rest of the pop isnt much briter. The Commuters are intellectuals who have salvaged some important stuff from pre-Fire times & like the Pelbar. are beginning to get a smidgen sense of history. However, theyre a bit short on street smarts, so the ensuing conflict bcomes more of a comic opera than a real battle. Then the *cumulus ex machina* gets into the act, there is a dandy cloudburst. Stel & Ahroe are reunited in a touching scene, & everybody goes home happy. The Ends of the Circle have come together; in fact, theres almost an orgy of getting everybody paired off, almost Tolkienish. Elseth takes up with Boldar, a good-natured but very duh-slow giant, a hily unlikely pair, especially with Elseth so dedicated to her sculpture. S&A stop off at Ozar on their way back, & find them all dead xept Hagen & Fitzhugh, who have taken a shine to each other & headed East. I guess theres nothing like sex to fix a bad back.

Book 3, *The Dome in the Forest*, brings yet another culture front & center. Stel hears from some hunters about a strange rod that rises from the earth at equinox, & decides to go have a look. It is abt ten yers later & Gareth is half grown, but



ART CREDITS

Cover: HARRY TURNER
 p3: New Yorker cartoon
 p6: map from book
 p8: book cover *Breaking of Northwall*
 p13: book cover *Fall of the Shell*
 pp9, 11, 14, 15:
 BILL ROTSLER

is yet to arrive at center stage. Instead, we get the development of Tor & Tristal, two Shumai who later have a whole book to themselves. Tor is a mighty hunter & warrior, & the best axeman around, where most Shumai have relied on spears & only recently took up the bow from the Pelbar. Tor is also deeply religious in the best sense, & in addition, gifted with ESP, ie, clairvoyance & precognition. He doesn't exploit his gifts, but uses them for good when needed. He is depressed by the rapid disappearance of the old wild free lifestyle of the Shumai & altho friendly toward Pelbars, especially Stel, he can't stand being cooped up in their walled city for very long. He decides that the best thing he can do is to educate his orphaned nephew, Tristal, in the way of the traditional axeman. This he does, or tries to, in bk 6, but we'll return to that later.

Where the Shumai nomads have seen only a mysterious object of the Ancients, Stel & Tor get strong feelings that there may be people inside who need help. Hah! The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Indeed there are people inside, & a fine collection of bozos they are, but needing quite a different kind of help than Stel, Tor, or all of Pelbarigan is prepared to give them. The Dome is a radiation-proof shelter, originally a drug factory, & converted for the benefit of the executives & top scientists, but when the Big Crunch came the xx didn't make it & the people on site were it. In a thousand years, their descendants had become pretty weird.

The Dome is situated at the edge of an "empty space," & the mystery rod is simply a radiation detector with which they take a reading twice a year. Unfortunately, the detector is defective & reports his readings every time & the only windows face out on the nuclear desolation, so they have no idea that the world is recovering & that there are by no means the last people on Earth. Their little world has become totally ingrown & their humanity badly skewed. They are mostly technocrats living inside their heads, with few emotions or moral values. They have ceased to reproduce naturally, & have

forgotten some of the techniques of mechanical gestation; consequently the creatures coming out of the vats aren't viable & have to be "recycled."

They got off to a bad start when they decided that their limited resources meant that the dome could only support a population of fifty indefinitely, so they murdered the "surplus" & divided themselves into "Principals" & "comps" (components). Guess who got to do the menial work. Guess who revolted after a while & were put down, then genetically engineered to be misfits; less dangerous & didn't eat so much.

Celeste is a girl who appears to be autistic or retarded. She doesn't talk, so they think she can't; that something went wrong in the tank before she was "born." She is a whiz on the computer, however, & tries to tell them that she has seen birds (geese migrating). They knew damn little about nature to begin with, & think this is just another of Celeste's fantasies. She knows about radiation & greatly fears it, but figures if the birds are alive, she has a chance, & anything is better than the stultified world she inhabits. She manages to decode one of the impregnable doors & get out. She is found by Tristal & the rest of the expedition, which bolsters Stel's idealistic plan to help.

