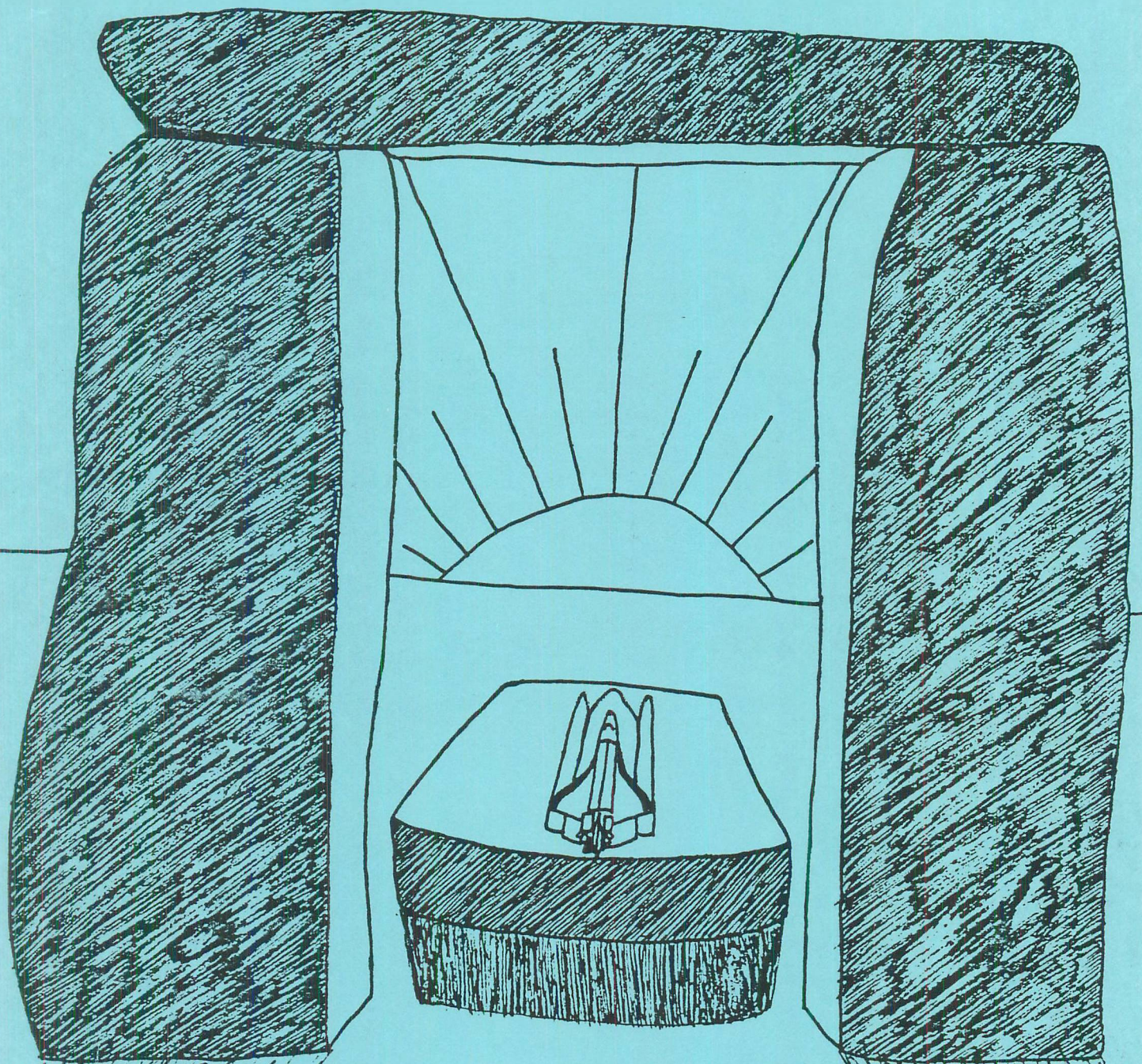


Solstice



2 x 4

IN MEMORIUM

DICK SCOBEE

MICHAEL SMITH

GREGORY JARVIS

JUDITH RESNICK

ELLISON ONIZUKA

RONALD McNAIR

CHRISTA McAULIFFE

THEIR DREAMS WILL LIVE ON IN OUR REALITY.

