

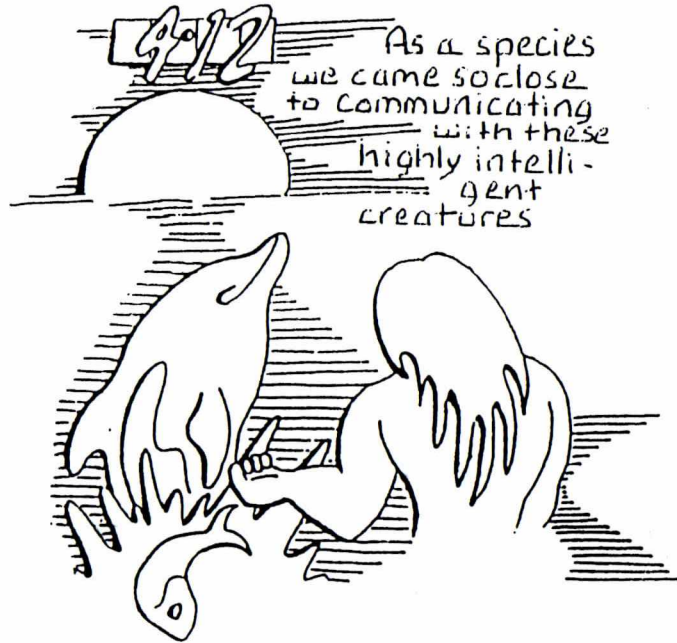
THE MENTOR 92

Australian Science Fiction

Story: Brent Lillie
Artwork: Rod Mitchell



Soon, they
will die -

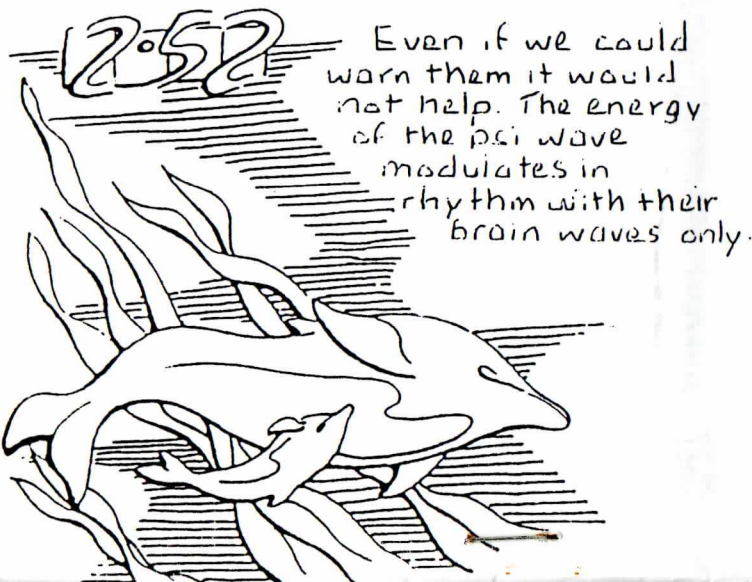


As a species
we came so close
to communicating
with these
highly intelli-
gent
creatures

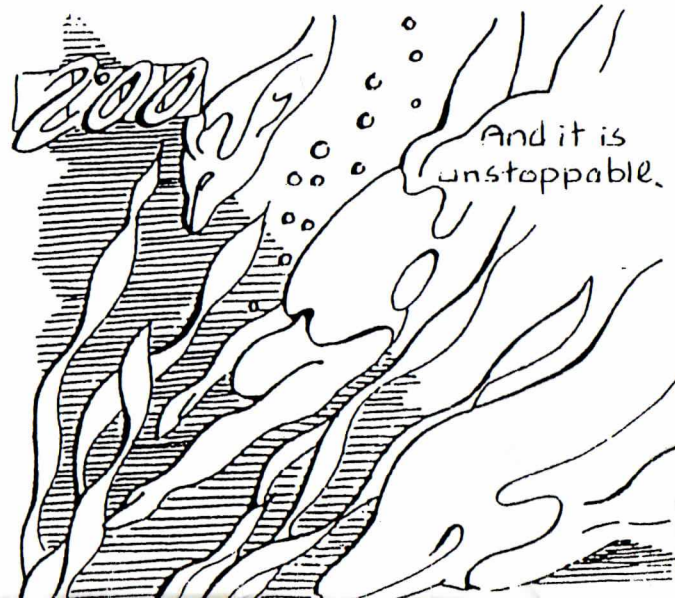


But now an invisible
wave of psi energy
from a distant star
approaches -

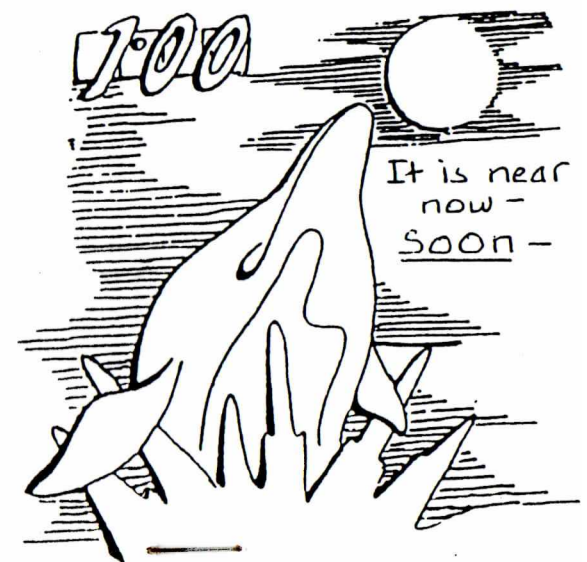
It is time
to say -
Goodbye



Even if we could
warn them it would
not help. The energy
of the psi wave
modulates in
rhythm with their
brain waves only.



And it is
unstoppable.



It is near
now -
Soon -

SPLIT

by Brent Lillie

Todd Hale slowly made his way down the hallway - a still river of darkness tonight - with tributaries that branched off at various points on either side. We'll call them lagoons, to maintain the river analogy. Silent, smothering, eerie. The first lagoon was his parent's bedroom on the right. Next, on the left, the room twelve-year-old Todd shared with his younger brother, Mitchell. More lagoons further down the hall, towards the rear section of the family's brick-veneered, single-storey home.

There had been a power failure. What the Hales would deem a good one. Severe electrical storms had pulled the plug on the entire southern end of the Gold Coast at around 8pm.

Frightening the living shit out of each other during blackouts had become something of a tradition with the Hales, ever since the kids had acquired sufficient strength in their short, chubby legs to propel them screaming down the hallway, with the rest of the clan in hot pursuit, waving their arms and howling like hungry werewolves.

Harmless fun. Although Bob Hale, 41, often wondered what the neighbours made of their antics. With all the noise it was a miracle none of them had called the cops and had the whole family hauled away.

Intermittent slashes of lightning ignited the storm's moist, drooping under belly.

On the verandah, the Hales were watching the storm and ruminating upon exactly the same line of thought: the dependence of modern society upon electricity, and how too much of a good thing can send hundreds of thousands of people straight back to the Dark Ages.

Well, kind of.

Essentially, darkness was like anything else. If you were smart, you made the most of it.

Taking a deep breath, Bob Hale made his customary announcement.

'The Rules of the game are simple,' he intoned. 'Leaving the house amounts to instant disqualification. Your mother draws the curtains, thereby making the black essence of the night even more absolute.' (Bob loved that part). 'The monster,' he continued, 'chosen by lot, counts to thirty in the kitchen while the victims conceal themselves at various points around the house - waiting to be found, waiting...' He paused dramatically and grinned devilishly at his children. 'To be consumed. First one found is the new monster.'

Todd entered his parent's bedroom. It was even darker than the hall. The venetian blinds blocked all light. Outside the window, the wind whistled in the eaves and rain lashed against the panes. Beneath these

noises, he listened for the telltale sound of his little brother's breathing.

If predicability is truly a crystal ball then Mitchell Hale's future was assured. He would be found and consumed. Todd's nine-year-old brother was scared of the dark and always hid on the floor on the far side of his parent's bed.

'I know you're in here, Mitchell,' Todd hissed in his best axe-murderer voice. 'When I find you, I'm going to chop your head off. Then I'm gonna cut your stupid Teddy bear's head off and stick it on your shoulders. There'll be blood all over the floor, Mitchell. Gallons of it. It'll sloosh when I walk on it.'

Todd frowned. Funny, that kind of talk would normally prompt a mad scrabbling on the other side of the bed and a suicidal dash for the kitchen. It was time to wheel up the heavy artillery.

'Mum and Dad are dead, Mitchell. I found them, all minced up and mixed together in a big pot on the stove. You can see their guts and everything.' Todd lowered his voice to a whisper. 'There's someone else in the house, Mitchell. Some axe nut. You'd better come out, while you've got the chance. Jesus Christ, he's got me,' he gargled. 'Run. Run!'

Nothing stirred. The blinds clicked idly against the window.

Todd scowled in the dark and shook his head.

'Right, you're busted.'

He felt his way to the other side of the bed and explored the carpet with his toes. There was no-one there.

'Little shit,' he muttered. Todd searched the rest of the room but drew a blank, then crossed the hall to the bedroom he shared with Mitchell.

There were a number of favourite hiding spots in here. A grinning Todd whipped back the bedclothes on the top bunk. No-one yelped and grabbed at his hand. The sheets were smooth and cool. The bottom bunk was empty, the space under it void. As was the space under the mirror recess in the wall unit and the gap behind the door.

It was at this point that something shifted in Todd's mind. Subtly, his boyish perceptions rearranged themselves. Everyone likes a pattern. It makes us comfortable. Some people like to shower in the mornings, others at night. By now, Todd has usually found at least one other member of the family to help him carry out his search. As he stood indecisively in the hall, chewing on a fingernail, the first icy finger of fear scraped across his heart.

He had a choice: backtrack and search the living-room, or continue down the hall. Opting for the latter, he branched left into the short section of hallway that led to the bathroom.

There were no curtains on the bathroom window. The room seemed to attract light. It entered the window and reflected off the mirror, glistened on porcelain and chrome. The shower screen was clear glass. Before the renovations last Christmas the shower recess had been opaque, the windows curtained. Now the bathroom offered little concealment unless you hid behind the door.

His elder brother's room lay at the end of the hall. It was always messy, because - like most kids - Daniel preferred to let gravity take its course. With Daniel being sixteen his parents figured he was old

enough to tidy up his own living quarters, which he did, regularly, around every October.

But try as he might, Todd couldn't imagine that the rest of the family - his mother and father, Daniel and wimpy little Mitchell - would all hide in the same place. After threading his way through a minefield of discarded clothing Todd explored the area under the bed with a cautious hand, finding nothing but magazines and dirty socks. On top, there were no bodies under the rumpled linen. Beneath the writing desk - ball of paper and biro caps, but little else. The wardrobe was home to everything except the warm, comforting feel of human flesh.

By now the panic had really started to kick in.

'Dad?' Todd said softly. Then louder: 'Dad?'

He left his brother's room, trying the light switch as he went in case the power had come back on.

'I give up,' Todd declared. 'You can all come out now.'

He waited for the squeak of a cupboard door, the rustle of clothing. But the house seemed - dead.

Fumbling his way down the hallway, he had a sudden notion. Of course! They were switching hiding spots, occupying rooms after he's searched them. But they must have been doing it quietly: he hadn't heard a giggle, or the soft rush of bare feet across the carpet.

Todd checked the kitchen, just in case everybody had crept out there to have a good laugh while he stumbled around in the dark. He conducted a fruitless search of the living room, his parent's room, then crossed the hall to his own bedroom. For five minutes, he stood in the doorway, hoping, praying for the sound of Mitchell's annoying chuckle, straining his eyes for a glimpse of four figures, sneaking down the hallway and into the rooms he'd just searched. Now the fear was a painful thumping in his chest. It was an opaque veil of dampness behind his eyes.

They weren't in the house. They weren't anywhere!

'Dad,' he sobbed. Todd ran to open the back door. Circling the house in the lightly falling rain, he called for his parents.

As Todd passed the kitchen window the fluorescent light flickered twice and came back on. The living-room lamp glowed warm and yellow behind the curtains. The mood of the night changed. The world began to hum.

'But they must be somewhere, Todd,' Maureen Hale said on the other end of the line. 'Did they go down the shop perhaps?'

'They went and hid, Grandma.' Todd said through clenched teeth, trying to make his point for the second time. He shifted the telephone to his other ear and glanced down the hall. 'We were playing hide and seek. They wouldn't have gone down the shops. Especially with the power off.'

'And they're not anywhere in the house? There's no note?'

A note. Right.

'No, Grandma.'

'Well, lock the doors and stay where you are. I'll be over in five minutes.'

Todd poured a glass of milk, sat down in the living room and turned on the TV. By now he realised, deep down in his heart, that none of his family were ever coming home. Todd suspected it all had something to do with electricity.

Or the lack of it.

The house sold five weeks later. Todd and his grandmother were removing the last of the family's personal belongings one stormy night when the power suddenly died. Todd retreated to the kitchen, sobbing, almost choking on his own fear. Maureen held her sole remaining grandchild close to her chest, stroking his fine, blonde hair, whispering 'It's all right, Todd. It's all right,' but she couldn't stop the trembling, or stem the flow of tears.

Todd was waiting for the shuffle of feet in the hall. For the sound of his brother's familiar giggle. For somebody to come around the corner from the living room and finally end the game.

Linda Hale sat at the dining-room table, staring toward the back of the house. Mitchell and Daniel were at her mother's. Suitcases and cardboard boxes were stacked by the front door, waiting to be loaded into the car when the power came back on.

She turned to her husband and said tonelessly: 'Somehow, I'd hoped that tonight...'

The lines in Bob Hale's face had deepened drastically during the five weeks. His skin was as waxen as the single candle, burning on the table. Hale looked down the hall and shuddered. He was more afraid of the dark now than his youngest son had ever been.

He swallowed dryly. Looked down at his hands. All he could do was nod.

END



H. G. WELLS THROUGH OTHER'S EYES

by Richard Reeve

Herbert George Wells was born in 1866, the son of an unsuccessful small tradesman. He was apprenticed to a draper in early life, a period reflected in several of his works. For some years, and in poor health, he struggled as a teacher, joined the Fabian Society but was soon at odds with it, his sponsor G. B. Shaw, Sidney and Beatrice Webb.

His literary output was vast and very varied. As a novelist he is possibly best remembered for his scientific romances, among the earliest of the new genre of science fiction, *THE TIME MACHINE* (1895) described a society divided into two classes. This was followed by many more novels, including *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS* (1898), *THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU* (1896), *THE INVISIBLE MAN* (1897), *THE HISTORY OF MR POLLY* (1910) and collections of short stories.

He continued to reach a wide audience with the massive, *A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WORLD* (1922) and, *THE OUTLINE OF HISTORY* (1920), followed by *THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME* (1933) which was a work of scientific and political speculation. His experience in *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (1934) is a striking portrait of himself and his contemporaries. He died in 1946.

On himself he wrote in a letter to Henry James, 1915:

I had rather be called a journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it.

(On himself, *EXPERIMENT IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*.)

Every one of us who started writing in the nineties, was discovered to be "a second" - somebody of other. In the course of two or three years I was welcomed as a second Dickens, a second Bulwre Lytton and a second Jules Verne. But also I was a second Barrie, though J.M.B. was hardly more than my contemporary, and, when I turned to short stories, I became a second Kipling.... Later on I figured as a second Diderot, a second Carlyle and a second Rousseau.

(On himself, in Geoffrey West, *H. G. WELLS*.)

I launched the phrase "The war to end war" - and that was not the least of my crimes.

Others wrote:

The critics have been right. For as one looks back over Mr Wells's long and honourable record as a novelist one fails to recall a single vivid or credible character. They are all alike - and all alike in being rather colourless automata, mere puppets by which their manipulator has sought to demonstrate his successive attitudes toward a changing world.

(Conrad Aiken, in *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1926)

I suppose you'll have the common decency to believe me when I tell you I am always powerfully impressed by your

work. Impressed is the word, O Realist of the Fantastic! whether you like it or not. And if you want to know what impresses me it is to see how you contrive to give over humanity into the clutches of the Impossible and yet manage to keep it down (or up) to its humanity, its flesh, blood, sorrow, folly. That is the achievement!

(Joseph Conrad, *Letter To Wells*, 4 December 1898.)

All Wells' characters are as flat as a photograph. But the photographs are agitated with such vigour that we forget their complexities lie on the surface and would disappear if it was scratched or curled up.

(E.M. Forster, *ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL*)

I like Wells, he is so warm, such a passionate declaimer or reasoner or whatever you like. But - ugh! - he hurts me. He always seems to be looking at life as a cold and hungry little boy in the street stares at a shop where there is hot pork.

(D. H. Lawrence, *Letter to A. D. McLeod*, April 1913.)

Perhaps in the end we should come back to his student ambitions for the secret of Wells' individuality as a short-story writer. The interest in biology has mated happily with his concern for the mass of human nature to make him a general practitioner in the diseases of creation: his consciousness of life as an organism has made him the cosmic doctor.

(T. E. Lawrence, in *Spectator*, 23 February, 1928.)

Mr Wells's directing idea - "the re-orientation of loyalties through a realisation of the essential unity of our species" - is not trivial. To this he has devoted his life with a noble disinterestedness... We may find it hard to like or respect him, but he is doing work that needs doing and that at the moment seems terribly urgent. Yet we must also remind ourselves that the more his kind of influence seems likely to prevail... the more urgent is drastic criticism. If he belongs to the past it is only in the sense that it has long been possible to discuss him seriously except as a case, a type, a portent. As such, he matters.

(F. R. Leavis, in *Scrutiny*, May 1932.)

*I have no hesitation whatever in saying that Wells, as he is, entertains me far more agreeably than Dickens. I know very well that the author of *DAVID COPPERFIELD* was a greater artist than the author of *MR POLLY*, just as I know that the Archbishop of Canterbury is a more virtuous man than my good friend, Fred the Bartender; but all the same, I prefer Wells and Fred to Dickens and the Archbishop.*

(H. L. Mencken, in *Smart Set*, July 1910.)

H. G. Wells is delighted with the failure of the League [of Nations], since it provides him with a perfect illustration of human muddle-headedness. He becomes more of a republican every day, and is in fact the only political thinker I know in England who seriously believes that it would be desirable or possible to abolish the monarchy in the country.

(Harold Nicolson, *Diary*, 12 May 1936.)

Dine with Sibyl (Lady Colefax). H. G. Wells starts a long and well-expressed theory that homo-sapiens has failed. Even as the dinosaur failed because he had concentrated upon size, so we have failed because we have not developed the right type of brain. So we will first destroy ourselves and then die out as a species. Just revert to mud and slime. 'And we shall deserve it', said Wells. Walter Elliot says that surely it won't be as bad as that. 'One thousand years more,' says Wells, 'that's all that homo-sapiens has before him.'

(Ibid, 15 June 1939.)

Back in the nineteen-hundreds, it was a wonderful experience for a boy to discover H. G. Wells. There you were,

in a world of pedants, clergymen and golfers, with your future employers exhorting you to "get on or get out", your parents systematically warping your sexual life, and your dull-witted schoolmasters sniggering over their Latin tags; and here was this wonderful man who could tell you about the inhabitants of the planets and the bottom of the sea, and who knew that the future was not going to be what respectable people imagined.

(George Orwell, in *Horizon* August 1941.)

The weak part of Wells' outfit is his lack of any detailed knowledge of social organisation - and this, I think, vitiates his capacity - for foreseeing the future machinery of government and the relation of classes. But his work is full of luminous hypotheses and worth careful study by those who are trying to look forward.

(Beatrice Webb, *Diary*, December 1901.)

The tragedy of H. G.'s life - his aptitude for "fine thinking" and even "good feeling" and yet his total incapacity for decent conduct. He says in so many words that directly you leave your study you inevitably become a cad and are indeed mean and dishonourable and probably cruel.

(Ibid, [commenting on THE NEW MACHIAVELLI], 5 Nov 1910.)

The Old Maid among novelists; even the sex-obsession that lay clotted on ANN VERONICA and THE NEW MACHIAVELLI like cold white sauce was merely Old Maid's mania, the reaction towards the flesh of a mind too long absorbed in airships and colloids.

(Rebecca West, review of Well's novel MARRIAGE, in *Freewoman*, 19 September 1912.)

Wells never learnt how to write a novel which was a work of art. When advised of this, he bluffed after the manner of the defendant in an English Law Court charged with libel. This defendant answers the charge by saying that the words were never uttered, or alternatively that they do not bear the meaning put upon them, or again alternatively that they are in fact true, and legitimate comment. Wells, charged with being unaesthetic, replied that he never said he was, and alternatively that the aesthetes can't prove it, and anyway, Yah!

(Frank Swinnerton, *The Georgian Literary Scene*.)

He is a professor of the gruesome, a past master in the art of producing creepy sensations... He spends his life imagining what would happen if one of the laws of nature were altered just a little - with terrifying results.

(William T. Stead, In Review of Reviews, April 1898.)

His death on August 13, 1946, at the age of 79, came with a shock. England without H. G. Wells, to many of us, will hardly be England. 'Heavens, what a bourgeois!' Lenin exclaimed of him after a long and famous interview. Translated out of Marxian into English that reads: 'Heavens, what an Englishman!'

(John Middleton Murry, in *Adelphi*, October - December, 1946.)

A whole generation of cocky, iconoclastic young men and women came into being... You were the most energetic and intimate of our fathers. You opened so many doors. You delighted and excited and angered us. You offered us all the world in tempting cans with lively labels: Socialism, Free Love, Marriage, Education, World Organization, and H. G. Wells's Patent Feminism - Very Perishable. Down they went. And gradually, on this varied if not always digestible diet, the children grew older.

(Freda Kirchwey, "A Private Letter to H. G. Wells" in *Nation* (New York), 28 November 1928.)

VISIONS OF VENUS: Lost Legacies from the World of Water

by Andrew Darlington

Venus is an imaginary world. Always has been. A world that never existed outside the delusions of fantasists and dreamers.

On a clear night you can look up, trace the outline of lunar seas, mountain chains and craters. With just moderately powerful assistance you can see the contours of Martian continents and ice-caps. Sketch in your own imaginary canals. Cities of quartz and crystal at their nodes. But look at Venus - and surface features swirl and dissolve. Nothing is fixed. Nothing observable remains. Only a blurred vagueness.