After they are able to communicate with Celeste, she realizes dimly that letting these weirdos with their hi-tech weapons etc loose on the innocent Pelbar isn't such a good idea, but is unable to explain it to them. Events take a hand in the form of a thousand years of erosion, which has left the building in danger of collapse, which those inside are unaware of because they never have been outside. Susan, an elderly woman in the dome, begins to understand Celeste's point of view & not having long to live anyway, makes a break for it just as Stel & company are trying to find a way in.



Stel gets in, but is knockd out by a stun gun. The inhabitants are freakd out by his intrusion & very existence. Dexter, the de facto leader, & most amoral of the bunch, wants to vivisect Stel to find out how he has apparently become adapted to heavy radiation. They find the door & lock it so Stel's companions cant rescue him. Ruthan, a domer with some compassion left, & Butto, a drug addicted poet, protest that Dexter hasnt even tried to talk to Stel, just presuming him some kind of non-human creature. Eolyn, a gorgeous ice queen with no emotions (supposedly) sides with Dexter, but is movd by Stel's fiziq, (compared to efete domers) & tries to stay D with logic.

While they quarrel, Mother Nature & Tor take a hand. Besides the erosion, a slow leak in their oil supply has accumulad a small pool in a fissure below the dome. When they run the rod up to take a dubl chek on the surrounding rad level, the rod is hit by lytning, wch runs down & sets the exterior oil pool ablaze. Tor gets on top of the dome, & with some fancy acrobatix, breaks the small hi window with his ax & gets in, opening the door for the others. There is a battle in wch Tor loses half his ryt arm, & Dexter is accidentally blown away by Eolyn with a stun gun on max. Theres a standoff as the whole dome catches on fire & they all get out just as it explodes. Movie buffs wd luv it.

All the dome pepl xept Eolyn are convinced that they dont have much choice but to go to Pelbarigan & make the best of it, trading their ancient hitek nolej for the "street smarts" of the newworlders. Eolyn, a few months later, still chafing under the constraints imposed by these "savages," decides that life in Inanigan will be more like that she is used to, & against the advice of Jestak, Stel, Tor & all the experienced travelers, insists on starting an eastward journey in late fall, in spite of reports that the ferocious Peshtak have been spilling over their borders & raiding settlements to the south.

Of course, she & her party are surprisd & capturd by the Peshtak. Tor & Tristal, who are unaware of the awesome power of the helmet weapons, (since they werent used at full power in the altercation after the escape from the dome) are informd

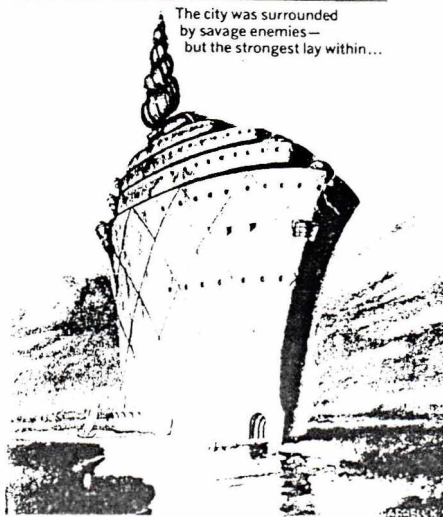
by Celeste that if they fall into the hands of the Peshtak they can be used to destroy Pelbarigan itself. T&T set out to overtake Eolyn & Co. Butto sacrifices himself & the comps to save Eolyn & Royal (a dr from the dome) by setting off both helmets at self destruct & incinerating the whole valley where they are. Tor, Tristal & a small band of Shumai who foloed, mop up the remaining Peshtak. Eolyn, much chastend, returns withem to Pelbarigan.