Is it over? Is it really over? You may have noticed, there is a considerable lapse of time between SOLSTICE number 1, and this, number 2. As editor, all the blame rests with me. To put it mildly, last year was the pits.

This issue was typed three (3) count'em three times. After the first copy was finished, while waiting for Joe Siclari's Gestetner to be resurrected, I neglected to make the proper offering to the local rain god/dess, and s/he wrought vengeance upon me, via a nasty roof leak, which, very inconsiderately happened to be above my desk. Have you ever seen what old rotting insulation looks like when it drips on nice, white, pristine paper? It is not a pretty sight. Strangely enough, not everything was destroyed. In the middle of the papers was BLOOD SODA, Brad Linaweaver's contribution, which somehow emerged with all its virginal splendour intact. I haven't quite figured that one out.

SOLSTICE was then retyped, for the second time. One word of warning. When you write, edit, or draw...DON'T HOUSECLEAN! Yes, you probably guessed right!!!

The third typing almost went on wax stencils. Fannish, yes; allergies, yes. That meant going back to the typewriter. (You may have guessed, I am one of those primitives who do not [yet] possess a computer.) Anyway, what you see here is the final attempt. In the meantime, the demon E-stenciler committed suicide.

I had found someone that was willing to donate the use of his Xerox machine, however, due to circumstances beyond his control, he had to withdraw his offer. When you receive this, it no doubt be a direct result of BILL WILSON, who will find a way to get the ~~zine~~ zine printed.

To all of SFSFS: Sorry for the wait. This is a shorter issue than originally planned, and I think better than the first issue. I'll admit that one had a lot of faults.

Anyway, enjoy this issue. It's small, it has pictures....and the stories are good.

SOLSTICE is the official clubzine of the SOUTH FLORIDA SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY.

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*The Phillo on pg. 18, was slightly adulterated by ye-editor, who has a strange sense of humor that Phil Tortor Ricci pretends he understands.

Things between the (|)'s are the editor's kibbitzing. All typos are the editor's %%%(¢ fault.

Blood Joda.

Brad Linaweaver

The thing about Herschell Gordon Lewis is that you can't say anything negative about his movies that hasn't already been said by himself. Here is a guy who gives a new meaning to candor. When informed that French critics considered his films worthy of further study, his reply was, "Well, they also say that about cancer." Possessing a degree in English, he evaluated his first gore opus by drawing upon his academic background as follows: "Blood Feast I've often referred to as a Walt Whitman poem--it's no good, but it's the first of its type." Find a critic who can top that!

Lewis does not sing the body electric, but rather sings of the body dismembered. The titles of his movies are masterpieces of honesty in advertising: the aforementioned Blood Feast, followed by Two Thousand Maniacs!, Color Me Blood Red, The Gruesome Twosome, A Taste of Blood, Something Weird (which may not belong to the blood films, as the scenes of violence are uncharacteristically inept), and The Wizard of Gore.

No doubt the question will be raised: why have HGL as a guest at a convention? One answer is that he is a true independent film maker, who has gone where the majors do not care to follow--although there is no denying that there is a much greater level of violence in movies today than ever before. Compared to Lewis' typical budget and resources, Roger Corman started out as an Establishment tycoon. There is no film maker in America who deserves the title of independent more completely than Lewis. As he has said of his own breakthroughs: "The only film that an independent can make and survive with is a film that the major producers cannot or will not make."

It may come as a surprise to learn that only a minority of the Lewis films belong to the gore genre, although these are the pictures that made his fame. Most would fall into the category of sexploitation films, or what a more innocent period knew as the nudies. Perhaps the primary contribution of Lewis to the cinema is that he brought the "acting" endemic to hard-core pornography before a mass audience with his anti-sexual, slice-and-dice films. By this I mean that his gore movies--his most widely viewed product--has acting on the level of the cheapest pornography, a kind of performance rarely witnessed by the general movie going public. Atlanta columnist and character assassin, David T. Lindsay, has this to say on the subject: "In Herschell Gordon Lewis movies, the actors do not act or react, but they go into a trance and stay that way until they're butchered." The one exception to this is Two Thousand Maniacs!, the best produced of his pictures, and one that, by some accident, has moments of credible acting.