On Venus, nothing is what it seems. To C. S. Lewis it becomes Perelandra. A world of a single vast ocean with drifts of floating islands that ripple on the swell. To Edgar Rice Burroughs it is Amtor, with cities carved into forests of giant trees, lost races of fish-people and sentient amoeba in a ring of fire. Henry Kuttner's FURY locates its survivors of a nuked Earth living in domes on the bed of Venusian seas, its Jurassic jungles a "blazing green riot" above. While Olaf Stapledon speeds through time to the year 500,000,000 and a racial migration to Venus when Earth is destroyed by the falling moon. Human evolution on their new world continues, producing a doomed species of winged men circling and swooping through an atmosphere we now know to be 70 km deep and ninety times the surface pressure of Earth. Dan Dare, meanwhile, encounters green Treens, blue-skinned Atlanteans, prehistoric triceratops, and his most evil antagonist - the Mekon, beneath the planet's cloud belts.

When Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison launched their 1971 anthology FAREWELL FANTASTIC VENUS, it was these imaginary worlds they were leaving. Still beautiful, still fantastic, if only in memory.

Venus is bright. So bright it can cast shadows.

Its day is longer than its year. And it revolves retrograde, that is, backwards to Earth and to just about every other known world. The sun on Venus, if you could see it, and the moon, if there was one, would rise in the west then set in the east. The sky is orange, and it rains a haze of sulphuric acid droplets. There are probably regions of volcanic vents spewing lava into strobes of constant electromagnetic lightning.

It wasn't meant to be like that. There's an entire Venerian mythology built up interactively by generations of fantasists to contradict that. And their conceptual shared dreams are seductive. They go like this; planets farthest from the sun cool soonest, and hence are older. Distant Mars is therefore an antique world, decadent, corrupt, dying. Closer worlds cool and solidify later. Like Earth. And moving yet closer inwards, Venus cools even later than that, and hence is younger still.

Then there's the obscuring cloud belts. Clouds and mist are composed of water vapour. Everyone knows that. Even scientists agree; in 1917 Swedish astronomer Svante Arrhenius writes "we must therefore conclude that everything on Venus is dripping wet". The next inevitable step is also suggested by Arrhenius - a young, wet, world - steamy, tropical? Venus must be a planet of carboniferous rainforests with all the monstrous implications that grow from that tantalisingly evocative chain of ideas. Don't scoff, such an empirical structure of dreams is beguilingly contagious. Empires of pulp fiction follow. And I refuse to believe that such a fantastic beauty can be wrong.

Venus is a mythomania of worlds. The heat is oppressive. The air heavy with moisture. There's a faintly rotten perfume of vegetation. The half jungle, half swamp is lost in wreathing vapour and tainted with the muddy fecundity of legends beautiful and strange.

To Leigh Brackett, transporting Stark to meet THE ENCHANTRESS OF VENUS (PLANET STORIES #1 Bre March 1950) it seems too simple even to compose the ocean of mere water. She makes it gaseous, dense enough to float the buoyant hulls of metal ships, and it burns perpetually from deep inner fires; "the mists that clouded it were stained with a bloody glow. Beneath the surface Stark could see the drifts of flame where the lazy currents ran, and the little coiling bursts of sparks that came upwards and spread and melted into other bursts, so that the face of the sea was like a cosmos of crimson stars". Brackett's poetical romance takes Stark down through the crystallised forests beneath the gaseous sea to the city of the Lost Ones to discover terrible secrets.

E. C. Tubb's serial THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT is strewn across the first three issues of the VARGO STATEN SF MAGAZINE (from Jan 1954); "memories filled his brain, memories of the hot, eternally cloudy skies of Venus... the thick, jungles, the strange insects and animals, the natives with their paradoxical life of primitive simplicity and extreme sophistication. He could almost smell the ground mists, feel the warm rain, and his skin prickled to the memory of never-to-be-forgotten heat". He follows it with a second three-part serial (from #4) with more Venus-based exotica, this time prompted by the metabolism-altering properties of the Venusian fruit. Once eaten, forever addicted. This forces the Terrestrial wage-slaves to unintentionally escape the exploitation of Earth-based corporations and become colonists for the new world. For now they can never leave Venus.

According to Aldiss the first real SF "Voyage à Venus" was written in 1865 by Jules Verne's contemporary Achille Eyraud. He was followed by George Griffith whose HONEYMOON IN SPACE came in 1901. Stopping off at the Moon and Mars, he then populates what he calls "The Love Star" with angelically beautiful winged humans, not dissimilar to those that Stapledon will write about. He also refers to this "Cytherean" paradise as an "Eden before the Fall" - as C. S. Lewis will in what Aldiss nominates as "arguably the loveliest portrait of an imaginary planet ever written".

But the battle for Venusian colonial rights heats up as Ralph Milne Farley sets his "Radio Planet" series there. A conscious ERB-variant, the adventures of Myles Standish Cabot of Boston begin in a 1924 serial for ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY in which, while "experimenting with the wireless transmission of matter (he) had accidentally projected himself through space to the planet Venus". The story is related through the familiar framing device of an Earth-based narrator receiving messages from the

interplanetary voyager, and perhaps deserves some credit for his early introduction of the Beam-me-up technology. But the leaden prose is virtually unreadable now. Cabot "found the planet inhabited by a race of human-like creatures - called Cupians, with antennae instead of ears, who were living in slavery under the Formians, a gigantic breed of intelligent black ants. Myles Cabot devised artificial electrical antennae, so as to be able to talk with both races, and organised the Cupians, and led them to victory over their oppressors, thereby winning an honoured position among them, and the hand of the princess, the lively Lilla".

Frequently reprinted since, the novels were even adapted as a 1951 Avon Fantasy Classic comic-book with Wallace Wood's highly-rated picturisation; "TRAPPED ON A PLANET OF PERIL, HE DARED CHALLENGE ITS MONSTER RULER" proclaimed the cover as a giant ant seizes a flimsily-clad winged girl in its jaws. There are inevitable sequels as Farley, a Harvard-educated Wisconsin State Senator, follows THE RADIO MAN with THE RADIO BEASTS as the defeated ant empire regains control with the aid of the renegade Prince Yuri, and Cabot starts his War of Liberation all over again. Then comes THE RADIO PLANET, and so on. His Venus - or Poros, "my Silver Planet", is a tropical world; "the weather could not have been finer. The air was warm, fragrant, hot-house scented and fanned by gentle zephyrs, for the prevailing winds which blow ever towards the boiling seas, were less strong than usual. Above, at a fair height, shone the silver clouds which always surround the planet, to shield it from the intense heat of the sun". There are forests of red-knobbed many-branched lichen where four-winged snakes flit, a sect of the lost subterranean Priests of Kar, saurian carnivores called Woofus, and Cabot rides giant whistling bees into battle against his adversaries.

But Venus is fluid, malleable... deceptive. Its landscapes shimmer and dance through the lens of new writers, twisted and tortured into a thousand elaborate shapes. Venus is a world without a single star in its sky. And no sun ever shines on its true surface. Populist astronomer Willy Ley suggests it is a world enveloped in a triple-layered cloud ocean. Radar maps from the Pioneer orbiter investigate "continents" called Ishtar and Aphrodite. At its closest it is a mere 38,900,00 kms from Earth.

Otis Adelbert Kline started out as a songwriter. Became a literary agent. Then created Lotan of Olba. Kline - or OAK to aficionados (as Edgar Rice Burroughs is ERB), was born in Chicago on 1st July 1891, and he writes heroic fantasy at first most luridly extravagant. What Burroughs did for Mars with his John Carter novels, Kline does for Venus with THE PLANET OF PERIL which first ran through ARGOSY in 1929, and its follow-ups (PRINCE OF PERIL - 1930, and PORT OF PERIL - 1932). Even ERB himself, switching his attentions to Venus with his Amtor story cycle late in his career, fails to construct such a consistently exotic ornately fantastical vision of the veiled world. Kline's catalyst is Doctor Morgan, an eccentric scientist with an Audio-Photo Thought Recorder enabling him to establish telepathic communication across space, and hence transmit the stories to his terrestrial readers. He accelerates and concentrates Farley's rather pedestrian imaginings, while retaining their romance. It is a style "wooden, but violently coloured" according to John Clute. Although his primary hero is Robert Grandon, his luscious world is precisely encapsulated in a brief 2,200-word story he sold to AMAZING STORIES (December 1933) for just \$15, which was later turned into a strip by Tim Conrad for Stan Lee's 1975 UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION. Plant hunter Lotan seeks the rare and valuable Kadkor fungus

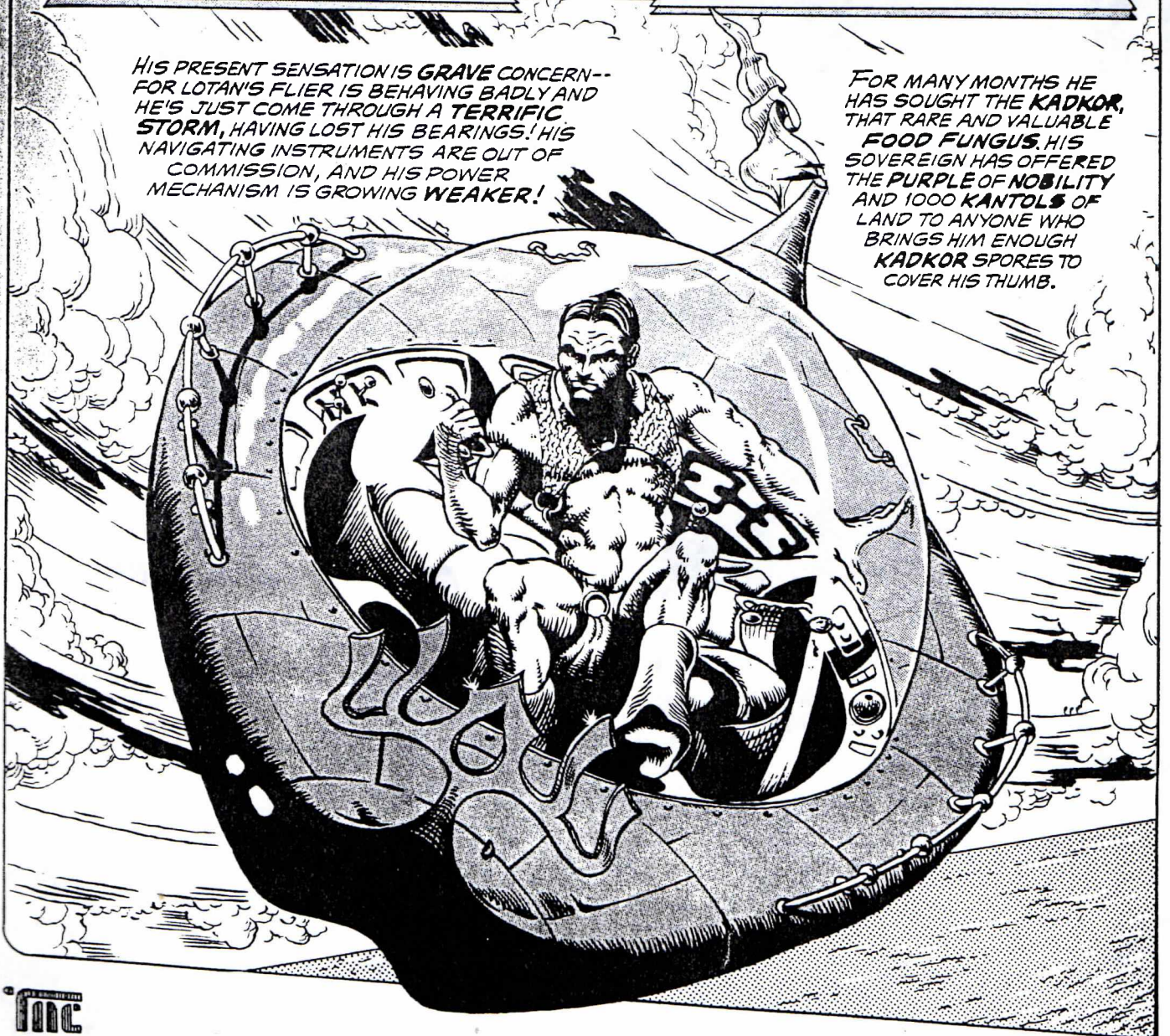
DR. MORGAN, SCIENTIST AND PSYCHOLOGIST, STARES FIXEDLY INTO THE CRYSTAL GLOBE BEFORE HIM IN THE STUDY OF HIS STRANGE MOUNTAIN OBSERVATORY. FOR MANY YEARS HE HAS BEEN COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE OF MARS AND VENUS BY MEAN OF MECHANICAL TELEPATHY AND RECORDING THESE COMMUNICATIONS.

BY MEANS OF HIS THOUGHT RECORDER HE HAS ESTABLISHED CONTACT WITH LOTAN, A YOUNG PLANT-HUNTER FOR THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT OF OLBA ON VENUS! HE IS SEEING WITH LOTAN'S EYES, HEARING WITH HIS EARS-- EVERY THOUGHT, EVERY SENSATION OF LOTAN'S IS, FOR THE TIME, DR. MORGAN'S!

A VISION of VULCAN

HIS PRESENT SENSATION IS GRAVE CONCERN-- FOR LOTAN'S FLIER IS BEHAVING BADLY AND HE'S JUST COME THROUGH A TERRIFIC STORM, HAVING LOST HIS BEARINGS! HIS NAVIGATING INSTRUMENTS ARE OUT OF COMMISSION, AND HIS POWER MECHANISM IS GROWING WEAKER!

FOR MANY MONTHS HE HAS SOUGHT THE KADKOR, THAT RARE AND VALUABLE FOOD FUNGUS. HIS SOVEREIGN HAS OFFERED THE PURPLE OF NOBILITY AND 1000 KANTOLS OF LAND TO ANYONE WHO BRINGS HIM ENOUGH KADKOR SPORES TO COVER HIS THUMB.



mc

Script and Art: TIM CONRAD

Adapted from the story by OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

with special thanks to PETE IRO

Astounding **SCIENCE FICTION**

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FURY

BY
**LAWRENCE
O'DONNELL**

THE WORLD'S GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT
A WORLD DESTROYED
BY ATOMIC FIRE

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

which will earn him the Purple of Olban nobility. His telekinetic-powered flyer is wrecked on a tiny islet in the Ropok Ocean which teems "with life of a thousand varieties. There were creatures of striking fantastic beauty and of terrifying ugliness". He rescues the fair orphaned aristocrat Mirim from the reptilian hyena-like Hahoes and the man-eating Gnarsh pterodactyl, only to discover that during the rescue she'd accidentally collected enough grey spores of kadkor to make his fortune." 'Take me Lotan' was all she said, but her lips against his told him all".

The story - VISION OF VENUS, is reprinted in SWORDSMEN IN THE SKY, a 1964 Ace theme anthology edited by Donald A. Wollheim. A book which also collects Leigh Brackett's THE MOON THAT VANISHED, another tale set on Venus. One of the most enchantingly lyrical writers ever to grace the SF genre her yearning strictly romantic prose adds softening layers of exquisite myth to the misty Cytherean dreams that precede it. And this story is a delicious confection, an entrancing escapist delight more illuminating than the purest LSD. Her quest for the hallucinogenic transfigurative powers of the fallen Venusian moon invests the imaginary world with some of its lushest visions ever. While coincidentally providing a possible first section of what is ample fictional scope for a feature exclusively based around the concept of the elusive Venusian moon itself.

The Venus in the real solar system had no moon. But oddly, ERB's Amtorian oceans are inexplicably tidal, despite the obvious lack of the planetary mechanism that makes tides happen. But adding weight to Leigh Brackett's "fallen moon theory" a characteristically cataclysmic John Russell Fern novelette envisages a prehistoric war of attrition fought to mutual extermination by Mars and the slug-like Venusians in which the single moon of "Minitus" is deliberately shattered to rain its meteoric fragments onto the world beneath. The complex story behind this story begins with the publication of RED HERITAGE in the January 1938 ASTOUNDING, revised and extended it becomes a 1951 Scion novel, now called THE AVENGING MARTIAN - with its authorship credited to 'Vargo Statten'. Then again in a 1953 reprint it re-appears as SURVIVORS OF MARS ! Whatever - the third and final SPACE KINGLEY ANNUAL (1953) reverses its hypothesis in a story by Ernest A. Player, when a wandering world called Lemas enters the solar system and takes up an orbit around Venus, becoming a rather troublesome moon.

Venus is a world of fungus, rot, and reeking swamp. Venusians are semi-aquatic. Reptiles with webbed feet, pulsing gills, and watery unblinking eyes, bulbous and frog-like. It's impossible to chronicle all the writers who take the voyage to Venus. Because it rapidly becomes a popular literary destination. And not everyone abides by the consensus wet-look view. Robert Shekley is a dissenting voice. His PROSPECTOR'S SPECIAL appears in GALAXY in December 1959. A quasi-Western in extremis, he portrays "bristly-bearded old prospectors" hunting goldenstone in a world of "cynical bartenders" in frontier saloons along the scorched super-heated Scorpion Desert rim. He adds cute robots and Catch-22 bureaucratic conundrums, but despite such updatings his Venus still has surface water - if only in meagre supply, and a breathable atmosphere. Indeed, when it's later collected into THE SCIENCE FICTIONAL SOLAR SYSTEM anthology (1980) editor Isaac Asimov comments that "there couldn't be a drop of liquid water anywhere on the surface of Venus, and even the world of PROSPECTOR'S SPECIAL is now out of date".

The Pohl/Kombluth classic THE SPACE MERCHANTS (1952) and Larry Niven's BECALMED IN HELL (1965) attempt a similar "dry and hot" Venus, but the lure of lush dreams is hard to kill. The idea of a panthalassa - an oceanic water-world, persists in Isaac Asimov's juvenile LUCKY STARR AND THE OCEANS OF VENUS (1954) and Poul Anderson's SISTER PLANET (1959), and even retains credibility in academia. No less an authority than Patrick Moore FRAS speculates in his 1962 THE PLANETS that Venus could be an ocean world, and that as life on Earth had evolved in such an environment "can there be a parallel with Venus, and can the seas on that rather peculiar world already support primitive life-forms? And so, Venus may be a world upon which life is just beginning". He goes on to wonder whether future Terran colonists will inadvertently interfere with the evolution of those Venusian proto-creatures.

Arthur C. Clarke concisely fictionalises the idea in BEFORE EDEN where a plastic disposal bag dumped by an exploring scout car at a Venusian South Pole "a hundred degrees hotter than Death Valley in midsummer", contaminates and ends the evolution of a strange life-form they've discovered there.

It was left to the U. S. Mariner 2 probe (launched 26 August 1962) to decisively murder the oceanic theory by recording surface temperatures of 480°. Yet even then, not to be outdone, Patrick Moore merely backdates his beguiling aquatic scenario. In his 1990 revision of THE ATLAS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM (written with Garry Hunt) he writes "in the early days of the solar system... the climate (of Venus) was probably much more hospitable... and scientists believe it may well have been covered by an ocean of water".

And beyond such musings there's always Terraforming.

If Venus isn't, and perhaps never was the tropical paradise envisaged in the delusions of fantasists and pulp dreamers, there's no reason why it can't be in days to come. Poul Anderson's THE BIG RAIN (1954) depicts attempts to create artificial rainfall on a dry Venus. And as early as 1930 Olaf Stapledon's Fifth Men Terraform Venus, creating a breathable air by a mix of genetically engineered "appropriate vegetation" and the "electrolysis" of the Venusian ocean. In the process they happen to exterminate the native species. But that's a small price to pay for creating Eden, isn't it?

Venus is, after all, an imaginary world where nothing is what it seems. And the beautiful myths once created interactively by generations of writers, still remain bright enough to cast shadows across our own less lush Venus.

- Andrew Darlington



SEEING BLACK AND WHITE

by Ben Peek

There had been a murder.

Jake Trents, a private detective on Mars Colony, was in one of the blackest moods when he received the call. *Two in the morning and they were calling him!* Within a dark fumbling, he managed to pull on some clothes—not bothering with an attempt to match: everything he owned was either white or black. That way there was no mistake, no embarrassment. Outside, and the white lit streets of dome five were silent and empty: a few late stragglers mixed with bulky service bots were the only things to be seen, but Trents, through sleep crusted eyes, didn't even notice them.

Then the terminal loomed darkly, and all too soon as far as he was concerned. The service bot, a dark slated thing with white flashing lights, demanded four two dollar tokens with a metallic voice; Trents payed with a slur in its direction. The terminal itself was dark and empty, greys beginning to bloom around the white lights overhead. Caught in an odd exercise, Trents measured them for a moment, watching where they began as white, touching the edges and inking into grey; then, finally, black at the tunnel openings. He muttered to himself sleepily:

"How many people see the world like this, eh?"

He laughed, darkly and with self loathing, at himself.

But that was how he felt on this morning: and he'd forgotten his medication: *idiot!*

When the train arrived, it moved slowly, like a half imagined dinosaur. Sleep played within him for the twenty minute ride, just as the greys and whites and blacks did, each sifting and mixing and blending and, finally, blurring. Sleep began to flee when he stumbled, like a drunk almost, from the carriage and up the equally dark stairs.

The streets here were absent of service bots, but just as silent.

He wound himself through them, and when he arrived was almost fully awake and silently muttering to himself. Outside the apartment, black suited men and women clouded together, a cornered off area just behind them. They nodded, briefly, when they saw Trents: one, however, separated from the clump to direct him towards the scene. Up three floors, with agency psychiatrists littering amongst the tenants, Trents finally came to the grey-black slated and bared doorway; three black suited men and women had filtered within. White flashes were

blinding, then receding within a grey mist as he made his way into the room.

His mood became worse when he saw the body.

("Who is *that*?" one of the suits asked.

"Trents." The reply was vague, very. "Jake Trents. Contract detective, one of Kellar's."

"He looks... I, dunno, like he's burnt out... like a movie detective?"

"All of Kellar's do," answered the second. "He worked on Earth, before this."

"Earth? Christ, why'd he leave?"

"Got bombed on a routine medical. Seems he had implants placed in his eyes, legal, y'know, except something went wrong. Fault, I guess; I don't really know. Only, he doesn't see colour anymore: just grey, black, white: shades.")

The body itself was a black mess: the left leg remained tucked under the right, bent and broken, the bones might be crushed, as might her bent and twisted arms and back; her chest, however, was torn open, as if erupted by something within, while her neck was twisted at an odd and viscous angle. Despite the horrific nature of her death, Trents continued to stare at the body, dark and grey, his gaze lingered at the face: still, calm, as if she had been asleep. In some ways, it was a beautiful face, even in death, even if the eyes were empty. Trents caught himself wondering what she had been like, who her family was, her lover...

What could of done this?

("So why'd Kellar pick up his contract, then?" asked the first, distaste evident.

"Why not?" the second scratched the bridge of her nose. "Y'know Kellar, he picks up all the odd balls. Funny thing is, though, that this guy is... well, *brilliant*."

"Don't sound so happy about it."

"Nah, that's not what I meant. I mean, this guy, he's like a blood hound. I reckon to see some English noble on a horse, following him with a rifle any minute. Swear. If I'd done this, I wouldn't want him following me."