The book closes as Tor & Tristal start off on another epic trek, this time to the "ice country," even farther than the others have gone. But first, we come to the story of the third city of Pelbar, Three-rivers, told in Book 4.

The Fall of the Shell accomplishes several things at once, tidying up loose ends & prepping the ground for Stel & Ahrooy reentry in the next book. Several items are added to the map, all to the south of the previous action, & we take a sort of Twain trip all the way to mouth of the Heart-Mississippi & a bit beyond.

THE FALL OF THE SHELL

The city was surrounded
by savage enemies—
but the strongest lay within...



In place of Huck, we have the 14-year-old twins, Brudoer & Gamwyn, who live at Threerivers, the third & most conservativ of the Pelbar "cities." But where Huck's inner & outer trips were simultaneous, Williams chooses to have one twin imprisond, while his brother Gamwyn goes on a quest downriver for the grail that will redeem both of them.

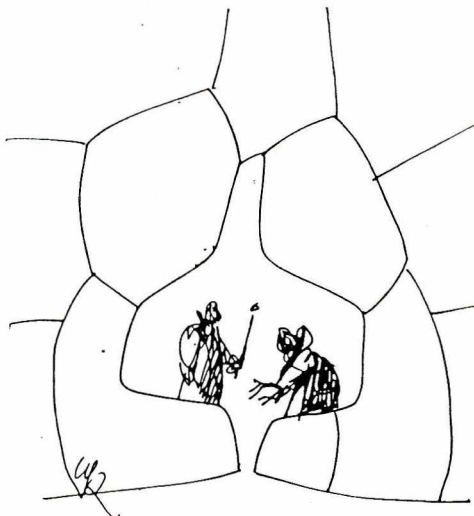
The title is rich with poetic ambiguity & reverberations. The boys are horsing around on the stairs, when Gamwyn accidentally bumps into Bival, a powerful family head in the matriarchy. She has stopt to admire her newly aquird treasure, a shell, wch she has placed on a windo lej. This shell is a rare marine variety, wch just happens to be the model for the design of the citys main tower.

The designer of the city 300 years bfor, was Craydor, a female daVinci genius, who incorporated her philosphy into the structure of the city itself, wch is somewhat of a mystery to the inhabitants. She intended the structure & artwork to reinforce her writings, for them to be a living document like our constitution, to be amended as conditions changd, ratheren a frozen set of rules unable to adapt to new times.

When Gamwyn innocently bumps into Bival, a near-tragic (in the classical sense) chain of events is set in motion, as the shell is knocked off the windo sil.

With a gasp she saw the two halves of the shell, like wings with no bird, caught in the autumn breeze, falling, spinning, gliding, catching on the last terrace wall, shattering, then falling again in white flakes diminishing over the edge of the high city wall.

The loss, & her shock is compounded by guilt, bcoz she has just come from an angry dispute wither husband, bcoz she took some of his savings to buy the shell. He later leaves her (even tho he will be demoted to menial work) bcoz she is too stiff-necked to admit that she done him wrong. The fall of the shell foreshadows the fall of the city. It also has the aspect of true tragedy, bcoz



Bival was on the way to show the shell to Udge, the Protector (mayor) with thots of persuading her to be less intransigent in her management of city affairs.

But Bival is enraged with the enormity of her loss, & savagely attacks the boy, severely wounding him in the process, so that Brudoer forgets his place & comes to his brothers defense, giving her a few good lix w his belt buckle. Of cors he is arrested & thrown into a cell, & Bivals conference with Udge turns into vengeful plans to make an example of the boy as a warning to Lawless Elements.

Udge is not the Wicked Witch of the West, but so blindly traditional & hidebound that she makes Maggie Thatcher look like a flaming liberal. Imagine Pat Buchanan or Pat Robertson in charge of things & you get the picture. She decides that Brudoer must be punishd severely, & thinking of those advocating a more moderate approach & reminding her of Craydors Way, she gets frustrated & falls into the typical compartmentalized thinking of the authoritarian. She says to herself:

Udge

Damn Craydor. How could she keep the city to its founder's ideals when the founder's own ideas blocked her?