"She's right, you know," the third cut in. "He is brilliant. I worked with him once, on a triple homicide, and... and, well, the things this guy came up with: angles that were totally opposite to what I was thinking, or anyone else, leads that lead places, reasons and hide aways. I mean, a week later, and we had this guy caught and bound like it had been inevitable.")

Trents stood and turned: grey shaded 'droids moulted around the edges of the room, collecting dust samples from the desks, window seals and glass. It would be apparent, soon enough, however, that they would find nothing. Whatever had done this didn't come through a window or door, and damned well didn't leave them prints. In the middle of the grey floor, stood the three agency detectives: each dressed in dark suits, white shirts and dark ties, and each looked at him like he was some caged animal.

He recognised two, but it was the third, the oldest, he knew, if not well, then most. "Lucas. It's nice to see you." This man had a grey and black lined face, the whites of his eyes suspended in a fine network of frail shadows.

"Jake."

There was a brief nod.

Then: "You remember Ellen Silverwils, and this is Joseph Wilts. They've been with me since arrival. I'm

sorry if we woke you."

Which was a down right lie. Trents shrugged anyway. "Nothing I can't catch up on, or will miss. What do you have so far?"

Lucas looked down at his pad: "Her name was Laura Branch. Earth born: Texas. Thirty two, divorced, one child. Son. PhD in alien structures--and currently registered at Heilmann's University. Dome two. The neighbours heard nothing and saw nothing, not until the boyfriend came upon her a couple of hours ago."

"Where is he?"

"Threw himself off the building in grief."

"You're kidding?"

"Nope." The elder mans lips twitched: "He was a poet."

"Christ." Trents thought about the grey clouds of agency people at the bottom of the building, the psychiatrists... "Run a scan on him, and find out how long they'd been dating. Is the body go for autopsy?"

"Well," Joseph broke in, "we're kinda having a bit of trouble with that: seems the son doesn't want her cut up, wants her whole for a proper burial on Earth."

"Is he here?"

"Earth side."

"Send a scan to him, then do it."

"Of the body..." Joseph seemed quite horrified.

"Yes, of the body."

"Ah, sir..." the female, the other he knew, but had already forgotten the name of, interrupted slightly. "Isn't that, well, isn't it cruel."

Trents shrugged. "We need the autopsy. He'll be compensated, and besides, look at her." Trents waved his hand in the bodies direction. "Do you really think an open casket funeral is appropriate? She'll be cremated by Earth death laws anyway, so I say we do it here and save him the hassle. Do you have any problem with that?"

"No. I guess not."

"All that matters is catching whoever did this." Trents turned, began to walk to the grey fuzz of a hallway, his back to the other three. "Media cap it, too. If this gets over the stations, we'll never find the killer. Lucas--have the autopsy done as soon as possible. I want the results first thing." Sleep was never an option, but he needed to go home, to take his medication. Things got confusing when he didn't take his medication. "Send the results to my office once you've got them. Anything else?"

"Where are you going to start?"

Trents gave a twisted smile. "I'm going to look through the public 'net for her work. Maybe that's the key."

And then, stepping into the grey hallway, he made his way home.

"You forgot your medication, Jake."

In the grey of the room, the voice seemed like a forgotten spectre, or something of an equally gothic past. Trents paused at the doorway for a moment... Then he stepped in, closing the door behind him. Fishing his pistol out, dark and black, he dropped it on the grey and darker grey striped couch to his left.

"Yeah. Yeah, I know."

There was a moment of grey silence as Trents shuffled to the fridge, then:

"Is your case interesting?"

"Suppose," Trents drawled; he reached out for a glass, snagging one from the sink. "Nice messy body and no forced entry. My only lead leapt from the window, so I'm back to square one."

"Ah. Do you have a plan?"

"Yeah," he muttered, then poured some water into the glass. "Yeah. I'm going to check the public 'net, see her stuff, his--maybe someone is bragging about it? Heh."

"Do you think that likely?"

"No, not really."

The AI fell silent as the white light of the fridge closed, and Trents swallowed two of his pills; then, in grey silence, he placed the glass back on the sink and shuffled into the lounge room.

"Computer: On: Public 'net."

A portion of the far wall flickered with grey static.

The screen flickered to life: white and grey, a glow almost, then black before flipping into a bleached white and grey sign, displaying the words PUBLIC INTERNET across them. Trents spoke another command: black for another moment.

Then his area flipped to life, a tiny scan of Laura Branch in the corner, and he fell to the couch, preparing for a long morning.

Laura Branch: in the white vastness of the public internet, Trents learnt more than he had ever thought possible about alien structures, but very little about the person herself. Her papers were written with a... *dedication*, Trents supposed, and perhaps, in some cases, a little too much enthusiasm. Her boyfriend was just as much of a waste, and his poetry was terrible (even the AI, which never agreed with him on anything literate, said so). All in all, he had wasted his time.

The top of his screen flashed black and beeped for the autopsy around five fifteen: it said that her bones had been broken--all of them, splintered, snapped, and powdered. Even her skull had been patterned with hairline fractures; and, as suspected, there had been no marks left on her skin, with no prints and no sign of struggle detected in her apartment. The strangest fact was, that her heart had, shockingly, burst open, resulting in the massive chest wounds.

And she had been peaceful in death?

Trents snorted, then closed the file.

He must of, sometime during his reading, spoken aloud, because the AI said, with quiet knowledge: "The body is not always frozen in its death moment. And death is not always instant, Jake, perhaps she fainted. You must always consider, also, that, perhaps, the killer closed her eyes, even if there were no prints."

So he must.

But to the AI he said nothing: nothing to provoke it.

Staring around the grey toned apartment, his gaze fell onto the image scan of Laura Branch. Passport photo--and she must of had a bad hair day. Trents gave a twisted, dark lipped smile. Funny how you thought those things: nothing about her character, her dedication, her passions. Just a bad hair day.

He'd need to change that.

And, accidentally--despite his pervious caution--he spoke aloud:

"What time does the University open?"

"Administration is there at eight."

Standing, tearing off the scan, he folded it and placed it into a pocket. On the way out, he picked up his pistol from the couch, and stepped out... Then, in grey silence, re-opened the door, came back in, and picked up a small container of pills.

"Sorry," he muttered to the AI.

"It's okay, Jake," came the careful reply.

This time, the grey streets weren't empty, and neither was the dome ceiling: white clouds in a grey sky littered it, while the cleaning 'bots had gone from the streets, like they'd never existed. People had taken their place: in grey and black suits or grey and black dresses, each with white shirts and sharp, alert steps, the people filled the grey like sand collected at the bottom of an hourglass.

Trents checked his pistol, made sure it was hidden; then he stepped into the flow of endless grey, and was promptly carried to the terminal. He bought a cup of coffee before paying the four token price again...

And ninety minutes later, after a twenty minute train ride and five minute walk to the University--and lets not mention the fumbling hour he spent on campus--he finally found the administration building: thanks to the rather general directions from a young student on the campus.

He spent ten minutes in a grey aired office.

Then was directed to a building: D32--alien structures.

Around eleven in the morning, he finally spoke to someone on the topic.

The conversation, with one Darwin Maxria (a neat, grey and white, official looking man with his hair cut short), was recorded and went:

"Did you know Laura Branch well?"

"No. No, not really."

"Do you know of anyone who did?"

"No: she was only casual."

"Did she have any problems?"

"Of what nature...? Ah, can you not play with that. Alien, you understand."

"Spouse: violent, threatening. Y'know."

"No, I'm quite sure I don't. Look, Mr Trents, Ms Branch was just a tutorial teacher here. She taught one class, on a Tuesday, for two hours. That was all."

"She never mentioned anything?"

"No. Ms Branch never spoke to us, not about anything personal, at any rate."

"How come?"

"She liked her private life to remain private, I assume. Look, I have a lecture to give in ten minutes... if there isn't anything else?"

"Yeah. There is. A few more questions."

"I really--"

"No more than a minute, I assure you. Did Laura leave Mars recently?"

"Mars? No."

"The domes, then?"

"Ah... yes. Yes, she did. She spent two weeks at a new excavation site."

"Where is this sight?"

"...(Sigh)... Mr Trents, here is the number of the site owner... I suggest you contact him. Now, I must go.

Thank you."

It proved rather fruitless.

However, he did have a number: nothing else, but a number nonetheless. So, with a rather moody emotion seeping into his bones (time to take his medication), Trents decided to ring it. Firstly, however he got himself a cup of grey, rather bland coffee; and then searched for the phones. In a white lit, grey wooden floor room, he found them, each nestled in private cubicles.

Trents wedged himself into one, popped three two dollar tokens in, then dialled the black and white buttons.

He wasn't sure what he'd get, but what he got was sure as hell what he thought he *wouldn't* get: Sebastian Shawn, one of Mars Colony's richest men, and celebrated as the most eligible bachelor, answered it himself. Trents thought that, over the vid-phone, he seemed slightly ruffled; but there was a lot of grey lined distortion to account for that. Obviously, he was still on the site.

"Mr Shawn, my name is--"

"Jake Trents, yes? What can I do for you, detective?"

"I would like to speak to you about Laura Branch."

Shawn gave a slight, dark grey lipped smile. "Naturally. I'll have one of my workers come and pick you up, around six tomorrow morning. Until then."

And the line went.

Trents sat there for a minute longer: shocked, stunned--and not really sure what had happened. Surely he wasn't going to a site, not for something that would take ten minutes over a phone? Damn straight. He dialled again, but got no answer; he tried twice more, but got nothing.

"Shit," he finally muttered, then took two pills.

When Trents got home, the boyfriend's personal details and autopsy awaited him.

It was all rather uninteresting, and worse, unhelpful.

So, in grey water, he took a shower: the steam was white, but a slightly darker white, almost grey. Almost. For a while, he watched it, wondering, just briefly, why he saw the world the way he did. Why he had been cursed, cursed to be different, cursed to see everything different... Which was a sign, he knew, to take a another couple of pills--which he promptly did.

Then, as he watched the late night news, he ate a small, grey and white meal, which rested on a black plate. Time inched by: nothing to do, not until tomorrow, and all his other cases had been given to others. This was priority.

Finally, after swallowing another two pills, he crawled into the white sheets of his bed. Sleep came after about thirty, forty minutes, just as it usually did.

The worker was there early, much to Trents' distaste. Wasn't anyone late anymore? When did being late become taboo? Didn't they know that some people *liked* to sleep? Sarcasm came all too easily as he was shaking dried sleep from his body, from his mind: with chalky teeth, he stumbled into the empty streets, his blocky companion all too chirpy for his mood.

As they walked the grey toned streets, he secured his pistol.

Which, of course, was a sign to his companion... About an hour later, with the beginnings of a headache, Trents was sitting in a small rover, driving across the grey Mars sand, white light glaring like an angry old man above them. In the distance, he could just make the dark outline of the site...

...Which grew as he came closer, taking on a massive form, grey toned with alien symbols cascading across--indeed, around--the three sides. To Trents, it seemed an awesome sight, this monolith in grey tones, with the grey, almost white, sand piled up against it and around it, like some lovers dying embrace, with the burning whiteness about it.

Which was only spoilt when he noticed the black insects of people around the base. There was just something wrong about that. The debate around alien structures, alien life forms, had started the moment humanity had begun to live on Mars, and was situated in an area similar to what Trents was seeing: should humans be allowed to go near them? They weren't the owners, and they sure as hell didn't know what they were, so weren't they best left alone until solid evidence said otherwise? And Trents, in his opinion, thought that they ought to leave them well alone. Did these people, after all, know what they played with, what secrets they unearthed?

Trents knew they didn't: academics never did.

The rover rumbled to a halt.

"Up and out," the driver commented, ready with a smile.

Trents pulled on a bulky space suit, the type that had come and never really gone away. It was cheap and serviceable: which was what most, on Mars Colony, only needed. The helmet was secured with a click, air pressured in with cold, sterile gasps, while a tiny black microphone rested before his mouth.

"How long are we to wear these?" Trents asked, his voice an echo and alone.

"Until we're in the site: atmospheric generators have created a dome within the first four levels of it."

"Only four?"

The worker laughed. "Work is slow, Jakie, 'cause the aliens ain't human."

Trents ground his teeth together. He *hated* being called Jakie. And it was another reason, just one on the pile, why he'd be happy to see the day ended.

And his headache was getting worse.

(Maybe he should take some medication? He hadn't taken any today, because he'd been so rushed this morning. So shouldn't he take some? Just in case? Too late now, that was for sure.)

The two of them stood in a tiny chamber at the back of the rover, a dim grey room in which a soft hissing emanated through: there was a light on the door, flashing with weak grey--then, all of a sudden, stronger.

"Time to go out."

Which, Trents muttered with soft cynicism, he already knew.

"Hey, did you say something?"

"Me? Nope."

A grunt came through, his only reply.

The outside was eerie with silence, the grey sand soft and clouding under Trents' hard boots. Every

movement came with a detached ease, a flow that didn't seem natural--and Trents suppressed a moment of pure fear. He hadn't walked the land of Mars before: he had no obvious reasons to do so, and to be quite honest, had no wish too. Grey sand, when, in his youth, he'd seen the real colour...

The reality was far worse than his imagination.

Angry--at his fear, himself--he thrust the images away. "Where is Shawn?"

"Inside the site, Jakie. It's where our camp is."

Walking awkwardly, Trents made his way to the entrance: the white cased and black faced workers waved to his companion, their movements languid and flowing. Again, Trents quelled a moment of fear.

He laughed at himself, too, but that didn't help.

"First time out?"

"Yeah."

"Ah, don't worry, Jakie. The feelin'll pass--just remember to piss in the bag." And there was laughter.

Trents grunted this time.

The two finally came to the opening of the site, a large steel container that had been fixed into place outside. The worker stepped up to the grey pad, and with fluid motions, punched in a code.

A flash.

Then the door opened.

Both stepped inside, the worker closing the door behind and punching in another code. Again a flash, then the hiss of air being pumped into them.

A minute later, and the worker said: "You can take off the suit, Jakie."

Trents twisted the helmet off quickly, feeling trapped, feeling caught, though he was at a loss to explain where the fear had come from. Without this suit--this cheap piece of crap--and he'd be dead in the sand, his body bloated and...

The worker opened another door, with a flash and a beep.

"Mr Shawn is through here."

Trents followed, his hair damp, his hands shaking slightly so that he thrust them deeply into his pockets. Then he looked around the site: it looked like an invasion, to be quite honest, full of grey electronics that were strung out like lines of defence, with black and grey men and women walking between them, as if patrolling, with some holding white paper, and others cups or plates, each with thin plumes of grey-white steam in the air, almost like ghostly half imagined rifles and pistols. The walls of the site, visible through the dome--or maybe part of the dome, it was all physics and therefor gibberish to Trents--were patterned with much the same diagrams he had seen on the front. Although these did seem more detailed, but maybe it was just his perception, maybe it was because he stood inside: and because he didn't have a face plate of thick glass in front of him.

"Impressive, eh?" the worker asked.

Just a little, but more because it reminded him of children playing with a large bonfire. "Shawn?"

"Over there," and a hand raised, pointed.

Trents nodded, thanked the worker and made his way, in that shuffle walk of his, towards the lone man. Yes, alone: even on a site, which was, basically, in the middle of nowhere, Shawn was easy to pick. Like a diamond in a bag of coal.

Quietly, not wanting to intrude, not yet, Trents slipped into a chair before him.

"Good morning, detective." He didn't look up, but kept reading whatever he was reading.

Surprised? Trents wasn't, not really. "Maybe."

Shawn slowly looked up: his face covered with a grey black stubble, his eyes dark and eyebrows shaggy: this close, he did seem haggard, which Trents was mildly surprised with. Maybe the multi-billion dollar man wasn't that, maybe he was the blue collar man: underneath the cash, that was.

"Yes, I'm fine, too. So nice of you to ask."

And maybe he wasn't.

"Laura Branch?"

"Was here for two weeks, mapping the fourth level."

Now, Trents had thought about this trip: if Shawn had only that to tell him, then he would of said it over the phone. No need to waste time--and therefor money--to tell him that, straight to his face. No, Shawn had more: the question was, just what?

So he changed the subject.

"Do you know me?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, when I phoned yesterday, you knew me on sight. So I thought, y'know, that I might have met you before."

"You're not a publicity free man, Mr Trents," Shawn told him with a slight, dark and grey smile. "You've earned yourself quite the reputation."

"Yes, but--"

"But you're right, that is not how I knew you."

And he stood, clad in simple, yet expensive, clothes. Brushing back his hair, he said: "Follow me, I have something to show you--something, I think, that will answer all your questions."

Which, of course, made everything just to simple.

But Trents stood and followed.

Shawn lead him through the lines, to a skeleton stilted elevator. The black poles lead up, through a floor in what seemed a human made cutting. Again Trents questioned these people, but silently, and to himself. Then he stepped onto the platform, watching as Shawn hit a button.

"Six months we've been here."

Which, Trents had to admit, he wasn't really interested in.

"Six months," he repeated, softly. "Work has progressed faster than I had anticipated. Faster than anyone anticipated, in fact."

They passed through the first break, kept going, the sound of hydraulics the only sound for a moment.

"And it is due to one aspect," Shawn continued, as if there had been no break. "One magnificent aspect."

Another break, a passing bar of black ran over them.

"And what is that?" Trents asked, thinking he already knew.

But, then, he didn't know what Shawn would whisper next:

"Aliens."

"Aliens, eh?" Trents' cynicism was hard to edit, made harder because he didn't want to. To think he had

come all the way out here, to the middle of nowhere, and for this... this... *fucking shit!*

For a moment, a part of his brain registered the need--the desperate need--for his medicine: but this wasn't the time, wasn't the place.

And they had come to the last gap, grounding to a halt.

The room was grey, verging on black--the air was thick and dark and Shawn was laughing: "Aliens, Mr Trents, aliens--every scientists dream, every academics leprechaun... And I know them, I work for them..."

Trents narrowed his eyes. Work for them?

Mr Trents, we welcome you.

The voice was female, but that wasn't what sent him spinning around, drawing his pistol and levelling it at the figure before him. It was the fact that the voice spoke in his head, with thoughts, with a violation, and within his mind!

Please, that is not needed. We are not here for violence.

Trents didn't move.

Before him, the figure was small and squat, grey with large black eyes. She had long, disjointed fingers, clicking and flicking in almost absent movements; around her, in the darkness, mingled others, but Trents could not give a number.

"Jake... Mr Trents, please... they asked for you."

Right. Sure. Yeah.

Lower your weapon, Mr Trents: it is not needed. We come to offer you a position, a role that is pivotal to Mars Colony.

"Did you kill Laura Branch?" he growled, harsh.

"Mr Trents!"

No, no--it is a valid question, Sebastian. He has a right to know.

Trents was tense, his arm gave a slight tremble.

The alien moved slightly before him, her feet with four toes, each long and sticking to the floor. **Yes. Yes, we did kill Laura.**

"Why?"

He was amazed at being so calm.

We offered her a position, only she refused.

"And you just killed her?"

There is more to it, but yes. We have needs, Mr Trents, needs you cannot understand.

"Yeah? And you killed her for those needs, right?"

She seemed to be sad, almost filled with regret: but she was an alien, and Trents knew nothing about aliens. **Yes. And now we offer you a position.**

"If I refuse you'll kill me?"

It is not for us to decide.

"Then who decides?!"

Do not shout, please, our hearing is quite sensitive. And we cannot answer your question. We are only ever contacted, never the reverse.

"And?" Another tremble ran up his arm.

We need to... eat, Mr Trents, and though it shames us, our food needs to be alive: we live off white blood cells.

Trents felt horror in his throat: the first time for a long, long time.

But we do not wish to attack Mars Colony, for it would cost us much. And we are a peaceful community, never wanting for war. The alien raised a

disjointed, almost skeleton hand. **We need bodies-- alive, for dead are of no use to us. The blood of the dead is like poison for us, and we would like you, Mr Trents, to hold this food for us.**

Bile rose, Trents tightened his grip.

He couldn't believe this was happening, surely it wasn't; aliens, ha. No, it couldn't be aliens, because there were no such things as aliens, and the way Shawn was staring at him, lead Trents to believe he was just getting too confused.

We can compensate, in ways you would never think. And the raised hand began to glow, one finger at a time--only, they did not glow in blacks or greys or whites: they were green, then red, then purple, vivid and searing in his mind. **We could give you back your sight. Your colour.**

And it was tempting.

More tempting than anything...

But he couldn't, he wouldn't. This was just a mass of lies, a huge hallucination, and any time soon they'd find him on the floor, convulsing, grasping for his medication because everything had become so warped, so much a distorted version of reality.

Mr Trents?

He fired, moving forward he fired:

The alien jerked back, her chest erupting in black bursts.

"No!" Shawn screamed. "No!"

The alien, black streaming her chest, looked at him. **We are pacifists, Mr Trents, but we are not weak. You shall regret--**

Trents shifted his aim, and her skull burst opened with the two shots that followed.

"No!"

The shadows were shifting, but Trents' pistol suddenly clicked empty. Swiftly, he dropped the empty cartridge, palmed another and turned to Shawn, who stood, in shock, in anger, staring at him.

Trents fired without thought.

Everything was going smoothly: only he didn't quite realise what he was doing. He had become suddenly detached, everything like some massive day dream, and here he was, punishing the weak, gaining revenge--at least, that was what some tiny part whispered. Oh, God, he was so confused.

Spinning, he caught the shadows breaking apart, becoming grey and squat, coming forward, coming at him.

He fired.

Something went down, silent now.

Again he fired.

And, as something went down, something glowed.

Blue, it glowed.

Azure.

No, surely not, no, it couldn't be.

Firing... firing... firing...

Then the blue hit him, and there was only blackness.

There was the memory of blackness, perhaps death--but it wasn't death, because he could feel himself, painfully stretched out. Painful and heavy.

He opened his eyes, gasped in shock.

Red.

Everywhere, the soft red sand of Mars.

Sweeping the ground, sweeping the world before him: red.

And not one red: crimson, scarlet, ruby, cherry, maroon... Colour.

And just in the distance, more flickering red...

But this, this seemed different. More alive, more deadly.

Flames?

Stumbling, he pulled himself to his feet, not surprised to find himself in a space suit, and the site far away from him. With a touch of fear--*oh My God, flames, the domes!*--he stumbled and fell forward, into the sand.

But he regained his stance, continued forward.

Eventually, shocked and stunned, able to see truly, but unable to explain why, he came to the top of a dune, collapsing to his knees, a lone and desolate figure: he looked down to Mars Colony.

Mars Colony, the domes, all seven giant turtle shells of them, contained flames: tickling against the surface, people running and fleeing: but not dying, being captured, being rounded up. He could tell, could see them, but it had to be a mistake. He had sight, he had colour, and aliens had given it to him...

It was just too much. He laughed, slumped in the sand, he laughed.

Any moment, reality would come crashing back, and he'd find himself sprawled on the floor, gasping for his medication.

Any moment now.

- Ben Peek.



UPSKILLING AND THE CYBER-SCRIBE

by James Verran

It took me until 1984 to realize that I would never write an epic with my wife's portable typewriter, so I bought my first computer, a Commodore 64. With no user-loaded operating system as such, the C64 booted straight into Commodore's version of BASIC. To do serious computing it was necessary to invoke various SYSTEM numbers to switch from BASIC to machine language and...I settled for grappling with the lesser evil and laboriously entered screens of BASIC code copied from magazines and books. It was a lot of fun, if you can think of transcribing 'The Lord of the Rings' while reading it in a mirror as a lot of fun.

To speed up the process, my kids and I developed our own jargon for dictating code to whoever was doing the key work. For instance, a line of Commodore BASIC sounded like: "One two zero space kay why equals peek left-bracket one nine seven right-bracket colon if kay why equals three nine then col equals col plus left-bracket col greater-than two right-bracket," or: 120 KY=PEEK(197):IFKY=39THENCOL=COL+(COL>2). By this method I eventually wrote, and modified, a simple word processor.

That first word processor was little more than a text editor, so I bought a 170 page volume dedicated to constructing a serious word processor (minus spell checking) and spent months entering, debugging and customizing the thing. It worked at the speed of a desiccated snail -- such are the limitations of BASIC programs. At about that time I graduated from the infamous Datasette to a 1541 disk drive -- WOW! The 1541 was only slightly less infamous, in that it loaded data in a fraction of the time, although you could still mow the lawn, wash the car, make a cup of coffee, then walk the dog and be back in time to see the program title flicker onto the screen.

If the ol' 64 had one endearing feature, it was its full screen editing, something Microsoft never emulated in any of its versions of DOS -- tapping the F3 key is about as near as MS-DOS ever came to making repeated commands simple. I still long to be able to 'cursor up' to a command line anywhere on the screen, and execute it by pressing ENTER -- yes I realize that a mouse lets you do that nowadays. By the time I had finally debugged my home-grown word processor, I could afford the 'state of the art' word processor Easy Script, all forty screen-columns worth, or up to 240 columns with horizontal scrolling. My serious writing career had begun.

After a handful of short stories, a lapidary handbook, and a one-day-to-be-expanded novel, mostly never submitted, hell froze over. You see, in those days a state of undeclared war existed between Tandy TRS80 (Trash80) owners and C64 masochists. Witnesses, alive to this day, often remind me of my words: "Hell will freeze over before I'll own a Tandy computer." I was smitten by the Tandy LT1400, an IBM XT clone, laptop computer.

As I look back with fondness, I must confess that it was more of a lap crusher with its dead weight of 5.8 kg. Nevertheless, it seemed like a quantum leap in computing. The XT could save and copy files in less than ten seconds that would have taken the C64's 1541 ten minutes, if it could have handled files that long. And so began my passion for mobile computing.

The LT1400 had no hard drive, but working with its twin 720K 3.5 inch floppies, I devised a fail-safe backup procedure. The laptop seemed to run according to Murphy's Law, so became known as Mrs. Murphy, and I never dared to shut her down before making three verified copies of my latest work on individual disks. Why three? If your disk drive 'chucks a fruity' (many do, sooner or later), and you discover that your disk has become corrupted, you use your backup, right? Ah-ha, but when you place the backup in the renegade drive, and it too becomes corrupted, STOP! While your disk drive is being repaired, take your remaining copy to someone with a reliable drive and immediately make two fresh backups.

Computer folklorists once decreed that you should always backup data files at the end of each day, or week, at the very least. Disregard that advice and make more frequent saves. Use an autosave if your software permits, and get into the habit of saving every ten to fifteen minutes. At the end of EVERY session, make at least one -- preferably two -- backups ON FLOPPY DISKS to ensure that you have independent copies of your latest work as well as the working copy on your hard drive. Even if your disk drives never malfunction, there is the ever-present risk of power failure. That is where laptops have a decided advantage: they keep running on battery long enough to close any open files before shutting down.

Mrs. Murphy also introduced me to the delights of the RAM Drive, an option missing from the Windows 95/DOS 7 operating system in its showroom configuration. A RAM Drive, or Virtual Disk is a software program (driver) which configures a block of spare Random Access Memory for use as an extra disk drive. The RAM Drive has a drive letter, usually the next after that of your highest physical drive, and is accessed in exactly the same way as any disk drive -- just select it by typing its drive letter and a colon then press ENTER, or use the electronic rodent if you must. A RAM Drive may be divided into subdirectories if necessary, and can be used for saving to, or copying from. Because it uses no motor-driven disk, it is lightning fast, and provides the perfect interim storage medium for file juggling. For instance, expanding compressed files, which usually takes more than a few seconds on a physical drive, is performed quicker than you can lift your finger from the

ENTER key using a RAM Drive. However, because a RAM Drive only exists as long as the RAM is powered up, you must copy any of its contents you wish to keep to a physical disk before turning off the computer.

Contrary to popular belief, it is NOT prudent to leave superfluous files, especially confidential material, on your hard disk. When files are no longer required they should be off-loaded (archived) onto floppies, and the working versions erased from the hard disk. By keeping only currently required files on your machine, you will avoid the embarrassment of having files on your machine for curious computer technicians to read, or plunder, if your machine goes in for repairs. If your hard drive is still working when the unthinkable happens, you should delete sensitive material (not the executable software files) from all directories, then copy a large file (the thesaurus from a word processor is ideal) into each directory. But how, if the machine is acting up? That is what your bootable system (startup) disk is for, so learn how to use some of the essential DOS commands. DELETING files is not sufficient — there are widely available software tools that restore (UNDELETE) 'erased' files. Fortunately, very little can be resurrected if something else has been saved in the same area after the erasure. Blackmail and plagiarism aside, there are people out there who pay for information scabbed from computer disk drives.

Despite her slow speed and limited RAM, Mrs. Murphy was a perfectly adequate word processing computer, but I had need of more versatile software, so our relationship came under some stress. Friends, being what they are, we drifted apart when I become infatuated with a 486 notebook. This one was much faster, lighter (2.5kg), and had more RAM, plus a hard drive. At last I could use more memory-consuming software, which didn't make me a better writer, but it was a helluv an incentive to work at it.

Given the choice, I settled for DOS 6.2, and unencumbered by Windows, the notebook is a delight to use — just find a comfortable place to work, and switch it on. Apart from the cost factor, sticking with DOS has other advantages; most old software runs smoother under straight DOS than Windows, and DOS 6.2+ makes it possible to set up multiple configurations through the AUTOEXEC.BAT and/or the CONFIG.SYS files. When I boot up and ENTER my password, my trusty notebook greets me by name — well, it is a personal computer — then offers me a list of configuration options. I have a choice of several RAM Drives ranging from 640K to 2Mb, or a pair of 1024K, and if I do not make a choice within twenty seconds, it defaults to the 2Mb RAM Drive. It is possible to switch on, boot up, run the word processor, then load a file and begin writing within thirty seconds — try doing that with any version of Windows.

Although it would be great, and decidedly more expensive, to have the latest hardware and software, it is always more productive to work with a familiar set-up. I have several redundant word processors on my machine, but mostly use Word 6 for DOS, which was the last version before Microsoft lost the plot; even so, it has a few vices which I have been forced to live with. The other word processors are only kept to work with files from friends who share my penchant for vintage

software. Their files can be converted with the appropriate software, loaded into my favourite workhorse, and the process reversed later to reinstate their original formats. Files generated on Windows applications are a bit more trouble unless they arrive as ASCII (text only) files.

Be patient when shopping for software. If you can wait, the best value for money is found a few months after a later version has gone on sale. You can save hundreds of dollars by buying remaindered software, and most of the old progRAMs still have real, printed-on-paper manuals, and there are usually excellent upgrade deals. About the only reservation is to avoid obscure packages with limited compatibility. Find the software that best suits your needs, and learn to use it efficiently.

My current DOS applications are Microsoft's Word 6, Works 3, and Gazelle Systems Inc's QDOS 3 for managing files and keeping my disk drives from going critical. Works 3 has a useful little integrated word processor with a very handy set of options for converting files to (and from) the formats of several popular software packages: a rare concession from Microsoft. Strangely, the word processor in Works has line numbering in the DOS version, yet this essential has been omitted from the Windows version. The spreadsheet is also impressive, if you are masochistic enough to enjoy that kind of thing. The unpretentious Works database is easy to use, and adequate for keeping facts and statistics in a place where they can be accessed quickly. By regularly updating and expanding my databases, I can now look up such things as character profiles, locations, technical facts and statistics, as well as indexed details for locating related information in reference books. Keeping track of what manuscripts have been sent to (and usually rejected by) whom, and when, is no dRAMa either. I can recommend buying one of the popular integrated SOHO packages. Integration, via Windows or whatever operating system, is the way to go. The ability to work concurrently with all the integrated applications is what real computing power is all about.

Back in the dark ages, when I was manipulating files with MS DOS 3.2, a demonstration of QDOS II so impressed me that I bought a copy of the later version, QDOS 3. This utility makes it possible to move blocks of files around drives, change file attributes (it's a real hoot to send files dated in the future to friends), or edit, copy, rename, and backup files. QDOS 3 switches instantaneously between drives and directories, with split (dual) displays, and creates, renames, prunes and grafts directories. So who needs Windows?

While I am quite happy to slap away at my little DOS-based notebook, my better half is not. A few months ago she bought herself a multimedia computer running Windows 95 (Virus 95 among our friends) from a long-established nationally renowned electronics chain. We have learned to shun name brands which are generally overpriced and underpowered (like the LT1400), so her machine is a mongrel, literally: the thing hates me. Fair dinkum, IT managed to crash 95 within the first week, and make it look like MY fault! This necessitated a total reinstallation — just as well, because several of 95's

crucial features had been passed over during the pre-delivery installation.

Later, I suspected something else was askew when I discovered that her Works for Windows (a freebie), didn't. Now, given time, and a decent manual, I can fix most problems with DOS...but Windows 95 was supplied with no manual, just a hundred pages of spiel alleging what it does, but nothing concrete on how to make it perform the much-touted miracles. Of course there are thousands of maddeningly intrusive help screens, but to really utilize them you have to keep your printer inked, full of paper, and on-line.

One major problem was that the Works on-line tutorials would only run with the CD in the drive. Herself was not amused, because she needs to use the CD reader for playing Strauss while pounding the keys. The problem was eventually overcome by copying the required files to a new HELP sub-dir-er-folder on C drive and a minor edit to the WORKS.INI file. This was accomplished with DOS commands, and the trusty old text editor on my computer without touching a mouse button. Some awesome intellect has convinced the Big M to rename directories to folders, which is about as logical as calling a pad of paper a writing tablet.

It is well known that claiming your rights as a registered software owner is an absolutely frustrating exercise, so it seemed pointless to register any of the new software, including Windows 95. The 'registration' forms were nothing but blatant invitations to be sent junk mail, and why would anyone in their right mind willingly invite junk mail? To add further insult, the free offers (bribes to register) had expired before we had purchased

the damed things, anyway -- obviously customers are expected to rush out and buy on the day of release, or very soon thereafter.

I could write an entire article on printer hassles, but won't -- for the present. Windows 95 came with every imaginable printer driver, except a suitable version for my old 24 spot dotty. Despite this, we were congratulated on our successful installation of the IBMXL24 Printer -- on the only nearly legible page the thing ever produced under Windows. No doubt one of the generic drivers would do, but as for finding which one.... The printer manufacturer was no help, and I had no intention of contacting the Big M, for the reasons previously mentioned. Herself did some lateral thinking, and eventually bought a new inkjet printer, with drivers for 95. I continue to use the 'real' printer in DOS mode.

The good ol' DOS command prompt has been getting a real work-out. Windows 95 will not tolerate the mauling of its long filename files with older version utilities, in fact it is computercidal to attempt to use anything but Windows 95/DOS 7 utilities.

Still, despite Virus 95, our marriage has survived, and now Herself swans around THE NET, accompanied by 'The Blue Danube Waltz', while I am still trying to grasp the essentials of E-mailing. I live in hope of eventually downloading a 95-friendly driver for my old printer, and maybe tracking various other bits. Although I am not yet a fully qualified Internaut, I now have permission to touch her computer, occasionally, without supervision -- now that is trust.

- James Verran



THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE

by Pavel Viaznikov

Here I am again, just back from Holland and eager to share my impressions. I was there as a tourist, so had plenty of time to explore the country. I spent most of my time in Amsterdam; my hotel (it was the Galaxy) was located some 10 minutes walking distance from the Central Station; you had to cross the bay, though - there's a round-the-clock free ferry, only for several days it didn't work as the water froze.

This was an unusually cold winter in Holland. The famous *grafts* (canals) were all frozen and the happy people were skating just as on Breighel's paintings. For the first time in 11 years they had their "12 cities marathon" - 200 km by the ice on the canals, and the event was topic #1 on TV. And, you know, for several days there was no snow, and the canals were mirror-like, excellent for skating, but, I am afraid, the famous tulip bulbs in the fields would perish, not being protected by snow.

The unusually severe frost had other effects for the Hollanders - for example, when I went to Den Haag (The Hague), I thought that perhaps I would witness the annual January 1 sea bathing - but when I came to Kurhaus beach where the event is usually held, one of the many dog-walking old ladies informed me that the weather was too cold for that. And indeed, cold it was: I nearly froze solid, like the beach itself, and, having thrown a coin into the waves, hurried back to the tram stop. Similarly in Madurodam - the famous "Little Holland", the toy city representing the most remarkable landmarks and buildings of the country. I was the first visitor, an early bird, and I was alone in the big frozen bowl of Madurodam. The tiny canals froze, and tiny ships were sadly sitting in them, like flies which by accident had drowned in an



THE AUTHOR ON A FROZEN CANAL

ice-cube tray. One oil tanker was barely visible from within an ice hill - it's a representation of a fire ship quenching the flames of a damaged tanker, and obviously, on the day before,

the model worked, pouring freezing water over the "flaming" vessel. I wanted to take some photos, but couldn't - at first I had big difficulties unzipping the camera-bag, and then just could not flex my finger to press the button, so cold it was. Soon, a detachment of Japanese tourists arrived, and I was photographed by them (as you know, the Japanese tourists are famous for enjoying the world exclusively through the windows of their cameras)....

Most of my friends, having learned that I was in Amsterdam, asked me two questions - primo, if I visited the Red Light District and the girls therein, and secundo, whether I enjoyed a joint in those "coffee-shops". The answers are yes, no and no - yes, of course I strolled a lot in the "sex city", no, I never felt like entering one of those rooms with red-lit windows, and no, call me a prejudiced person if you will, but drugs are just not my cup of tea - or rather coffee, since they sell the stuff in those "coffee-shops". I don't smoke at all to begin with - I hate the smoke. Besides, I did not have a friend with me who could take care of me if anything went wrong (if I got stoned, I mean). But the Red Light District... well, first of all, it ruined some of my illusions. I thought it would be fun - most of it just wasn't. Like, I wanted some funny sex souvenirs for my friend, but it seems that it's either sex or imagination, like in the joke about the guy with a giant penis - when having sex, the poor man fainted as his erection took all the blood from his brain. I managed to find only two souvenirs with a good twist - a woven mitten for genitals and a playing stone with sex positions instead of numbers, for those who have difficulty agreeing on positions. The others were just a "lighter", a "lipstick", a "pistol", a "pen", & etc., each concealing a toy penis... funny as hell.

Same for the porno videos - I decided to see several of those, not "normal" ones - those I have seen, - but devoted to various deviations, just to find out what they are. So, purely for scientific purposes (as you have already guessed, I hope), I undertook to view tapes highlighting vastly varied ways in which the species Homo Sapiens have learned to exploit their copulative, excretory and others organs. I don't know what the videoshop owner thought when for three days nightly I rented three films apiece - all for different sexual habits - and locked myself in the viewing cabin, unpleasantly smelling of old sperm. I must admit that I found some things funny, some disgusting, but most were so-oo bo-oring! I could not make myself even start watching the ones for the enjoyers of scatology, nor the zoophiliac ones, though. Also, I forgot to take a film about "rubber" - I'd never heard about such a perversion and wanted to find out; the labels showing people dressed in rubber suits, not unlike those for scuba diving, and gas masks. I still don't know what this is about, and when, seeking enlightenment, I asked the shop assistant, he answered that "you should try it to know". Well, and what if I don't feel like it, but am just curious?... Like, what "a rubber mask with pump", sold in one of those shops, could be used for, and how? I lacked imagination. By the way, those who got to Amsterdam in search of varied sexual entertainment should better not postpone their trips - it seems that this source of, er, specific pleasures could suddenly or perhaps gradually dry up. Thus, in the summer of 1996 the EU advised the Netherlands to impose a ban on all kinds of sex involving children (not a bad move, may I remark), and on corresponding pornography, and it is expected that "hard S&M" will also be driven outside the permissible limits. Some people believe that the policy towards the drugs could also become somewhat more rigid.

And guess what? I won a prize at a sex show (alas, it was boring too - I hoped for strip dances or something, but it was just some f*cking; sorry, I would like to call it something else, like "a stage version of sexual intercourse", but the former term describes the show more precisely). Now, when the performance was over, they had a "New Year lottery" - and I, or rather my seat, won a something, only I had to also answer

how long was the main acting person's member. I blubbered something at random, and was presented with a rather heavy box. Which turned out to contain a pair of shackles. I must admit that, among other "sexual toys" this is one of the most interesting; I shall either give the cuffs to my nephews for playing cops-and-robbers, or hang the thing over my bed, I have not decided yet which. If it was the above-mentioned rubber mask, I wouldn't know what to do with it, even if it is equipped with a pump.

Of course, my interests were not limited by the Red Light district. Holland has a lot to offer to an interested guest: though the weather was far from pleasant; it was windy and slippery in the streets, and yet, I managed to enjoy several museums - the Reichsmuseum, the "Our Lord in the Attic" (a secret praying house), the Tropical Museum, the Naval Museum and the museum ship "Amsterdam" (that I did at my own risk, as was advised by the museum management - the berth was covered by ice, and it didn't have any rails, and once or twice I was close to taking a refreshing bath). I visited Den Haag with the city museum and the Madurodam - the "Little Holland", Delft and Utrecht - in Utrecht I especially like the most enjoyable collection of musical boxes, mechanical pianos, street organs and orchestrions, all in working condition and most of them being played during guided tours. The visits to different cities were easy, as the train network is very convenient, the ticket attendants most helpful and ticket prices moderate enough (but to warn you, the tickets are checked regularly and you could be fined even for riding 1st class instead of 2nd, even though there is practically no difference between the two). Besides, the distances are not what they are in Russia, or, say, in your antipodes' country; in Russia, Moscow and St. Petersburg are considered neighbour cities - you can get on a train at midnight and at 8 AM you arrive at your destination. In Holland, you get from one city to another usually in a couple of hours, or less; for example, it is only 25-30 minutes from Amsterdam to Utrecht, while in Moscow, it takes me 1 hour to get to my work, and several years ago, when I was working for the House of Russian Cosmetics, it was 1 hour 40 minutes.

In Amsterdam I met a most unusual tourist - a classical Russian *babushka* (granny), in the usual cheap overcoat and grey woollen shawl, looking absolutely out of place in Amsterdam. She turned out to be a retired St Petersburg candy factory worker, with a very small pension. However a couple of years ago her factory was reorganised, and every employee got his share of the shares. Most workers decided that it's "another trick of the authorities" and they never got anything for the shares, just like it was with the so-called vouchers five years ago. This old lady decided that she's old and lonely, and can afford to take a risk. "I do not expect to live too long, I am already 78", - she said, - "and I do not have any heirs. If I die, the social service will get rid of my body for free. I do not need a mausoleum upon my grave. And my 3-room apartment was only a heartache for me, so I traded it for a 1-room place and used the balance to buy shares from the factory employees. Then, some American company went in - they wanted the factory and after buying most of the shares from the State, they started buying the employee's shares. So I sold mine for a US\$30,000 gain, placed my money in three banks for extra security and the interest alone is good enough for me. Now, I have to spend the money while I am still alive. You see, I do not need fancy clothes, a bigger apartment, or a car. I bought myself a small automatic washing machine and a big TV set which is better for my old eyes than the old one with a 12" screen, and I do not need any other expensive things..." So, the old lady decided to see the world. She has already been to the USA, Germany and the United Kingdom, - though the latter trip wasn't very pleasant, as on her first night in London she wandered away from her hotel, lost her way and could not explain anything to the police, and was rescued only just

before the group's departure (they had to produce the correct number of tourists for their group visa). Thus, she failed to see London. So, in Holland she was careful not to walk away from the guide. I learned her story from her when I treated her to an apple pie and coffee; you see, she never ate lunches or dinners, only breakfast - a buffet breakfast in the hotel, since she was sort of ashamed/afraid to go to a restaurant, as she could speak only Russian (so I advised her of a nearby self-service place and a shop, where one can go and eat without talking). Well, she told me her story and asked my advice as to where she should go next time.

Oh yes, the food. For me, food is one of the objects of interest, just like the museums etc. (and a source of my extra weight, of course). Therefore, I made my point to taste the famous - "the best in Europe" - potato fries, *oifenbolen* (oily doughnuts), the generous *ristafaal* (borrowed from Indonesia), tender herrings (almost raw), etc. In a pancake restaurant the owner tried to persuade me that we Russians borrowed the idea of pancakes from Holland, through Peter the Great - just like the ship-building industry, tulips, potatoes and tobacco. (They know our Peter and his wife Katherine - later, also the Empress of Russia, they are proud that Peter learned carpentry, navigation and ship-building, as well as some other trades and sciences, in Holland - where he lived as "Peter Mikhailov". When I was in Amsterdam there were two exhibitions devoted to these two rulers of Russia). Well, I had to disappoint the pancake man - Russians have eaten pancakes from time immemorial, and every spring, in March, one week before the Russian Orthodox Church starts the Great Fast - the Lent, people celebrate Pancake Week (*Maslenitsa*). This tradition started long before Christianity came to Russia; in pagan times the round golden pancakes were made and eaten to glorify Yaril, the Sun-God, and to hail the Spring. Christianity could not stop the tradition, so it adopted it as an unofficial beginning of the Lent. People used to make pancakes and eat them with different fillings or toppings - meat was already forbidden, but one could enjoy butter, sour cream, caviar, chopped salted fish with onions, honey and jam, - and oh boy, they did enjoy it! Generously buttered hot pancakes were counted not in pieces, nor in dozens, but in cubits (a measure of length - from the fingertips to the elbow). I mean the height of piles of pancakes, not pancakes put in a line! Russian kids still enjoy fables by the Russian poet Ivan Krylov, and many lines from his fables became proverbs. Well, he died from over-eating during a Pancake Week. During this week, the people also enjoyed outdoor fetes and fairs, which offered not only different goods, but also all types of shows and farces, waxwork rooms, merry-go-rounds, etc. The kids were buying special Pancake Week toys, only available in this time of the year - like "mother-in-laws tongues", for example (those were paper strips with a nipple on one end, rolled like a photo film - when you blew in the nipple, the "tongue" unrolled into a foot-long, vibrating thing, and the whistle in the nipple gave an especially nasty shrill when the "tongue" unrolled or rolled back. Also, they burned a big doll of Maslenitsa, which represented driving away winter. Well, I gave to the owner of the restaurant this enlightening information, along with some recipes - he said that he is going to try them and if they prove to be good, add to the menu. I wonder whether he did it, actually, it could help him to get a special which would only be served at his place.... Another thing was beer. This is a warning: if you are in for a good beer, you have nothing to look for in Holland. It was an unpleasant surprise to me, but the Hollanders just don't know how to make beer, almost like the Americans. They themselves joke that their "Amstel" beer is bottled right from the Amstel River... In Russia, you can nowadays find many beer brands which differ from Holland beer like milk differs from cod-liver oil. So if you want a beer in Holland, forget all local brands and settled for imported beer. On the other hand, in Belgium, which is next door to Holland, beer is excellent and most enjoyable, and therefore highly

recommended. I spent only a few hours in Brussels, but managed to taste at least ten brands, and eight of them were just tops. Another nice thing they make is wafers - those are soft, fragrant and sing glory to God right out of your mouth. And the chocolates they make - yummm!...