Both boys do a lot of growing in their fifteenth year. Brudoer, reflecting in his lonely succession of cells (part of Craydors design, foreseeing injustice & a rebel occupying them sometime down the line) and studying the peculiar symbols & cryptograms built into the stones, comes to man

Meanwhile, Gamwyn is spiritd off to Pelbarigan & the skills of Royal, the dome dr, further angering Udge, who wantd to charj the victim with something, too. As Gam heals, he determines that he will go to the Southern Sea & replace Bivals shell & thus set everything strate. Hes not nearly as successful (or as funny!) as Huck Finn in dealing with the wicked people & their societies along the banks of the river.

First he is capturd & enslvd by the Tusco, a lotek parody of Stalins USSR. He escapes & spends some time with Jaiyan & his reconstructd church organ, wch is wreckd when the luckless G is forcd into some dubious carpentry. He evades Jaiyans wrath & continues down river with a Tantal bro & sis, who were born at Threerivers after the defeat of their pepl at Northwall.

They get by Murkal, a company town of wage slavery, wch probly was once New Orleans, & finally find the Atherers in the lower delta. The Atherers are black, & interestingly enuf, are the only really free group in the future world. Even Pelbar has its own form of "benign" gender-based slavery, wch seems ok until a rebel, or an autocrat like Udge shows up. Then it suddenly turns ugly. They befriend the youngsters, & lead Gam to an old hermit who collects shells & turns out to have the one G is seeking. After a hurricane kills the old man, who was reluctant to part with his favorite shell, they find he has bequeathd it to Gam.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Udge has her head up her ass, & blows off the serious loss of the citys best workers as simply getting rid of the rifraf and an opportunity to tyten discipline with her few faithful. She also dismisses reports that the ferocious Peshtak are gathering around the stricken city, figuring it will soon be a pushover.

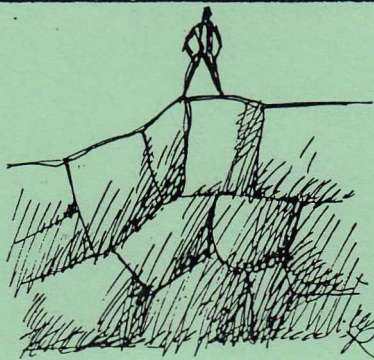
cont. p. 16 →

BIVAL sat hunched over her lamp, reading the manuscript Brudoer had copied in a careful hand. Again Craydor expressed unsureness:

I tremble when I think of the tightness, the exclusiveness of the organization of this society. Is it all a mistake? Should I have ever initiated it? Knowing as well as I do the human tendency to freeze institutions, to glorify mere procedures into ultimate truths, have I, in my attempt to create a wholly defended society capable of growth, simply walled one in with irremovable barriers? I have suggested modes of change and growth, but they have not been taken up. My words about mundane matters have been regarded as final truths, while I have not felt these words to be revealed by Aven, or even to deal with ultimates—only with social organization in this time of hostility. I am in agony now in my last days. I only hope that future generations will include the independent as well as the faithful, and that Threerivers will evolve and change, preserving our ideal devotion to Aven. But what if that does not happen? I have reached the ends of reason and design. I now can only pray.

The above is excerptd from ch 18. It reminds me a little of the concerns of Brian Aldiss in the *Helliconia Trilogy*. This is the sort of speculativ insyrt that separates the men/women from the boys/girls; ie, 'real' science fiction from mere sci-fi.

Stels mission is to reunite the disunited states. "We are all one people." From literary truth to mundane truth, the word is "unite." We have never really been united, altho more so than any other large culture, such as Europe or the now-fragmentd USSR. It distresses me that we seemd to have learnd nothing from the Cold War or the Vietnam experience. We congratulate ourselves that "we won," instead of taking the dismal spectacle of "Russia" as a warning that "It Can Happen Here."



Brudoer has disappeared, & they think he has somehow escaped, but he has decoded Craydors cryptic messag, & is exploring the maze of secret passajs in the city, & is slowly beginning to understand her grand design. He discovers & helps thwart a sneak Peshtak atak, but doesnt reveal himself.

Pelbarigan thinks Udge shd stew in her own juice, but reluctantly send a small force under the command of Ahroe. They are equipt with rifles, wch the dome pepl hav shown them how to make, & when they encounter a marauding band of Pehstak, they wipe them out, but take a cupl of prisoners. They find out that the Peshtak are such a mean pepl & so difcult to deal with bcoz they are being pressured on their eastern boundaries by the Innanigani with their superior tekology, & the only way they can survive is by being twice as nasty & having no regard for life, including their own, going all out to win or die. They are mostly dying. They also have a loathsome disease with painful itching sores, often fatal, wch adds to their desperation.

Ahroe & her soldiers are too late to save Threerivers. A spy helps a group to get in & open the gates to the main force. They pay dearly for their victory, however. The citys defenses are even more intricate & cunning than those of Pelbarigan & Northwall. The small force of defenders are favord by narrow corridors wch make it difficult for the invaders to bring their superior numbers to bear. And the place is full of traps. The Peshtak no sooner gain access to a large area, when the floor drops out from under them, the ceiling falls in or both.

But as usual, the Peshtak take their losses & keep on coming. The Pelbar are forced back & back to the prison cell area for what seems to be their last stand, when Brudoer appears & guides them thru his secret door & replaces the keystone bfor their enemies can figure out what happend. He leads them thru a tunnel to some ancient caves he has discovered in his month of exploring, where the original inhabitants had livd when they were bldg the city.

B has further found out that the entire fortress-town has been designed by Craydor on a diamond pattern with handles inside the walls for certain key blocks. He

pulls these out, saving the master block for last. The Peshtak are all inside by now, & the Pelbar are out. Too late the invaders hear the ominous groaning & rumbling as Brudoer pulls the last stone & escapes as the entire city collapses with a thunderous roar, burying the "victors" in the rubble. The shell has fallen.

Ahroes troops clean up the few Peshtak left outside. They are trying to decide what to do with Udge, who has miraculously survived, still not understanding what has happend, ranting & raving & trying to order pepl around, when Gamwyn arrives with about a hundred pepl he has pickd up along the way. There are refugees from the Tusco, Murkal, & assorted Siveri, Atherers & Sentani who have come to see the new country for themselves & perhaps a better life. Gamwyn & Bival are reconciled, & Udge is allowd to return to her former occupation of potter, but not be in charj of anything.

This ragtag & bobtail crew are symbolic of balkanizd Urstadge beginning to come together, but Stel has yet a lot of work to do. Reserve your copy of YHOS 56 now for the fascinating conclusion of this epic. Better yet, collect these paperbax bfore they disappear altogether & read them for yourself.

CAVEAT: The reader shd be warnd against making any hasty jujmts abt this work, bcoz u arent seeing what the writer wrote, but my perception & interpretation of it. Im sure my liberal* vus have colord my reportage of what the characters said & did & even the backgrd wch influenced them. Williams seems much more even-handed than I in appraising difrent cultures merits & demerits & how they serve their members or not. If I have misjudg his intent or mist the mark here & there, Im sorry, but I hope that Ive been true to the spirit of the whole work, wch I much admire.

* The term is almost devoid of meaning these days. Its original cachet was pretty well worn away even bfor the Kennedy administration & the Vietnamese. Liberals are left with only a pale label designating them "a little less conservative than the Right Wing." See my remarks later on the Innanigani.