A BEER TEMPLE

The trip to Brussels was quite funny; our guide kept telling us "far away on your right is a very big and nice cathedral, but we cannot go there due to construction work; on your left, there's an observation point from which you can enjoy an excellent panoramic view of the city, but we don't have time for it", etc. The city is occupied with construction sites, and they make me sad; I've seen a very nice Modern-style building being pulled down to make room for yet another dull box of an office... the guide told us that vast territories in and around the city are going to be used by the Government of the EU. I wonder, couldn't take some land well outside Brussels for that?

What I enjoyed very much, was the Fine Arts Museum. Its collections are just fantastic and display chef-d'oeuvres from Rubens and Breighel to Magril and the "Zero"

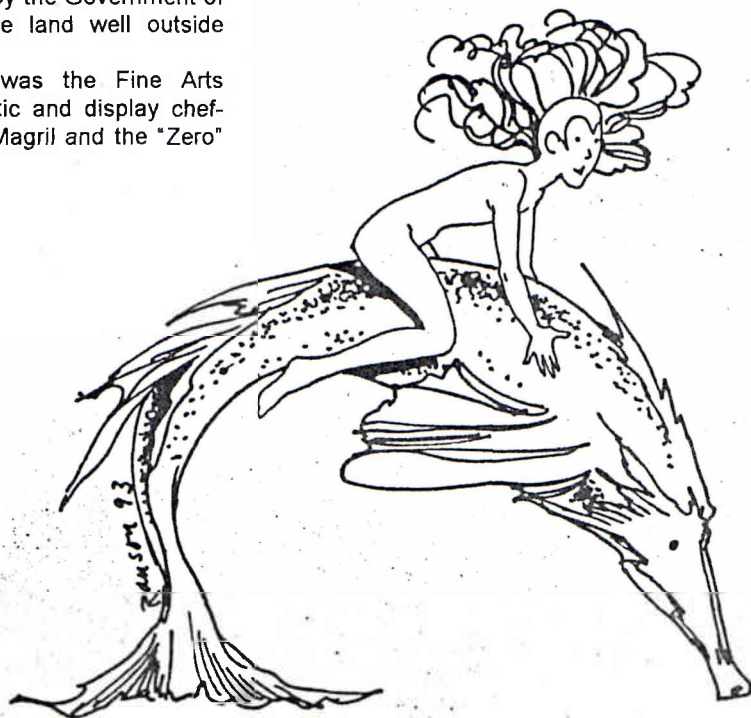
group. This was the very best part of my trip to Brussels. By the way, the old lady of whom I told you in the beginning of my letter, the confectionary factory *babushka*, was eagerly striding along the museum halls - mind you, we were on our own as the guide just gave us our time and advised where we should go if we want to go shopping, or to have lunch, or see the museum. So the "newly" rich aged traveller chose art, and none could be wiser. Alas, we didn't have too much time in Brussels and I could only see one museum - while next to it was the Modern Art Museum, for example, and I wouldn't mind sitting in a restaurant, etc. But I managed to buy some chocolates, and a couple of toy mice - my friend collects them and I always try to find new exhibits for his collection, in fact, about 2/3 of his (?) collection was collected by me...

On my way back to Moscow, I had to spend all of my remaining Guilders in a duty free shop. You see, I was told that there was an exchange office beyond the passport control, but they didn't have it there - and it's very difficult to have your currency exchanged in Moscow, unless it's US Dollars, DM or British Pounds (oh, you can find a bank where they can exchange it, but not quite easily). So, I think, I looked quite funny with a big bag full of bottles of liqueur (the most practical buy there). Well, at least I could give a small party for my friends....



A YOUNG LADY AND I

- Pavel



THE YANKEE PRIVATEER

by Buck Coulson

When I was young; from age 8 or 9 up through teenager, we lived in northern Indiana and my grandfather owned a farm in southern Indiana, and we'd visit him twice a year, on his birthday in April and at Thanksgiving. There were other relatives and old friends of my parents to visit as well, but we stayed with my grandparents. During the day, if we weren't visiting, I'd probably be out looking for groundhogs to shoot. My grandfather mostly raised turkeys, but also had some livestock, and groundhogs were pests which dug burrows that a cow could put a foot into and break a leg. They weren't wanted, and gave me some shooting practice, as well as teaching me what patience I have (not much, I'm afraid.) You had to wait for them to stick a head out of the hole.

The other recreation I had, since the grownups were talking about things I wasn't terribly interested in at that age, was reading. Like most kids who became fans, I suppose, I'd read anything that had print on it. The supply at grandfather's wasn't large, but he did have pulp western magazines, which were much more interesting to me than treatises on raising turkeys. So, I became mildly addicted to westerns in print, though not to the "B" movie westerns which were popular at the same time. (Juanita was the one who got hooked on them....) So, when I got a job and had money to spend, I spent some of it on western pulps. I had discovered science fiction by then, so I spent more on science fiction pulps, but I did pick up westerns, mostly second-hand. I currently have a couple of bookshelves of western pulps with a variety of titles, including a couple of copies of REAL WESTERN.

This was a bit different in some ways; for one thing, it was edited by Robert W. Lowndes, who is better known in our field as the editor of several science fiction magazines. For another, it contained some very weird western stories. The August 1956 issue included "The Water Carriers", by Lon Williams. A deputy sheriff is ambushed by two killers he's trailing, when they suddenly turn and kill each other. Then he meets three lovely maidens who tell him their names are Ina, Leta, and Electa, and they're trying to help their brother Melos who is chained to a rock under the tree Tantalus, which tantalises him with luscious fruits, but keeps them out of his reach, and won't let his sisters bring water to him. In the end, the deputy shoots the tree with his trusty .45, Melos is released, the ground turns to boiling mud, and everyone escapes, with the sisters giving the deputy magic cups of amethyst, silver, and gold. Not exactly your typical cowboy story.... I wonder what the regular readers made of it? The August 1957 issue included "The Dancing Trees", also by Lon Williams. The same deputy first runs into two

men, one chasing the other around a circular path. Ones gives their names as Post Poner and Tempus Figut. Deciding they're both lunatics, he starts off but stops for another character, Regretful Shade, who is looking for yesterday. Then he's halted by a pair of knife fighters who call themselves Hokey Pokey and Braggy Doshey. They try to sneak up on him, but are stopped by the music of Orpheus, who asks Winters to release his girlfriend Eurydice from captivity by a Maenad tree. In the end, our hero shoots the previous weirdos he's met, who are attacking Orpheus, Orpheus' music enchants the Maenad, and everybody goes home happy. Again, not what one expects, especially from a magazines titled REAL Western..... Unfortunately, those are the only two issues I have, so I don't know how long Lon Williams continued exploiting classical Greek tragedy in the American west. I asked Lowndes about it once, but he didn't recall author or series.

Otherwise, I've had some physical troubles. Late last summer I came out to let Elli the dog off her chain, and while she was bouncing around in ecstasy, she managed to wrap the chain around my ankle and pull, providing me with a hole the size of a half-dollar and down to the bone, in my ankle. Among other things, I couldn't wear shoes, since even oxfords came up over the edge of the hole and irritated it. Treatment has now reduced the hole to dime size and about dime depth, and I can wear shoes again, which is handy... It wasn't a fun winter. Lately, though, I seem to have developed arthritis, and I've begun taking medicine for it, which sometimes helps.

Couple of Conventions lately, to replenish our depleted bank account. Hal Clement was at Millennicon in Cincinnati and I was on one panel with him. (I was scheduled for two panels, which the convention thoughtfully scheduled opposite each other, so I just had to pick the one I preferred.) Hal is walking a bit slower than he used to, but otherwise seems healthier than I am. (As well as being a better writer and only 6 years older.) With the arthritis, I'm walking a good deal slower than I used to, but with luck the medicine will help; I just started taking it this week.

We had a mild winter, and a wet spring. Floods in southern Indiana, along the rivers leading into the Ohio and along the Ohio, but none up here. Our county doesn't have creeks; it has drainage ditches. We did get 10 inches of water in the basement once and had to call a plumber. Sump pumps, to remove water from basements, are common here, but we never needed one before. And having bought it, I read the instructions and couldn't install it. The instructions said to never install the pump if the basement was damp, unless the electricity was turned off. The problem was that our bank of circuit breakers is in the basement; on the far wall and around a corner from the stairs. So I could turn off the electricity, install the pump, and...? Turn on the electricity while standing in 10 inches of water didn't appeal. The plumber put his pump in at the foot of the stairs and used a long hose, and didn't get his feet wet. Mine, a different type, wouldn't have worked there. That was a month ago and we don't have a bill yet, but it will come eventually. Last time he was here, the bill came 4 months later. Leisure is appreciated in this community. Don't have a bill for the last oil either; that was 2 months ago.

I seem to be manuscript reading in spurts; when they have an unusual number, perhaps? Anyway, I got some more after writing my last MENTOR column, but haven't had any this year yet. Anyway, Juanita and I are still alive and kicking, and hope you're all the same.

- Buck

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF SCIENCE:

REVISED, UPDATED AND
GENERALLY REFURBISHED.

by Darren Goossens

Part V

The Twentieth Century: The two biggest influences on twentieth century science have been Elbert Einstein, Max Plank and Mr. Ibm.

Einstein: Einstein invented Relativity and mc^2 , two great breakthroughs, but is best known for his hairstyle, which appeared to involve another physical principle - electricity.

Relativity was and is a popular theory. Put simply, Einstein said: "Everything is relative." This was not a comment on brotherhood amongst men but a physical statement that means that an observer's length depends on the rate at which their inertia is framing its reference compared to the speed of light in a vacuum. In other words, the faster something is going the shorter it is. Why tall athletes still win Olympic medals, he could not explain.

However, his idea that 'time slows the faster you go' has proved useful to anyone trying to make it through an amber light.

$E = mc^2$ is a formula relating mass to energy, and so was a great breakthrough in calculating the kilojoules in a slice of pie.

Max Plank, Quantum Mechanics etc: Max Plank invented the quantum, a very scientific idea that caught on nearly as well as mc^2 . This was a very important concept, and so after the efforts of people like Kneels Bore, Irwin Shrödinger, Werner Heisenburger and Paul Dirack, something called quantum mechanics emerged. This is a very successful theory that describes the behaviour of very small particles, though it has not proved very useful in combating hay-fever caused by pollen.

The different concepts in quantum mechanics - the 'Uncertainty Principle', the 'Exclusion Principle' and the less well known 'Phoo function' - have, by demonstrating that at a fundamental level the universe has a random nature and yet obeys certain simple laws, been of great importance to philosophy. That the game of golf behaves the same way was not considered proof enough.

The Uncertainty Principle states that you can't know a particle's position and speed at the same instant. The author has found that this does not work as an excuse for a speeding ticket.

The Exclusion Principle is rather different - it says that things are excluded on principle. This has of course resulted in cries of 'discrimination!' but it is neither easy nor desirable to cure electrons of their isolationist tendencies.

Quantum considerations have lead many great discoveries; to the silicon chip and its uses - in computers, aircraft and, most importantly, intelligent toasters.

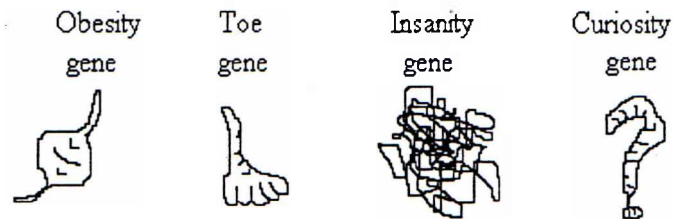
Particle Physics: Along with Quantum Mechanics, particle physics expanded greatly in the twentieth century. Now we have particles with not only mass and weight, but charm, strangeness, and schizophrenia.

There is the 'proton' of positive charge, the 'neutron' of negative spin, the 'quark' with strangeness and colour, the 'carryon' which has a loud voice, and the 'cynnamon' which is at its best on raisin bread toast. They are now seeking the 'Higgs Boson', the particle which gives all other particles mass - analogous to a candy bar.

A great pioneer in this field was Marie Curie, who invented radium, though she did irradiate herself in the process. This lead to her death, but not before the winning of two Nobel prizes and a beauty pageant, in which the judges said that she 'positively glowed'.

The work of Curie, Ainstein, and Plank came together in the 'Manhattan Project' which started out as a New York musical and ended up as an atom bomb. This then lead to the hydrogen bomb, which was even more destructive, so much so that it was hypothesised that its testing might set up a chain reaction that would cause the Earth's entire crust to explode. They then went and tested it.

Biology: In biology, the genetic revolution has happened. Genes were identified as the mechanisms of heredity. Some are:



And the gene for homosexuality:

Censored

Genetic engineering has been developed, and the possibility of trying the technique on human genes has been raised. It is very controversial, though the opportunity to eradicate genetic baldness from the gene pool should be jumped at.

Spaceflight: Spaceflight is prominent in twentieth century science; the penetration of the final frontier, the journey to the moon, Neil Aldrin's name becoming known around the globe. In addition, Voyager went to Jupiter, though Harold has yet to be revealed.

Epilogue: And so we reach the present day, with its multimedia and fibre optics and Stephen Hawkins and space telescopes and Big Bangs and teeth transplants. Science is skipping ahead in leaps and bounds, and the man in the street can only hope that it will not run him down. Hopefully this little treatise has wiped away any misunderstandings and readied the reader for what lies ahead.

What lies ahead? Even a well-versed scientifically literate person like the author cannot say.

We must wait and see.

Poetry, Too

ALL IS SILENCE

As nature's time bomb ticks on
Awaiting man's final act,
The abuse that sends him to the grave.
He struts the earth in arrogance
Proud of his puny progress.
All in the material world
Of greed and selfishness
Digging his own deep resting place.

But still the stars will shine,
And still the moon will rise,
And still the sun will shine,
But no birds will sing,
No flowers bloom
On Mankind's whitened bones
And all is silence
As earth spins on.

- Richard Reeve

SUPER-STRINGS

How these long strands
Of filaments hang
Is how the galaxies grow,
How the universe expands
By these long bands,
Not from an old bang.

More like a cobwebs' strands
Than a spider's web,
These threads depend
From the galaxies' ends,
And they grow and expand,
Until the filaments break,
When they drift away
As if tugged by a rake.

- Bill West

THE GLORIFIED HEART

Feel the heart thunder,
As it warms to the embrace.
See the look of wonder
On the loving face.
Look into the eyes
Filled with lightning fires.
Wait for the first warm rain,
Sweeping down from the mountains
In torrents and fountains
Whose source never tires,
As it brings down the rain.

Feel the heart on fire
With a flame that never dies
From the place which lightning struck.
Look at the moist lips
Beneath the eyes on fire.
Feel the soft kiss
And the moving tongue.
Feel the lungs suck,
As the flush spreads
Throughout every limb
And through the very air
Pulsing in each lung.

Share the love with all the risen
And those who are raised up;
With every human soul,
Come to share the cup
And the wine of communion.
Share the Beatific Vision
In consummated union.

- Bill West

FINDING THE DELAY ACCEPTABLE.

"You will never again be sure that your
companion on the walkway is not from
the dying world of Demos"

(cover blurb, 'The Star of Mesioch')

a whole
life walking hand
in hand ever now bent
wrinkled still pull each other on
years' path

seen with
sad sweet envy
on this world where by now
all but this pair chosen to stay
young smooth

unchanged
forever - when
at last one dies other
has grace waits till braindeath complete
to change

become
true nature what
was sent to send species
oblivion new immortals
can't cure

- steve sneyd

ORACLE OF CERES

by Steve Sneyd and Don Webb.

0

The Wheat Goddess gave her name to rolling planetoid
Dismal failed world pulled apart by gravity tide
hapless humans seek the answer
not thinking that those who built the Oracle
lost their world.

I

What prompted you with this largess?
The gift, two joys, three strangers;
None I dare explain.
My Being.

What whisper from the darkness between the stars?
That Giving is Salvation;
Getting's meaning cannot be
made so freely clean

Who will they be to have received such Gift?
Those the Gift was made for -
ask no more than this.

Who do you become at the moment of Giving?
Having Given, I become as free as chrysalis
when moth is flown... that is
enough

When will he Cycle end?
When that question is
asked by Given of the Giver, then
all ends only
that cannot begin again.

II

More like the Coal-Sack Nebula
with its promise of mystery
More like the rainbow shine of all
with its fleetingness
More like the character in an unknown alphabet
with hopeless command to decipher
She

He
Less than the commander none obey,
with his inward-pointing silences,
Less than the non-light of brown dwarves,
with is permanence of absence,
Less than plastic flag on Sol III Moon,
too well-known to be worth visiting.

They
together
less than sum of both
more human than the universe
fill supremely well
last gap remaining in
that alien pantheon

They sacrificed Earth to so nearly long ago.

III

The jealous Python having taken her due
the visitors are gone
from human view.

The trapezoidal doorway cracks
and golden ceramics burst out
in silent explosion.

Waltz-time slow
the fragments still manage to achieve
escape velocity.

Sparkling meteor whizzies
they delight
the children's children on a summer night.

NOR WHY NOR WHEREFORE

by Steve Sneyd

"Very often the greatest fences are
erected at the gateway to Nothing"
- F. Scott Fitzgerald

Over this new planet high as where
every our own world all of man's make
naked eye could detect'd be Great Wall
we saw it vast over snowcap lines black
swift breathing life as Lascaux cave
bison vast female beautiful human as
near as makes no odds we cheered some
even drooled. Captain sternly rebuked,
posited alternative explanations of
his own forming or shipbrain's; odd
natural phenomenon, mass hallucination,
telepathic projection by entities un-
known, but euphoria too strong to sink:
here, here, at last, beings like us,
unafraid, welcoming to so beacon their
world's inhabitation with so glorious
great sign. In sleeptime, while sensors
assessed all aspects of this globe, so's
to ensure our safety, landing, whispers
swung between Eden hopes and wilder
fears, how maybe such megaart a final
testament as species ended, abrupt last
dark of war, disease or slow down-down
dwindle. First sound of waketime bare-
foot rush to look down again on love-
ly shapely form.

In night had turned, been turned, faced
upwards head on, sneered a towering
hatefulness-filled contempt.

The sensors said the planet lifeless,
poisoned, of no earthly use.

We had not even missiles enough to use
to blast that us-all dissing face.

The Allfaith chaplain promised us
God knew the answer to such mystery.
Captain and Shipbrain forbore to gloat
both their wiser attitude to such eye-gift
unexplained unexplainable ship's tame
egghead said as all great Art

Secretly many of us attempt from memory
to copy what we saw... we try before,
but always find the sneer, and rub all out.

CRYSTAL CHALICE

by Nancy Bennett

Just a crystal chalice to capture the stars
a glass/ half full of dreams
a glass/ half empty of nightmares
drinking deeply under dark eyed night-misress is flowing
purple red/ diamond lined
Complex cuts arch across transparent sky, lines we have tried
to apply reasons to. why/what are they?
Just a glass outside, a giant glass where life is magnified..
and as I sleep under a warm blue- black dome,
glass upside down, signify enough drunken thoughts
or perhaps to trap an insect inside? Who is to know for sure..
I shall hope for dreams of half full chalices
never quite emptied of hope..

THE BLUE MONKEY

by Nancy Bennett

Calling as sirens shriek through green highways-earth channel open and
the blue monkey hears screams, it's voice the sound of emergence/urgent
birth cord broken
plunging into coldness of a metal dawn...

we have seen the signs of worship-blue monkey crystal shard eyes
reflecting back impact- times twilight monitor
painted in the clouds
Carved into our mountain sides, reminding those who forget
whose hand is Gods.
the blue monkey sees as the predators bolt...

The face/ less feline forms, the jaguars who were
devoured by flame, ignited ghosts
they trace the path of ashes back through cement sidewalks
looking for the pale ones who hide in concrete caves.
And the blue monkey cries, like a child whose toys won't behave
the sky opens with his tears and melts the metal monsters
with acid touch and sizzling regeneration
Rain forest new, blue monkey
awakens the fragments of our forgotten past

let the pale ones hide in creature comforts of the city
while the new apes
arise, their skulls a little bigger, their understanding
a bit more sinister

some day he'll check back, but for now the blue monkey,
covers his eyes,
closes his ears
covers his scream, switches to another
planet in progress, marks his progress on the chart
some you lose, some you win, some have to sink before they swim.

DRAGON RAIN

by Nancy Bennett

Arrows of time cusped on dragon's wings turn into sharp scales.
Shadow warriors, disturbed from a thousand year slumber
snatch stars for fire power/ propelled the race through space
shaking the metal fleas from blanketed backs.

Dragons free of dropout, mesh with phosphorus clouds.
As retribution scales fall from the sky, ancient weapons hit home.
Pinning warlords of armoured get/ on with dragon rain
remove the stain of a thousand years progress,
so dragons and children may dream in peace again...

A PLANET MUCH LIKE EARTH -

Part 7

BY Mac Strelkov

Here, from the earlier drafts, I will cull out a chapter concerning another "today". It was the time that Mudwall suddenly appeared with his son and daughter and a son-in-law who's a policeman, to try to halt the work going on up in the hills. It was right before the Forestry Inspectors climbed up to put the official seal on the 400 square metres of timber cut by Blasé and about to be carried off by him, from the land of Miguel. It was just a day or so after the bulldozer had been ordered by its owners to cease work up there immediately and return.

Blasé, furious, just *had* to hit out at somebody. So it seems that Mudwall might be the best weapon to use. Thus, all stirred up, Mudwall arrived to halt operations on our land (half-way up on the south side).

They climbed onto horses and followed the timber-trail up to where a branching trail turned northwards leading to a little place at the edge of the Pedregosa's precipice (on this lower side), where a few cedars and pines existed, and were being cut by the outfit that was under the control of several individuals whose names I shall omit.



ONE OF THE LARGE TIMBER LOADED TIMBER TRUCKS

'Stop this wood stealing at once!' ordered Mudwall's son-in-law, the off-duty policeman. (He was not wearing his official jacket or cap, just the pants and a shirt.) 'This property is ours!'

Mudwall could have struck earlier, attempted to prevent us from carrying out that trail in the first place, but that wouldn't have suited him. This way, he hoped to have everything done for him, for free, by us. [As Tony and Sylvia said, 'we were expecting something. When we had to pass by Blasé the day before that, Blasé was so gleeful he practically danced, just laughing in our faces in anticipation of the shock ahead we'd have to face. So we were already prepared....']

Well, the timber-men halted their work, got onto their tractor and dashed downhill to tell us that had occurred. And Mudwall and his army in turn rode back down hill to his little mud-house next door to our property down here, (a house that

had been raised by one of those unfortunate "purchasers" of a lot from him, who were all allowed to build and fix the land before being ordered off by "the Law", a system that had served Mudwall so well in the past.)

When Tony and Sylvia heard what had occurred, they shot off like twin rockets to next door, with the flunkies who'd been cutting trees following to watch and listen. Vadim and I scarcely knew what had occurred, though Vadim had caught onto the gist, hearing the shouts at the *tranquera*.

Well, Tony and Sylvia do things "properly" here. No *yanguí*-style impatience. Protocol must always be correctly observed. Hence, firstly, neighbourly greetings, hugs and kisses between all the protagonists had to be exchanged. Then, said Tony,

'What's this about our stealing your wood?'

'Well, it's on *our* land. Blasé says when those new surveyors are proved to be crooks, it'll be clearly shown it's ours.'

Yes, since Blasé is busily trying to squat on the entire upper territory where the precious pines and cedars used to grow, indeed having tried to demonstrate that even Miguel's heights (at that *aguada*) are obviously his by right of "possession" also. Of course there has to be a pushing of boundary-lines northwards at all costs, for the other property owners in between Mudwall's lot and Blasé's supposed territory will want to know exactly where their lands up there may be.

And the only way this could be accomplished was by squeezing us off, up there, right into the Pedregosa Canyon where it turns to descend sharply at the northern boundary of our land, robbing most of the Forest of Forever in the process, to be carried off by Blasé, with Mudwall receiving tidbits to keep him content. Just as in late 1983 Leon was giving Mudwall our wood from the northern side and telling us newcomers that it was from Mudwall's land! But of course, if Blasé won the arguments now, it would anyway all have been Mudwall's, and we would have had just the ravine itself for ourselves, up there.

Really, they are all so tiresome! They have modelled their behaviour on that of our former leaders who not only had hoped to annex the Falkland-Malvinas (by "divine right"), but were also going to march into Chile, conquering as they went, could they only have managed it back then. (But Chile's president ruled by "divine right" too! Had he not got rid of another "godless president" in his revolution?)

They *are* tiresome. I don't know what annoys me more: the society-worshipping, news-magazines published in this country or the philosophy still apparent everywhere. The news-magazines also report on our pious former rulers now in comfortable captivity in their separate chalets with freedom to take walks and live as if on permanent vacation. And how they are still so sure that their cause will be vindicated by their God, and meanwhile they announce that they "forgive their enemies" (in full detail, listing all the nasty things their enemies did to get them into their present state. Some forgiveness!)

And I think of it all with a lump in my throat caused by this "something" that I cannot swallow: the situation as it is for humanity still on the planet. And as I turn back to our little drama with Mudwall, which I'm recounting, it seems in comparison, so insignificant and "minor"....

But let me conclude this scene where Mudwall accuses us of stealing his wood, (only coming into the fore once the heavy investment labor's almost completed by us - a year and more of struggle to get the bulldozer in the first place and then having to wait endlessly till Blasé decided he didn't need it for himself any more right then).

'Well,' said Tony to Mudwall. 'As you perfectly well will have noted, we have not cut wood on the land that formerly we supposed was yours. We cut only around the *middle* of our land, as you well know, simply to avoid this sort of drama which we'd been expecting.'

'Well, well,' said Mudwall urgently. 'We won't fuss if you'll go half-and-half with us, pay us half of your profits.' (The gross profits, of course, he meant, not at all interested in the huge expense we'd had to undergo to reach that little strand of valuable timber at last. Of 'ordinary wood', the tangled, thick jungle are full, of course.)

'That would mean we accepted your declaration that our land is really your land, and we won't do that. We shall go right on cutting and if you want to complain, bring along an order from a judge in Jujoy Town, not some little back-water town like right here. You'll have to do it legally, and moreover, if you reject the findings of the Court-approved surveyors, you will have to call in other surveyors and pay their costs yourselves. We will not share that expenditure with you.'

The torrent of arguments went on and on... our kids, (Both Tony and Sylvia) took turns in summing up the situation; how Blasé had refused to let Bernan have surveyors define Bernan's boundary-lines, said he'd chase them off with a gun; how Miguel too had had to go to the Law to get official surveyors appointed so he could know where his own boundaries were. How Blasé had fought it all he could.

The cutters in the background were drinking it all in. They'd wondered at the shady dealings that seemed to be going on, and had been puzzled by the sweeping statements (often contradictory) being made to them by Blasé constantly.

Tony and Sylvia continued beguiling Mudwall with details of the wonderful surveying job that had been done. 'And the surveying didn't cost you a thing, but now your land is double valuable, with the boundary lines all clearly defined,' our kids added, enticingly.

'Is that so? Then I can start selling it *again*, can't I?'

Our kids grinned and said, yes he could, visualising more of the old tricks Mudwall just loves devising, to prove "there ain't no flies on him"! It's a necessity to his dear little soul! Though it does puzzle him that such easy-going folk as we had seemed to be, have proved somehow (very gently) to be even more *vivo* than he!

[As I type this a huge bus stopped at our *tranquera*, absolutely jam-packed with people. They are going down to the cemetery to hold a memorial service for the soul of the gentleman mentioned in a previous column. The bus stopped, so Enicio could invite Vadim if he wanted to attend the ceremony, but Vadim at this instant is covered with dust and sweat; he's bare down to the waist and shining from working outdoors in the sun, so he could get off politely. 'I can't come like this, sorry!'

I should have added: Tony's in Palma Sola this morning with the boy who's been cutting our wood; they each have a power-saw that needed some fixing; Tony, moreover, is buying a few more bricks as he's closing in with wire-screens our back-porch where we have an outdoor-type (but roofed) barbecue chimney and grill he built some months ago. And Sylvia right now is in Mendoza helping her sister-in-law till Nilda has the baby, due in a month or so. Hence only Vadim could be invited by our Benecio. Everybody knows I never go anywhere, ever.]

Our kids are good at talking, they beat the best, and Mudwall was already falling under their charm.

'Yes,' concluded Tony, 'this time, bluster won't help. The surveyors, this time, have said the last word.'

'Bah,' blustered the off-duty policeman. 'You can't trust those surveyors. But I'll tell you what we can do. We can start measuring, ourselves, right now, starting from here and going upwards, together.'

'Well, I'll walk ahead counting steps, and every hundred steps I'll stop and put up a stick to mark where I am, and I'll shout to you below, *yoo-hoo*, and you're to answer *yoo-hoo* and put in a stick also. And that'll be about a hundred metres. And we'll keep going till we get to the top....'

'Shouting *yoo-hoo*?' Mudwall collapsed with laughter. (His son-in-law was surpassing himself anew with

astounding ideas that even Mudwall know wouldn't serve.)

'And when we reach the Pedregosa's precipice,' put in Tony, 'What do we do? Get a rope and shinny down it shouting *yoo-hoo*? It's at least three-hundred metres straight down! So we'll stop along the way to put in those sticks of yours, and you, above us, will also shinny down putting in sticks on the precipice wall in the same way? And half-way down we'll come to the end of our land as you figure it? Clinging to a precipice, half-way down?'

'Run along with you,' said Mudwall in disgust, to his son-in-law. 'Enough! All of you run along,' and he dismissed his followers. The cutters also walked away, muttering their satisfaction with Tony's arguments.

Along with Sylvia and Tony and feeling very close to them, Mudwall locked up the little mud house, and then - with their help - stuck the poles back into their holes, of his *tranquera*. Our kids then accompanied him down the road, walking into the sunset together, like any "final scene" in some romantic movie... all three like close friends, with his little dumpy figure between the two tall young ones. And as they went, rocking with laughter, shadowy in the distance, one heard a happy, reiterated *yoo-hoo*, as Mudwall savoured his delight in the downfall of his son-in-law's arguments.

Such scenes, (dressed up in my imagination with bright colour and deep shadow), I do savour, here. Mudwall may be Mudwall, and as much of a problem as ever, but he likes us and want us to approve. He's an embarrassment to his children, as all older people tend to be, to theirs, at times, but he likes to feel that our children and we appreciate him as a neighbour. (We would certainly prefer to have him than Blasé!)

It is easy (as Sylvia and Tony find), every time Mudwall strays off into wild pastures, to lead him back to the Straight and Narrow Way, "as the bird flies", no rappelling up and down cliffs shouting *yoo-hoo*! Especially, one should take no liberties with the crumbly Pedregosa Cliff! I think of our Danny, who died while scaling an "impossible cliff", and I know if he were here today he would not have rested till he conquered this cliff also - or it conquered him. He was that sort of boy, born with a "geas" to do the impossible. Am I still mourning him? I would not permit myself to do so, especially since I utterly believe by now that there is an evolution of the soul, while still we're "bound to the Wheel of Karma". I take that saying of Jesus, "Ye must be born again," literally. (But let's not argue the pros and cons of "reincarnation". I'd first insist we argue if there's a God or no, if the Universe is sentient or no, and so on. Belief is a thing that begins in the heart, and the mind accepts the evidence the heart selects.)

I, for one, am ever conscious that - even as the Universe is an overwhelming *experience* for every creature forming part of it - our education as sentient beings within this Whole cannot be a piddling thing. It is tough. It can be painful. The ordeals American Indians chose to endure during Initiation cannot match the ordeals we all have to go through willy-nilly, at times, in real life. The purpose may not be evident in one lifetime. It takes longer, I'm very sure. But I do discern a purpose, indeed a Purpose, with a capital P. As I say, Belief is a thing that begins in the heart, and then the mind awakes to find evidence in confirmation, and it's there....

Now, where we live now, we're in a major earthquake zone. (So is everybody in California as I gather, what with the San Andres fault.) Where we lived formerly, high up in the stable Sierra Chica range of Central Cordoba, the mountains are very old, and of granite. And yet we felt various quakes there, too.

There is nothing that reduces us to our true proportions like a quake. Suddenly we know we're *not* firmly planted on "solid ground", we have no more permanence than ants caught on a stick in a whirling flood. There recently occurred what Vadim and I (having been through a terrible

quake in Chile in 1938) consider a "little quake" here. It felt as though we were afloat on a raft on a lake that was rippling. (We were in bed, almost asleep.)

Morla and his wife living nearby, the next day, insisted that another shake would have brought their house down. We were very surprised. It hadn't seemed that bad. Sylvia was in Mendoza with Ed and Nilda and their children, during the big shake there last year that erased a good portion of that city. That, yes, could have brought all Mendoza down had it continued another second or so. One reads of the terrible quake in Mexico, the volcanic eruption that caused a whole city in Colombia to vanish under a mudslide mixed with sulphur.

This present location where we've settled now, is not far from the "second major quake centre of Argentina", (after the Andean one ranging from San Juan to Mendoza and environs.) The actual centre here lies south of us, and the locale there is called El Rey. There's a National Park there.

And around here, quite nearby, there are hot springs where people go... just the simple folk. No fancy spas! Not even a booth selling Coca-colas. Someone with rheumatism will hobble down a long, narrow trail through underbrush, to spend a day and a night repeatedly dipping into those thermal pools, and they'll return feeling (though maybe not looking) young again. Often they'll be alone there all those hours, with only the wild life around. People say, "One could make a spa there," but these places are visited only by the "nameless poor", and a spa would never make money. There are such spas further away, for the wealthy, that charge the skies.

Back in 1984, soon after the floods and landslides, there occurred a happening that alarmed many. One afternoon we all heard from behind Blasé's sector of the mountain range, an explosion. We ourselves found it a familiar sound... there were in the hills of Cordoba limestone quarries where explosions were constantly set off to dislodge more limestone. And, too, there were firing ranges somewhere beyond, there, used by the army.



THE FLOODED RIVER

But up here, where such things are unknown, there was anxiety. And then right after sunset, from the place where the explosion had been heard, there rose a slowly-revolving ball of fire. It expanded, turned paler, and seemed like a full moon surrounded by a halo. We all saw it, from different viewing sites, and watched it floating northwestwards till it dissolved totally in the far distance.

Leon was most worried, for he and his family take their omens seriously. He sent his daughters that evening to ask me what it meant.

I told them, 'In the books on native myths I've read, they called this 'ball-of-fire' the 'Mother of Gold', leaving one hill to go to some other far away, taking with her the luck of those who lived there. But of course that's superstition. You know this is a volcanic region, though there are not active volcanoes near. But we have all those hot springs. So it is

obvious that some gases got trapped and finally exploded and broke out, and what we saw was that - burning gases; that's all.'

By 2 A.M. that same night, the most terrible, dry wind-storm I've ever experienced struck. The leaves fell scorched from their branches; huge, top-heavy trees crashed on all sides and up in the hills; roofs flew off. (Our zinc sheets, being heavily anchored by cement-blocks, rippled madly but stayed put.)

The roar was terrible, but we began to hear through the instants when the gusts abated momentarily, loud cries at the gate. Running out to see, we found Leon's brother there, this time, asking for help. A tree had crashed on their hut, the roof had also flown away, and poor Leon was lying on the floor bleeding from the mouth and almost dead. Could we take him to the hospital?

It was decided that Vadim would drive our pick-up, leaving Tony to help Sylvia and myself should our roof be wrenched away. Vadim took a big axe, for trees might have fallen across the highway, and set off with Leon (practically unconscious) and with the brother and a son of Leon's. They got to the hospital safely; Leon's life was saved. He was away under treatment for months (he had ulcers), but when he returned in restored health, he came to us to say, 'I owe my life to you. I'd be dead now were it not for you taking the risk to get me to the hospital in the storm. Whatever I can do to repay my debt, I want to do it.'

All the past was cancelled by that remark. He is our dear friend now, even though we see little of him, but - as far as it is in him - he too wishes henceforth to "walk the straight and narrow way", at least where we're concerned.

Once, before it happened, he said to us, 'I had a chance to go the right way when younger, but I chose to serve the devil instead,' and he said it with great regret. When we assured him nobody is "lost", and one isn't obliged to "serve the devil" forever, (just because of an earlier wrong choice), back then he hadn't seemed convinced. Now, perhaps, yes... It took all those shocks to wake him to Life.

Perhaps what had helped to knock him out (for ulcers are often caused by worry as well as by drinking too much, etc., for he also drank), had been his tremendous anxiety. Mudwall had arranged for him to attend clients on the morrow, back then, who were coming to look at that *quina* on the Ridge of the Wild Pigs. Leon was certain we'd never allow it to be brought down, and that it would be impossible any longer to pull the wool over our eyes, but Mudwall had insisted. Rather than face that dilemma, Leon had possibly allowed his chronic condition to grow suddenly worse.

As for those would-be purchasers, they arrived on schedule, but neither Mudwall nor Leon showed up as planned. Mudwall was lying low; Leon was in the hospital. The would-be buyers came up to our *tranquera*, after driving around in vain looking for someone, and asked about the *quina*... where was there someone to show it to them?

We were very amused, our thought: *Mudwall is incurable!* And we understood then why Leon had collapsed when he did. He just couldn't face the morrow, for by then he really had become very fond of us; but Mudwall had him on a hook, from past dealings.

Well, we explained to the buyers the location of the *quina*, pointing up at the ridge, and anybody could see it was definitely on our land, straight above us, not on Mudwall's), and they thanked us and hastily escaped, not wishing to be mixed in any open thievery.

And they never came back, of course!

I visualised this whole story as a game such as might be played on a gaming-board. The 400 cubic metres of pine ready for loading on Miguel's land is one "piece". The one-eyed old squatter placed by Blasé on the same "square" ("of the *aguarda*") is another piece. The "square" is Miguel's; the cut wood and the squatter, Blasé considers still as his. In the

same way, that *quina* on the Ridge of the Wild Pigs is another prime "piece" on a contested "square" (ours? Mudwall's?) Oh, it could make a wonderful game, and that is how we ourselves (as movable pieces) choose to view it. And then there would be the "Acts of God" (as some call it), or the "Strokes of Fate"... sudden avalanches and mudslides shearing away whole hills and stretches of precious cedars, and sending us all back to Square One.

When viewed as a "cosmic game" one can enjoy it without feeling things so acutely. One's reactions are more that of a player... if one loses? 'Bad Luck!' Winning also is only part of the game. And once a move is made, it's made. No vain regrets. No gloating either, if one wins.

Chess-players too play without gloating, I believe. Tony, thanks to his Russian streak, is a dreadfully good chess-player. The only way I can win against him is when we play "lightning-fast". (No time to consider a move, one must move "instantly" without thinking.) Then my women's intuition outwits his male skills, quite frequently, till he calls upon his own intuition, inherited from me in full strength. Then he wins, even in that "lightning-chess".

Vadim does not much like to play chess, though he knows how and can play (in the old Russian style, slowly, like my father-in-law did) well. What a shock it was to old Nick, Vadim's father, when Tony - still just a little boy - always beat him at chess. The poor old man stayed awake all the night after such a game trying to figure out what moves he'd done wrong. But of course, Tony on such occasions, had used his "intuition" too, which poor old Nick totally lacked. My father-in-law was "all brain", and his only god was Nietzsche, whose written works formed the old man's Bible. (It wasn't nice for me, for Nietzsche's view of a woman's role is dim.)

Well, there have been more actors than action in my story, and the cast is bigger even than I've given. There are yet other figures besides the leading ones mentioned so far... a dear old man, for instance, living near the last surviving bridge leading out of our fastness "between the devil and the deep blue sea" (or, conversely, between the River of the Goddess of Last Resorts and the Goddess of Army Men and their Armaments). That "dear old man" is so cheerful and generous, he is perennially broke. We often hire his tractor, but it lacks brakes, so can only be used on flat ground safely. Also the tires keep blowing out.

And then there's the little "male Red-Cross nurse" at the first-aid station opposite us here, (though he lives further down in a tumble-down mud-building, once Ibarra's and very splendid when it was new). This person is an *avangélico*, and so terribly dedicated and earnest he makes me feel like a dilettante. He really takes his Christian duties seriously, rushing around all day long on his bicycle to check up on his patients, and carry Government donations of powdered-milk, etc., to women with babies, making sure their men don't sell the milk (and other staples donated) for more wine or coca or straight alcohol, too. They love it!

I could go on listing these neighbours of ours, and showing how each is a universe to himself or herself, yet together they make up the colourful mosaic of our daily life out here. When we lived in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, it wasn't at all like this... where was no pattern evident save that of harassed commuters running through the dark before dawn to catch a bus that would take one to catch a train so as to catch another bus or subway-train in Buenos Aires. (A two hour journey there and another two or three or four hours - if they were strikes or the rush-hours were heavy - back. How sick both Vadim and I got of it. I, at least, worked conveniently located in the very centre of town; near the Boston bank, for example; indeed I had a job in the bank till after our third child was born, and I'd gone through a period of such Catholic piety after nearly losing our second baby, I made it quite clear I must henceforth do nothing to prevent babies from coming...

Horried, the bosses there ceased to view me as a glamorous secretary who impressed the public, and hid me out of view in the basement, just typing away. So I looked for another job and got one I enjoyed a lot. Kept having babies, too. By the time I outgrew Catholicism, I'd outgrown child-bearing age, simultaneously.)

Well, one can never quite "outgrow Catholicism", as I know by a repetitive dream where I find "the little church of my dreams", (it's always "somewhere in the U.S.A.", never South America), and I go in, find a priest who's very human and good; I confess, and then take Holy Communion. I'm blissful, and promise to "be good", but upon leaving, I suddenly think: 'Good heavens, I've betrayed myself, and I cheated there. I've no intention of defending the Catholicism in power in South America, so I cannot be a Catholic.'

And I wake up so terribly sad....

This uncertainty of "what church should be my church" troubles many people today. One of my dearest friends in fandom, a Jewish girl in New York, wrote that her daughter wants to join the Moslems. Now, that would really horrify me, and I admire my friend's resignation... the choice is for the girl to make. (But to give up being Jewish really shocks me. Were I born and reared a Jew I would most proudly flaunt my ancestry... for there's none older, or finer, I do feel. And Jesus himself said "Salvation is of the Jews". The World's salvation does not depend on Christians, they've led us to war all too frequently.... Crusades, Inquisitions, Holy Wars, Pogroms. The Jews were the ones who sturdily maintained humanity's right to make its own choices individually, think things out clearly for ourselves. No wonder Hitler hated them so... all demagogues ever will!)

The Jews do not pretend to give us any "final answers", though a book like Herman Wouk's *THIS IS MY GOD* provided me with most satisfactory answers, as far as I am concerned. To be sure, my conditioning would prevent me from converting to the Jewish faith, though if I could have been given Israeli citizenship without having to become a Jewish convert, I'd ask for it, I really would, and be so proud of it too. I just wouldn't have the patience to keep up with those wonderful old traditions and rituals that Jewish women take to heart so admirably. I'm a wild one, still, and the older I get, the wilder!

No, I cannot be blindly pro-Catholic, for I studied just too thoroughly the history of Catholic action in the Americas from the days of Columbus till now. There are "leavening factors", really saintly individual priests. But the policy remains medieval and pro-violence (on the part of the established Old School types). We've had too much of that here! Indeed, I specially saved the news weeklies during the South Atlantic war, containing the pronouncements of Cardinals ordering the boys to go to "fight for their country" and not inquire into the "rights and wrongs" of it. And more, they did call the campaign "the Rosary campaign", and the Rosary was said non-stop throughout on the airwaves. (All sort of attempts were made, to win - barring the one method of employing only happy soldiers and convinced conscripts (for they were mostly sent forward quite ruthlessly, and ruthlessly prodded into the thick of the melee, even if their feet froze off). The Argentine boys were brave and enduring, it is very possible England is in the wrong, (though the Kelpers have no wish to "become Argentines" - for we have so little to offer them in place of what they enjoy as linked with Britain still). Britain has done some awful things... what she did before Israel gained her independence is not easy to forgive, as I feel. What she did earlier in India... and in China... George Mason, my mother's pioneer father there never forgave Britain for bringing the opium traffic in at gun-point. Oh, I'll not whitewash Britain, though she has these aspects too I've praised. (On the whole, and when not on a global scale, individual "fair play", for example.)

- Mae Strelkov



ROD MARSDEN, PO Box 19, Spit Junction, NSW 2088.

Great cover to issue 91 of THE MENTOR. The latest chapter of THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF SCIENCE by Darren Goossens had its moments. What?! No mention of Freud or Jung? No mention of how medieval demons and possessions had been replaced in this century by the Id and superego? If Mr Goossens is going to mention Newton and apples I thought he might get around to checking out young Einstein and bubbled beer. Oh well, not to worry. Darwin got some good P. R. Still, I must point out that, this late in the 20th Century, "Hubert" has been replaced by Lucy who happens to be cute. Now Lucy, completely and utterly nude (no clothes, skin, sinew, blood, or even marrowbone jelly) can be found at a local Sydney museum. She's small, lithe and kinda sexy if you like the skinless bone type. Hubba, hubba! Surely she deserves some of your time. Still, since she was only discovered in the 1960's maybe you'll get around to her next issue. I can hardly wait.

Read Darren Goossens' letter in this issue and have a feeling I may have been a bit mean. Yes, I do realise that you can't mention everything. History is vast. I'm just throwing a few things of my own into the stew like I did last issue. Others might well do the same as we all have different views as to what's important and what's fun. The Moors in their wars against the Spanish did find time to share some important pieces of knowledge with their enemies. Sure, the Arabic Muslims were another great source of information concerning science. No argument there. Darren is right when he mentions that the Dark Ages were a European phenomenon. Other peoples, of course, had other periods of stunted intellectual growth, bloody wars, bad harvests and no plumbing. What followed, a period known as the Middle Ages, started off bad, got better, got worse, got better again and ended in the age of new scientific enlightenment known as the Renaissance. Meanwhile, during the European Middle Ages, a Chinese inventor had invented the steam engine and, to our knowledge, it was used solely as a toy for the royal children to play with - nothing more. Centuries later, of course, a Brit discovered steam power without any knowledge that it had already been done and devised more interesting and profitable uses for it. By then the Church had split into so many factions that they had to give up on burning up-and-coming scientists as heretics, along with their notes, and be content to just let them be. Concerning Star Trek's pornography, I wrote: "It would be nice to see them *try*" not *try*. I have nothing against Star Trek fans. I happen to be one, though I do refuse to wear Spock ears to prove it. Typos do happen in the best mags.

Say Ron, the illo on page 14 is kinda racy but I like it.

Pavel Viaznikov from Russia, in the letters page, made Prague sound fascinating and somewhat spooky. Meet the spirit of the Hangman of Prague and/or the Mad Nun ghost? Yes, please! What? No mention of Prague's most infamous son, Franz Kafka? Well, Pavel's account of Prague's

general weirdness and historic weirdness is enough to make up for this slight oversight. Hmmm! You did mention Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1512-1609) in passing but not in connection with the Golem Legend. I guess referring to him as the famous alchemist philosopher says it all. I have got to go there some day and see the famous Jewish ghetto for myself and soak in the atmosphere.

PROHIBITED MATTER 8 should be out in Galaxy by the time your readers check out this letter. It will be a crime issue with some grizzly Jack-the-Ripper style yarns, grizzly Jack-the-Ripper style art and pics, more articles of a very controversial nature, and letters pages so hot they may be printed on asbestos - Yeowch!! and come with anti-glare screens.

(11.3.97)

STEVE SNEYD, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W. Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England.

Wonderful cover - intensively evocative of some lost cross-time chronicle (and you got the synchronicity of Mae Strelkov's ox-cart appearing, albeit in sad way.) Again the wonderful strangeness, mentioning her contributions. Recently read Theroux' PATAGONIAN EXPRESS - in many ways a very irritating book, as he seems most interested in the superiority of himself to his surroundings - en route, though, visits Jujuy. I was expecting a description of a meeting with Mae, but didn't happen, sadly, that would have jolted him from his self-complacency, I imagine, pretty sharpish.

The Blind Harry/Sandy Trill verse of the LAMENT FOR THE MAKARIS has stuck with me for life: had totally forgotten rest except for "chorus". Once visited Tranent, from which the Clerk came - a rather miserable little town on a hill, the only real "antiquity" on view a neglected tower house of the former of, if I recall, yard of a garage. Maybe the Clerk's home. Mention of the "Kingis Quair" set me looking for text of, but is in hiding - wanted to reread the dream celestial voyage sequence - proto-SF in many ways.

Of the fic, Brent Lillie's DOWNTIME made me laugh - partly as a gently funny tale of its self, but mainly at unexpectedness of a genuinely new-seeming twist on the old SF cliché of time travellers hitting Garden of Eden. Making the protagonist a likeable dummkopf added to the charm, too. Andrew Sullivan's clearly had higher ambitions, began very powerfully, the explanation was convincing, the situation emotionally compelling - but I found the final gear-switch to ghost story, whether the ghost real or hallucinated by Brody, oddly unsatisfactory. In Sullivan's defence, it's very hard to think of a way to give the situation a tidy ending, when the build-up could promise only a slow dwindling, as it were, but why not leave it with a reprise of the starting-point, the endless pointless wanderings of the brain-damaged hero about the ship?

Buck Coulson's column did the maddening trick of throwing away fascinating material teasingly right at the end. Hope he returns to the Maimi Indians past and present in a later "instalment".

The circularity of term "stalkers" being used for nuclear scientists studying radioactive zone round Chernobyl may be even more ironic, since there's a possibility Tardovsky, when filming ROADSIDE PICNIC, used the story not just to introduce hints at religious meaning, but also at the hushed-up, but rumoured (and later proved true) nuclear accident which had earlier created a Chernobyl-like zone in the Urals.

There's a lot of debate as to what relationship with the indigenous Celts the A-S invaders had. I realise Brad is trying to keep the picture simple, but the impression I got is of a patchwork situation; some massacres, expulsion or flight of Celtic leadership (although in parts of England they clung on for a very long time - Cumbria was a Celtic sub-state under Scottish rule till well into the 1100s; as late as around 900 its territory stretched nearly to Leeds), but Celtic experts of various kinds served the kings of Wessex (several of whom

themselves had Celtic names), the first Anglo-Saxon poet, Caedmon, had a Celtic name. There is a cemetery in Norwich, an area of early conquest, where burials in the Germanic and British manner lie side-by-side, and there are other factors which indicate various kinds of co-existence. There's also a mathematical argument from population statistics, that the extent of land under cultivation post A-S conquest could not have been achieved by the kind of numbers which actually arrived from Germany and their increase with time, so Celts must have remained present as field labour, and from survival of Roman and post-Roman estate boundaries into the A-S and even medieval period. Here in West Yorkshire, there are place names of Celtic origin, including ones with the prefix Cumb (from Cymri, "fellow countrymen", the Celts name for themselves) and Wal (foreigner), the A-S term for them, which imply surviving settlements on marginal land. It's possible to speculate that such pockets of brythonic-speakers lingered on till William's Harrying of the North, when genocide-by-starvation would have hit worse those in areas where food was already at a premium. So, though I imagine there would have been plenty of "ethnic cleansing", there would also be areas of cultural absorption, so that Celt-origin populations ended up as adopted Anglo-Saxons as it were.

Anyway, having expected to be little capable of comment, seemed to have rabbitied on to some tune, so will desist (except to mention of Dark Age Britain as excuse for a plug: that the long-delayed expanded 2nd edition of my collection of Arthurian poems has at last appeared - 25 poems as against first's ten, 50 pp, perfect-bound, \$15 incl p&p from publisher, K.T. Publications, 16 Fand Close, Stamford, Lincs PE9 1HG (or £5.00; USA\$15 from The Round Table, 375 Oakdale Drive, Rochester, NY 14618, checks payable A. Lupack). (15.03.97)

CATHERINE MINTZ, 1810 South Rittenhouse Square, 1708, Philadelphia, PA 19103-5837, USA.

Thank you for issue ninety-one of THE MENTOR. The back cover photograph, enabled me to put faces to names for the first time. You are a serious-looking bunch, or at least were for the nanosecond or so it took to take the picture. Why do I suspect some of those solemn faces cracked into smiles as soon as the camera was put away?

I noticed Julie Vaux's comments about writing phonetically. One major problem is deciding whose speech patterns are you going to use. You all can read what I've written here, but many of you will have no idea of what I'd sound like if I read it to you, and a few might even have trouble understanding me.

For reference purposes, Katherine Hepburn does a great Philadelphia accent. Indeed, she seldom uses anything else, even when she's not in *The Philadelphia Story*. It's not natural, but something she adopted when she became an actress, so it is exaggerated beyond anything found in nature - But I digress.

I had difficulty reading Ian Bank's FEERSUM ENDJINN, which made your recommended list, because it uses a phonetic transcription of a type of English I've seldom heard. I probably worked five or six times harder than the author ever intended to understand what was being said and ended up feeling grumpy about the story not being a revelation, a new classic, or *something* that would justify the effort of decrypting all those pages.

Just a normally-interesting, sense of wonder novel was not quite enough.

[Yes, I too had to work to understand those chapters. And I thought the author had made it a little too hard for the reader. However, I did think the novel excellent anyway. - Ron].

Thank you again, and thanks to the contributors, all of whom seemed to have produced particularly good examples of their various specialities for this issue. (25.3.97)

BUCK COULSON, 2677W-500 N, Hartford City, IN 47348, USA.

Goossens was moderately amusing, though Darwin hasn't converted everyone, especially in this part of the country. (Which is odd, since the relationship between man and ape is quite obvious here, especially in letters to the newspapers.)

Of course I was born well before the A-Bomb, but I never succumbed to all the nuclear hysteria. I don't think most people out here did; it was the big-city types who shit their pants. More or less logically; the cities would have been the obvious targets, *after* the military bases. (I admit to a touch of worry when I discovered that George Oshry was one of the people with his finger on the red button; George had been an Indianapolis science fiction fan, and was generally regarded as a complete nut.) I was mostly amused when son Bruce told me of the plan for his buddy (who had a pilot's license) and himself to steal a DC-3 his buddy knew about, load it with supplies, and fly it to our place, landing on the highway just south of our house, and when about 20 or so other people said they'd be seeing us when the bombs were on the way. *Mostly* amused; not *entirely*.... Now the city types are worried about all the computers going haywire on the millennium. Won't bother us... Though maybe I should withdraw all our money from the bank just before D-Day....

TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE interesting, but no comments.

I never comment on other people's reviews, precisely because their opinions are just as justified as mine. And I never paid any attention to criticisms of mine, fan or pro. Censorship? I thought that had been banned from fandom.

Well, Julie, Elli has been "promoted" to housedog. I am not generally favorable to 70-pound housedogs, but there were extenuating circumstances. She's learning to bark at all intruders except humans, though I think she barked at the Jehovah's Witnesses tonight after they'd gone.... Now if she gets to the point of barking at humans when they arrive, so we'll know they're there, everything will be fine. We've also been told by the people at the boarding kennel that she doesn't evacuate while she's there - which can be up to 4 days. Sphincters of steel.... So we always stop at home when we pick her up, before going on in town. At least, it's a relief to know that when she's in the house overnight, she has no problem in holding it in until morning. (The kennel is in a different town, so now we go there and pick up Elli, stop at home, and then go into Hartford City to pick up the mail.)

Gee, Harry, my post office delivered the unstamped MENTOR without even a quibble. Isn't it illegal for the US Post Office to charge postage due to packages mailed in another country? You should have demanded your money back. I would have (but then, I couldn't be fired for complaining.)

Err, well, not exactly, Pauline. The manuscripts I get range from things I would put down after the first page if they were in a book to a few that were possibly publishable. But I couldn't put them down after the first page because I had to do an outline by chapters on *all* of them. (That's why one gets paid to read them....)

Well, Stonehenge had been roped off for years, with some guards to prevent tourists from walking around inside the stones. Avebury (which is more impressive) was open when we were there, though one had to watch his or her step to avoid cowshit.

Lovely letter from Mae, and I'm glad she's getting some publicity (and power; they're connected.)

Do you suppose if Australian women are snobs, that there might be a good reason for it??? Of course, I mostly know Australian men from fanzines; Eric Lindsay and Ken Ozanne are the only ones I've talked to for any length of time, and they were pleasant enough. (27.3.97)

BRENT LILLIE, 10 Cherub St, Tugun, Qld 4224.

Soon the latest comet will make it's grand entrance

into the southern hemisphere. Can't wait. I still feel sorry for all those people who paid big money to fly above the cloud cover in passenger jets to see Halley's. Bit of a rip-off, but I suppose nobody knew just how tiny the bloody thing was going to look. Then again, maybe some of them they did know. Plenty of people will think twice about parting with their money if they offer those comet flights again, that's for sure.

On to TM 91. I enjoyed Andrew Sullivan's fiction offering (after I sorted out the page order. Was everyone's issue like that?). It was quite sad and poignant. But I sure wouldn't have been laughing, in a carefree manner or otherwise, as I was sucked into the vacuum of space, body organs and visceral juices exploding from every orifice. That's about my only criticism. Pretty heavy story, beautifully juxtapositioned by Goossens COMPLETE HISTORY OF SCIENCE. At first I thought his latest offering wasn't quite as funny as the others but the more I read, the more amusing it got. I loved the bit about science slowing down a bit due to the lack of historically notable figures.

Darlington has maintained his usually high standard. The Cuban missile crisis, for me at any rate, is one of those historical events I recall mainly by where I was and what I was doing at the time, like the assassinations of JFK and John Lennon. At the height of the missile crisis I was in Sydney, a passenger in a car driving through some suburb with lots of huge gas tanks or something. That part wasn't very clear, whereas with JFK and John Lennon I can remember what I was doing almost in perfect detail. Certainly, individuals associate certain personal things that have occurred in their lives with where they were at the time, but do younger people these days, say, under the age of 25 (I'm 45) collectively remember any situation-associated momentous events (SAMES)? I suppose the Baghdad bombing could be one. Any others? And if they don't, is it because modern society rarely lingers upon a certain person or thing long enough to make anyone miss it when it disappears forever, in a violent manner or otherwise? We are bombarded with information these days. Who can blame us if important events, along with the unimportant, lose much of their meaning.

So many wars, so many starving people, so many riots, so many big trials and scandals involving movie stars and royalty. The evening news tells us what they think we need to know, what they think will keep us watching. And most of it's depressing. The Western World, I think, thrives on money and depression. Is it really any wonder those 38 people killed themselves, in the belief they'd end up on a spaceship? Not long ago I went away on a three-day mountain camp with my 11-year-old son. No showers, and we had to make our own tents out of a piece of tarpaulin and a few supports. Hot days, hot nights, mossies, the lot. The kids had to look after themselves, in teams, cooking their own meals, washing their own dishes, *helping each other out!* We rode flying foxes, abseiled and faced our fears, not always conquering them. Best of all, no electricity, TV or radios. The first day I hated it, missing the showers, air-conditioning and the rest of life's "luxuries". After a while I sensed a change in the children. Next, I actually saw the spirit of co-operation, of generosity, replacing all the old pre-programmed ways. Separated from our normal world, we started building a new one. After only three days the culture shock of returning to television and it's car chases, hold-ups and the shoes, drinks and hamburgers we've got to have made me want to head for the hills again. I missed that camp more than I ever dreamed I would. Still do. I'm grateful for the luxuries, though. Society can change, *can* be more positive and generous. But it would take one hell of a turnaround in thinking to achieve it.

Buck's contribution always makes for good reading, even better this time with his references to Australian SF, and I also enjoyed Julie Vaux's translation, more than I thought I would, actually.

THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE is rapidly becoming one

of my favourite articles. It should be standard reading for any overseas traveller. And that bit of dialogue in an Indian hotel was hilarious. I read a similar piece once about Japanese pronunciation. Bad taste? I don't know. In most people's minds bad taste depends on how funny something is. There's been plenty said about Aussie pronunciation as well, so we're all in the same boat. (30.3.97)

DEREK PICKLES, 44 Rooley Lane, Bankfoot, Bradford, W. Yorkshire BD5 8LX, England.

Like the Celtic war-club on the cover [of TM 90] - it is a war-club isn't it and not some phallic symbol? EDITORIAL. As you will know we are in the middle of a General Election campaign in which the Tory and Labour leaders are promising to follow the same departmental spending limits and just shuffle the priority cards in their respective packs. The Tories have been privatising government departments, which means that fewer people have to work harder for less and lose rights. The railways have been privatised and one company sacked half of its drivers (to improve profits) and only realised that they had made a *big* mistake when they couldn't run enough trains to fulfil the timetable they had agreed as one of the conditions of getting a license. The company is facing a £1 million fine and possible loss of its franchise.

I've read a great deal about the amalgamation of West and East Germany and First World investment in the old East but Marie-Louise Stephens gives real life to what I have read. I found her account of her visit to her old home very moving, you can try to cut yourself free from your roots but seldom succeed, the ties are too strong.

Sergey Lukyanenko seems to have had a frenetic time. He had no need to apologise to other attendees at FANCON for if they had drunk the 798 litres of beer they'd have no recollection of what happened at the con and would have to accept his word.

I'd love to meet Mae Stréfkov, she writes with such warmth and humour but with sadness about the attitudes that society demands the young adopt.

Bill Congreve's tour of Australia is a most enjoyable read. The description of the desert makes me think that it's a place where Yorkshire Water have had fifty years to muck everything up instead of the ten we've suffered since privatisation. I loved the Busted Boot Tree, reminds me of the time, a few years ago when we went up into the Yorkshire Dales and found, on the verge up on the fells a huge heap of old paint tins. We marvelled that someone had carted them forty or fifty miles to dump them - no habitation in sight - rather than take them to the municipal rubbish dump. I know it would have cost a couple of quid as trade waste but the dumper must have used four or five gallons of petrol to get where he did and back home.

I read that your daughter is getting married this year, our younger daughter celebrates her second wedding anniversary next month and our bank balance is still in intensive care. We honeymooned in London (very dashing in 1951), our daughter and son-in-law honeymooned in Thailand. These really are different times. We couldn't afford to go abroad, not on a wage of £7.50. Our children won't believe their mother changed jobs for a 2/6d (12½p) weekly rise. (4.4.97)

MARIE-LOUISE STEPHENS, PO Box 158, Monbulk, VIC 3795.

Thanks for No. 91, haven't read all the articles and stories, but must tell you two things. I wrote a personal letter to the gentleman who hoped that when one chooses to leave one's own country one must accept sometimes things one doesn't choose, but are chosen for us - like, my mother sending me away from home to be safe in the West, as she didn't want me to encounter the Russian troops, and I think she was one of the few in our family who remained "untouched" - Russian officers told their troops their price for winning the war was the German woman, and for the first 14

days after the war ended, it was often hell for women (someone told me "from 9-90") but raping still happened after that. I told him in my letter that Australia is my home, and I don't want to go back. I am happy here.

The second item is the story by Andrew Sullivan IN INFINITE NIGHT AND MEMORY. The story is written so clear and simple that even someone like me, who is no good at the science of the fiction can understand, also feel the horror, the loneliness, of being alone out there in space, surrounded by luxury, robots, who provide food, but don't talk - no-one there who this one human can converse with. I was asked once if I wanted to do psychiatric nursing. I told them NO - I could have earned good money, but I wanted to help just sick people, make them better so they could go home again. I read the story through once, then a second time, to see if it stood up to a second study - it did. I had to read it right through, it didn't let me go - but also made me sad. Thank you, Andrew Sullivan!
(Easter Monday, 97)

MICHAEL HAILSTONE, 14 Cecil Rd., Blackheath, NSW 2785.

... I will make one comment on #91, while I'm about it. Buck Coulson deserves full credit (and I'm not being sarcastic or ironic) for being the only one to comment on my last letter, although I don't know how much you published thereof. Thus I know that my letter was published. I must even agree with what he says about me - though I won't repeat his phrase "will wonders never cease?" since I see nothing wonderful about failing to get TM #90.

Yes, I guess it's true: I don't understand people very well. I don't understand why some folks take pride in being utter deadshits, or make friends and write lots of lovely warm sympathetic letters, then suddenly turn nasty, even to the point of suspecting me of Satanism, or persecute others who have done them no wrong. (I could go on and on in this vein, but I think I've made my point.) Though which "comments to Mae Strelkov" is he referring to? I remember that I made two lots of such comments: the first fairly kind to her, which I now rue, since I now think I made such pretty dumb comments about myself in response to her rather offensive comments about hippies and Jesus. On the other hand, nothing over the last year has changed my impression that she had developed unhealthy McCarthyist obsession about Satanists, seeing them under the bed and behind the door. If this impression is wrong and due to my poor understanding of people, well so be it. And I'll add that, quite frankly, I found your quote from her in your editorial in #89 most offensive, since I saw her as having another nasty implicit go at me (and maybe other faneds).

(3.4.97)

MAE STRELKOV, 4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina.

I'll quote Buck re our weather, borrowing his phraseology. He tells us about his weather in Indiana. "...During spring and summer either it was pouring rain or it was just quit pouring rain. We had to get the lawn mowed..." it was 30 to 37° centigrade in Jujuy day and night non-stop. Some of the lawn grasses were a meter tall and more, and no chance to mow them. Scything was first necessary. The less "important" sectors did grow to human heights.

"The heat actually isn't (wasn't) the main problem," as Buck continued and I borrow his way of telling it, adding on my own. "It's heat combined with humidity. Most days in summer you can see the humidity, it hangs in the air like a thin fog." ("Mosquitoes!" Buck adds). Here? Every type of bug imaginable airborne, crawling, stinging, blood-sucking. Endless electric storms too, with the downpours... lightning bolts entertained our frightened visitors, striking right outside our windows.

My problem was the damp heat... I turned into a running, dripping tap, mopping my face day and night desperately. Never had this problem before, but old age does play tricks on me. So I wrote no letters. I got no letters either throughout January and even December holidays, when all the

Post Office personnel take their holidays. In Palma Sola as usual, all January the girl was away so the office was closed. No letters. I ought to be chanting the Lament of the Makaris (Julie, it's haunting), but I won't.

A lot of good poetry. I admire the brevity of Andrew Darlington's SPACEQUAKE. Perfectly said! Brent Lillie's DOWNTIME and Andrew Sullivan's IN INFINITE NIGHT... are both lovely and bewitching. Glad to see fiction in MENTOR anew.

Darlington's CHILDREN OF THE ATOM is an important study. Among my papers I came across a ms. from 1962 on the confrontation between the USA and Cuba (America versus Russia) and how we all waited for Doomsday, during that time. (DAY OF THE UNRAVELLING I called it and sent it to an editor friend, Mr Crippen at New American Library. He told me they almost published it but it was too outspoken for that time. I was cruel in my mockery of pieties locally, without the humorous touch I now use if I can. I'm glad it missed being published. It's not a dead albatross on my neck today.)

Darren Goossens' funny history is always good. Appreciate the photo of Futurians on the back cover, to which I referred when reading FUTURIAN OBSERVER. Gets one thinking... puzzling.

Riches from Russia - Pavel, thank you always. Brad Row's CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT: helps one learn, and remember, also school lessons appreciatively, in his review. Socage is a term I researched right back to its archaic Chinese characters with echoes worldwide. Oldest imagery? "A field of cut-up flesh drying in the sun!" (Formerly the Emperor's Field: (conquered after battle).

Terry Hornsby: I've been receiving your letterzine and enjoying it. Due to my "sickness" last summer and till lately, I wrote no answers anywhere. Forgive me? I'll try to reform. I owe so many replies, but am starting now to catch up.

Ah! Buck! I found that solitary posed photo of our seven and have a copy to send to Ron. Yes, Buck, I'm on Michael Hailstone's black books and he does tell me off for "seeing Satan" under his bed, as he puts it. Pauline Scarf. I shan't make a book of the extracts because of my age and because I've still to sort out 40 years of constant studies and notes before thinking of turning anything into a book. (Exceptions: anyone wanting my language studies will be deluged by me. Gary Mattingly in the USA is bravely publishing some of it - a tiny fragment, but a long article anyway. (SKUG, his zine).

Oh, I mentioned the TV interview in MENTOR 90. We learn it was aired twice for the visitors from all over, who come to Jujuy for the Spring Festivals, and cheered visitors up. Graciela's aunt in San Pedro managed to copy the bit where I'm interviewed, so I saw it. The paintings came out lovely, but me? A comic, silly old 80-year-old talking away and joking and forgetting to "behave". The camera fellows beamed. But they presented the program kindly and elegantly.

Graciela and her clan were delighted. "It's the way you always are!" (She wants it for her kids' kids, apparently. So they'll remember Grandma Mae - or "Abuela May" as they put it on the program.

Robert Leighton! We're still in Argentina, in Jujuy, in lovely but "challenging" wilds. Tony and family have moved to Palma Sola where buses pass constantly and he's always going about his work of getting Jujueños excited over sharing our marvellous scenery with visitors from abroad. (Winters, the weather is lovely. No rain.) Beside the hotel property, his father-in-law bought at another auction a fantastic hot spring further north, which the father is building up for visitors. (Swimming pool, restaurant, where snacks will be available. Ample bathrooms.) Later, maybe a hotel or "spa" type place. Tony saved the property from being robbed by crooks on a technicality... he now owns mining-rights because the crooks were trying to steal it "for mining the chemicals that come from over a kilometer under". There are dozens of such springs around here, undeveloped, but this leads the list as "best". All

our province of Santa Barbara sits over a vast deep lake of hot water, as it transpires. There's now a rush to acquire some of the springs and join the bandwagon Tony leads. Everybody's into it, and clubs and associations are being formed with Tony heading same, usually. He's often on TV now and in the newspapers. He made flying trips to Buenos Aires last Spring to be present at workshops, etc for building up Jujuy's reputation. Oh, and Rodney, I never was a great artist. I did a lot of full-color hectography in the 1970s which fanzine fans still remember and lately some of it was been aired on the Internet by British fanzines and several in the USA, which pleases me, I confess. I feel my art is important though I neglect it for my language stuff that nobody has wanted, all these years.

Darren Goossens: I wish I could meander *briefly*! I hate my own longwindedness that embarrasses me.

So thank you all. It's a comfort that you young 'uns seem to figure out what I'm talking about lately. I couldn't convey my inner thoughts successfully formerly, though I used to be told by editors abroad I wrote "remarkably well and fascinatingly", and yet my stuff was no good. Why? Too damn serious I used to be. Now, in old age, it's all funny - I laugh no matter what I think or recall or observe, etc. Life's secret? Beneath the tragedy life's a good joke on us all as we'll duly recognise in times to come.

Old eldest in Canada, George, worries I'm slipping from my religious background - so "wildly non-fundamentalist" am I, now, while he's become a Mennonite. He sent me a book however, mentioning the Torah Code computer studies in Israel, so revealing. Fascinating but disturbing, I found the information; and the Baptist-type author infuriated me. "So it's all true", he preaches; "See? Accept Jesus or you'll spend Eternity in Hell". I could kill him. Ned Brooks just finished putting on computer my story of me age 7 in China versus creepy True Believers of that category. Also, daughter Alice in Canada will be sending to Ned computer copies of further book-sized tales from that era in Shanghai, Elsa had her sister enter it (or the secretary typed it for her).

I just mailed Ned Brooks (at Newport News), a video of our life here. Also included were copies of videos made by George and his second wife; also Alice and her Niel, who comes regularly from distant Jujuy town. Plus I am including all that interview with the Jujuy TV, though it reveals I'm a comical, ridiculous and nearly toothless, cackling grandma nowadays. I thought, "Let no one think "Mae" glamorous! Truth must out." Besides, it's time old folk, growing older like me, learn to enjoy their very vicissitudes and failings, seeing the joke, as I've learned to do. And the irony....

Oh, one last surprise that came our way. Alice suddenly arrived last month, for a flying visit, to collect blood samples for a study being made at Calgary. (Her trip paid for). They are hunting the gene that comes out in our children - Alice and George there have it too and the researchers take blood samples regularly. Whatever the gene, it doesn't allow us to eat nuts, etc., without developing cholestrolis with "bumps" appearing. Fat meat is ok - no harm - bumps didn't appear on me - I passed it along, just, from my mother's side. Her sister in turn passed it to her children in the USA, my cousins. It's considered very strange. (Did I have a spaceling for an ancestor?) (Joking!) Anyway the mutation first appeared, my cousins told me, in London nearly 300 years ago. their research studied only blood types, researched by doctors in the 1970s, as I learned when there in 1978, but I have no recent news re them. Alice says the hunt for the actual gene is new. Well, it may turn us out "crazy" in the sense that we're all very dynamic till we either burn ourselves out (as did two sons, Danny and Robert), or succeed in some chosen walk of life. (Alice is in medical research in Edmonton, for instance.)

Feels funny, thinking of scientists in Calgary squinting through electronoscopes in search of my (our) "mysterious gene".

PS A PLANET MUCH LIKE EARTH dates back to 1984/5 with a retyping in 1986. In mid-1986 I nearly died from pancreatitis and it changed me a lot. The letters I write now to you, are less "starry-eyed". I learned people here are very tricky. (4.4.97)

TERRY JEEVES, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough Y012 5RQ, England.

Thanks for the 91st MENTOR. At this rate you'll soon be catching up on ERG. Striking cover without making me fire off rockets and blow the hooters.

The two fiction pieces were excellent, both far better than in the latest prozines I have read. Sullivan developed his Brody character beautifully and Brent Lillie did equally well with DOWNTIME. I usually switch off at fan fiction, but these were both excellent.

The COMPLETE HISTORY OF SCIENCE was another great piece of work steering exactly the right course between the factual and the crazy. I loved it. By contrast, CHILDREN OF THE ATOM suffered a bit. Well-written, but somehow it lacked an aim. It fell between the historical, the story comment and the grim warning. Really, it was about forty years too late.

VERSE. Normally I *hate* fan poetry, it's lack of rhyme, metre or content. - viz. the Reeve efforts, but I enjoyed Stone's little verses and the eccentric spelling used by Bridh Hancock also amused.

Mae Strelkov continues to entertain and amaze at how she can take a spell of back to nature living in hard conditions and make it a fascinating read. Coulson was also entertaining, but LAMENT OF THE MAKARIS was not my cup of tea. Sorry that Pavel didn't find Bombay that interesting, he should have nipped round to Churchgate station, a thirty minute ride to Santa Crus and a bus to Juhu beach would have given him a chance to swim in beautiful conditions - having said that I'd better add that I'm thinking of 1942, it may well have all changed since then. I bet the Malabar Gardens are still open in Bombay though.

Government - there just ain't no perfect system. LOCool very good and I liked the photo bcover. I reckon it's your best issue yet - hope you enjoy ERG 137 as much. (8.4.97)

ANDY SAWYER, 1, The Flaxyard, Woodfall Lane, Little Neston, S. Wirral L64 4BT, UK.

I enjoyed as usual the last couple of MENTORS (#s 90 & 91): even the articles on constitutional history which aren't necessarily the things I go to fanzines for, but one of the joys of fanzines in coming across the unexpected. I'm fascinated by the Mae Strelkov saga: the only problem is that I need to get every part together and re-read instead of coming to them almost cold after an interval of several months. Equally Pavel Viaznikov's journal of his travels: I enjoyed the piece in #90 on Prague (a city I've never visited but one I could love to) and also his description of India in #91). My daughter is currently in India, sending us detailed letters back, but she is in the north, in Manali (in the Himalayas foothills). So my current picture of India is somewhat very different from Bombay, etc. The photos we have so far seen show snow-covered mountains. That particular part of India has a strong Tibetan influence, we're told, because of the influx of refugees from Tibet - the Dalai Lama has his base in the next valley - but it's also been a strong part of the hippy trail - there are a lot of Europeans who went out there in the sixties and seventies and never came back.

Julie Vaux's translation of Dunbar's LAMENT FOR THE MAKARIS was a splendid piece of work. Julie wonders about the European influence: certainly there was as much if not more connection between Scotland and France at the time as there was between Scotland and England, but I'm not knowledgeable enough of the literature to make any real comparisons between Dunbar and poetry elsewhere on the Continent. A couple of points which readers not knowing the poem might not be aware of: "Makariss" is (as Julie translates

the word in verses 12 and 13) "makers", ie poets, and the list of names following those verses are apparently poets of the time, most of whom (apart from Chaucer and Gower) were minor figures whose work does not survive. This is, I think, obvious from the poem itself, but it may be worth pointing out. I would have made some minor changes to the rhythm to keep in closer to the ballad structure ("And made feebly by infirmity" scans better as "enfeebled by infirmity") and I prefer sticking to the rhythm of "Timor mortis conturbat me" by translating the phrase "Dread of death disturbeth..." (or "disturbing"), but these are minor points. *Timor mortis* is one of the poems brought by E. R. Eddison into *The Worm Ouroboros* where it is recited (minus the topical lists of names) as the dirge in honour of the dead King Gorice.

Andy Darlington's CHILDREN OF THE BOMB was a fine piece. There are so many connections it's hard to suggest other examples. One addition to the "motley coalition" which was CND might have been science fiction itself in the shape of John Brunner who of course wrote anti-nuclear songs for them, and who later wrote a long mainstream novel about the times of the Aldermaston marches which as far as I know never was published.

The UK as you may have gathered from other correspondents is going through a fascinating piece of history at the moment. I was talking to someone on the phone about the general election result and quite spontaneously he described the feeling the day afterwards as "like walking about in the parallel universe". It was a wonderful experience staying up all night as the results came in and more and more of the poisonous wretches who have been governing this country for the past 18 years were turfed out. Even the press don't quite know how to react: one radio satire programme had chanting voices going "Blair out! Blair out!" - then short pause - "Well, we just wanted to be first." But at the moment (and I'm speaking as someone who doesn't really like the way the "New Labour Party" have taken over much of the "Old Conservative Party" dogma) there's a sudden freshness in the air. (10.5.97)

[Australians know the feeling - we had it back in 1972 when Gough Whitlam got in after the Labor Party spent 23 years in the political wilderness. Of course back then his policies did bring a fresh change. Unfortunately in the later years it has been hard to tell Labor's policies from the Conservatives of the Liberal Party. - Ron.]

SHERYL BIRKHEAD, 23626 Woodfield Rd, Gaithersburg, MD 20882, USA.

Very nice contribution by Mae Strelkov.

I haven't had the time I'd like to deal with fanac, but busy is good. Busy and rich would be better, but....

Interesting cover - I was trying to see if it was from the lead story, but (unless it is mental exploit by Brady) I don't think so.

A new Bruce Willis film is out - *The Fifth Element*. I'm not certain of the reference, but think it might be earth, air, fire.... guess I'll have to watch it to find out!

I'm not really a media fan, but I just read in a clubzine that DS9 will be cancelled, but I have no idea if that is the current status.

I'm sure you are aware of the death of Sam Moskowitz - our fan history is slipping out of reach - glad you did the Australian fan chronicles!. (10.5.97)

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS, 27 Borough Rd, Kingston on Thames, Surrey KT2 6BD, England.

Goossens is amusing [in TM 91], so I'm looking forward to him dealing with quarks and charm in the near future.

Andy Darlington excelled himself; his best article yet; and his poem rang my bell too.

DOWNTOWN was the better of the two stories; an interesting variation on an old theme.

Mae, as usual, sets the standard. Can you ever feel at home? An interesting question. During WWII I was in the RAF stationed in Northern Ireland; I had a good time despite the rain. The people were divided into Protestants and Catholics, but there wasn't the violence then as there is today. I made friends with a Protestant family - and the Catholics didn't want to know me. It would have been the same vice versa, I'm sure. So I felt half at home.

Thanks for the FUTURIAN OBSERVER and the photo; nice to see what you get up to and how you look.

Pavel was good on the Indian hotel (and thanks for the information on Prague; you certainly are an enthusiast). THE MENTOR must be Australia's number one travel magazine.

[One of the reasons I print travel pieces - and pieces from "far lands" - is to note the comments the writer makes about the other country and culture; oftimes that society is more familiar than the writer's background. - Ron.]

Brad Row continues to interest me, and I shall look forward to the next instalment.

Biggles banned? Yes, no doubt about it - psychologists really are nuts.

I am currently reading AUTOMATED ALICE by Jeff Noon; a third "Alice" book where she travels into the future; good stuff. (20.5.97)

JOHN J. ALDERSON, Havelock, VIC 3465.

Well, surprise, surprise, a translation of William Dunbar's LAMENT OF THE MAKARIS by Julie Vaux. The "Aberdonian" school of poets was quite well regarded, and Chaucer, far away from the centre of culture, did his best to imitate them. At that time Scotland, rather than England was very close to the culture of Europe, and Aberdeen, being the main port was at the forefront. I have six volumes of Aberdonian poets in Latin. The Gaelic poetry of the Highlands and Islands was also well in the stream of European culture at the time. By all means translate THE KINGIS QUAIR but I would sooner have PEEBLES TO THE PLAY.

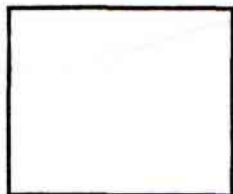
Brad Row's CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT is interesting, but his awful history is irritating. Of course the Roman Empire ran on slavery, they were the greatest slavers of all times. Northern and western Europeans were sold into slavery along the Mediterranean for centuries in the millions, and of course they bred. So many Slavs were captured as slaves that Slav became the noun for slaves. Yet, where is the Nordic traits, the fair skin and blue eyes in Mediterranean countries now? It seems that an area finally determines even eye and skin colour as well as other physical characteristics. Row's nonsense about the Angli and the Saxones is pitiful. There was never a tribe called the Angli in Europe and Saxon was the British word for pirate (from sac, to rob) and the Roman post of Count of the Saxon Shore dates from very early times of Roman occupation, centuries before the supposed Saxon invasion (who incidentally were land lubbers who may never have seen the sea). The language *does* tell the story because the Angles who gave their name to England are simply the Gaelic An Gael or the Gaels. Our language is simply loaded with Celtic words and most of the supposed Anglo-Saxon words are really Celtic. The pirates (Saxons) were Belgic Gaels and the Angles the old indigenes of eastern England, and both were refugees from rising sea-levels from the 3rd to the 13th Centuries. When the Vikings made their first settlement in England it was in East Anglia, by this time covered deeply enough to take their longboats. The difficulty, particularly in the face of the racist ideas of the English, is that geographically as well as linguistically, Celtic falls between Latin and the Teutonic languages so that they could find a word from one or other language to account for every Celtic word in the English language and blithely ignore words such as car, chair, seat, mid, middle, land, etc., whilst even the Roman rex, a king, is Gaulish and the essentially English bags, for trousers, is Gaulish.

Oli Vo's letter was interesting, that's her name spelt phonetically. The difficulty in phonetics being too variable. Anyone who has listened to the ABC will have noticed they now sound their "s" as a "z" (not the American c sound) so that business becomes buzeez. It must be an in-house thing as far as I know, nobody else in Australia so mis-pronounces their s's. Even in Australia letters are sounded differently and who's going to be the standard? Of course pronunciation alters too over the decades. As Julie mentions, the "d" after an "n" is usually silent, and I would be in favour of dropping them, but for one thing. We say, "You and I" and somebody feeling they have been left out asks, "And?" For the final "d" is sounded in interrogative case. Some of these "d's" were added in an effort to "Latinise" the language in the 17th Century so that the old Celtic "lan" as in Lochlan, and Eilan and so forth became "land", etc. The "t" is often another case in point but it should be dropped, it does not belong and was added to falsify the language. There is a further objection to phonetic spelling - it would look like Scottish which is a strictly phonetic language and few non-Scots could read a piece of written dialect. (-5.97)

SHORT MISSIVES:

JOHN FRANCIS HAINES: Greatly enjoyed Julie Vaux' translation of Durbar's "Lament" - I certainly hope she does tackle "The Kingis Quair" sometime, though I wish she'd use verse rather than prose for it. Andy Darlington brilliant as always - two others to add to the post-atomic reading list are THE CRUCIFIED CITY by Peter van Greenaway and RIDLEY WALKER by Russell Hoban. Years ago I also read PIG ON A LEAD by (I think) someone called Ingrams, which I've never seen since and which combines aspects of both the Hogan and the Greenaway. Couple of excellent stories made it a cracking issue, roll on 92! (4.4.97)

WAHF: Andrew Darlington, Bill West.



If there is an "X" in this box, this is your last issue unless you respond.

EDITORIAL.

Well, it seems that I didn't leave myself much space, as usual, for the editorial. This time it will be more a short list of comments.

As you can see, fiction is back, and for this issue, the R&R DEPT is quite small. I have added a device that other faneds have used for people who don't give much feedback: a Black Box, below, left. And I have about 20 readers who will be getting an "X" therein.

Sydney has lots of projects going that will be completed by the year 2000 - and the Olympics. One is construction of a rail link to Mascot Airport, which will have two underground train stations, and which will enable travellers to go direct to the city Central Station in the CBD in around 15 minutes. The other things that the Olympics brought were the filling in of all the "holes in the ground" with buildings, mostly apartment blocks. People seem to be moving back into the city area, rather than moving out, as is apparently happening in many US cities.

This issue seems to be creating a publishing period of every six months - why this is is a combination of suitability of contributions, and lack of time. Hopefully, however, I can stick to this schedule, at least.

There seems to be quite a silence from the 1999 WorldCon Committee in Australia, presumably because there is two years to go. There does not seem to be much of a drive in Oz to get people to join, though I think the thought in Sydney is that this is a Melbourne Worldcon, and this does not generate much enthusiasm here. This isn't to put down those fans in Melbourne putting the thing on, but the majority of the active fans in Sydney are mainly newcomers, and don't have the background in fandom that the old-timers in Melbourne have. - Ron

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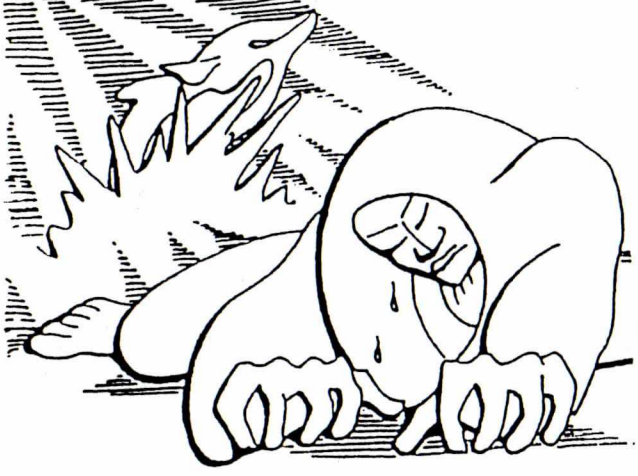
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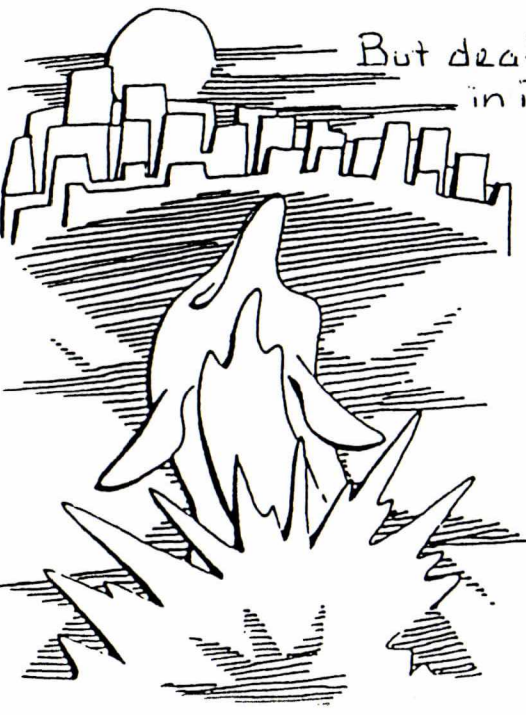


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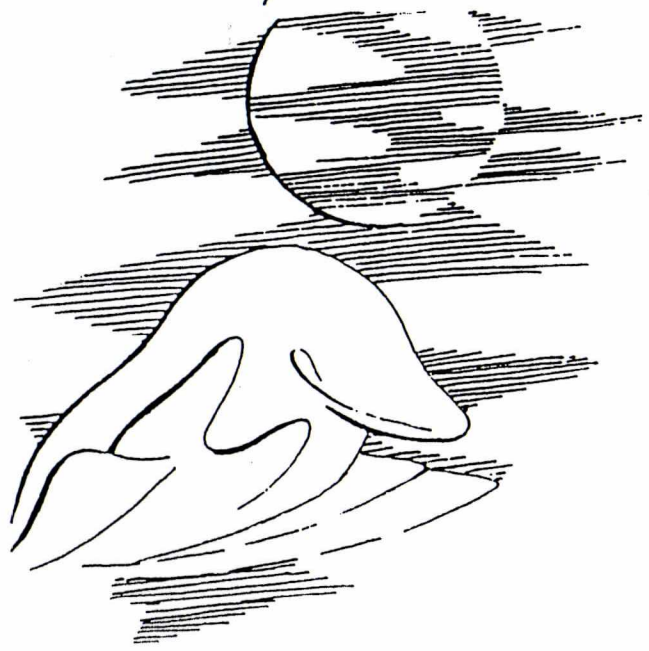
Die.



But death,
in itself -



Is not necessarily -



An ending