I first became aware of Lewis when I attended a Florida drive-in with a friend in the early seventies. We were going to a quadruple horror bill, a lost treasure in this age of multiplex theatres in shopping malls. There were three Hammer films, and one Lewis: The Wizard of Gore. We told ourselves that we were sitting through Wizard so that we could see a Chris Lee movie afterwards; but, to be honest, there is a morbid fascination at times like this. The very worst part was not the mad stage magician pulling out a girl's eyeball and popping it between his fingers, or sawing a woman in half the messy way, or using a piledriver on another woman's torso, or chopping out an assortment of tongues. No, the worst part was that the drive-in concession stand was having a special on pizza.

My friend and I looked out the window of our car at a line of bleary-eyed and pockmarked young men, wandering zombie-like from the concession stand with dripping red pizza in their hands. We took a good look and then, without a word exchanged between us, we each rolled up the windows even though it was a warm, humid night.

In a way, the Lewis film had set the hellish context for the drive-in, rather than the other way around. And yet his movies would never have come into existence it not for the drive-in markets. Surrounded by the shuffling pizza eaters, I remembered a passage from an H. P. Lovecraft story. In "The Horror at Red Hook," he writes of how modern people can, under the right conditions,



of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances" (emphasis added). HGL films are repulsive in exactly the same manner as De Sade: they strip away civilization without offering a sly veneer by which we may excuse ourselves. The glossy movies of Brian De Palma are every bit as infused with sadistic contemplation of a woman's death, and every bit as repetitious. Harlan Ellison has been telling us this for years. The trouble is that De Palma's films are watchable in a fashion that the Lewis pictures are not, because the Lewis pictures don't lie!

Besides being a talented businessman and abominable artist, what is the legacy of Herschell Gordon Lewis? He is the man who taught us things we didn't want to know. Of Blood Feast, the production that started it all back in 1963, he observed: "Sophisticated people can't stand to look at this picture." And yet, on a rainy night at the Bel Air Drive-In Theatre in Peoria, the movie sold out. Rarely has an artist in our time understood the nature of his work more completely.

THE MONUMENT

Margaret Gemignani

When men plan, they oft believe they want a thing one way, but sometimes they find out another is best after. all. Long ago one man believed that he was chosen to save a city grown evil in her ways, but later found that it was not the city he would save, but those in the city who could rebuild a better one. Such a man was Sam-el; called the Mad.

Sindar, Sam-el's home, was the richest city state in the distant land of Ma in those days long past, but she also was the greediest. Blood and tears were the price she paid for gold. Only one man looked beneath the greed and saw hope. One only loved Sindar, for the city was not lovable, as even that one was to find. The one who loved Sindar was not Bedvan, the double-dealing, lying-tongued lord mayor. His own neck and his own pockets were his only concern. Nor was it the Council of Merchants, who loved Sindar. They lived by lies and cheating, and they cared for nought save gold. Nor was it the citizens of Sindar, who, for the most part, were thieves and rogues. No, it was the madman in the House of Retreat, the madhouse, who loved the city, but he could not save her. None could save Sindar, for her greed had destroyed her.

Sam-el, Sam-el the Simple, had been a jester in the house of Bedvan, until he found nothing more to laugh about. Sam-el loved justice and truth, but those who loved such things died young in Sindar, or retreated to the madhouse. So when Sam-el appeared one day nude in the street, wearing only a battered helmet and carrying an empty bird cage, no one was much surprised that he disappeared into the madhouse.

But Sam-el knew Sindar, and like many others, he had but taken refuge from her cruelty in the madhouse. He could have left the House of Retreat at any time, for he knew well the great sewer system of the city. He could have left the madhouse at any time, but why should he? He stayed until the day he embarked on his plan to save Sindar - a plan that was to lead him down a route far different from the one he'd planned.

In those days, the Alcazars, fierce sons of the hills and deserts, were well known for their warlike ways and the services they performed, for they were irregulars and mercenaries. Thus, when Bedvan, troubled with the fierce raiders, the Brothers of the Blood, found that because of them the rich caravans came no more to Sindar; when he found the population mumbled against him, for they missed the rich trade; while he was unwilling to send his men against the much feared pirates; he called the Alcazars, for someone else must fight and die for Sindar. He promised them much gold and riches if they would rid him of the Brothers of the Blood, and at great cost to themselves they did so. But Bedvan refused to pay them. They pressed their case and sent their captain to collect their due, but he was cast into prison. The Alcazars threatened that if their captain was not released by dawn, they would burn Sindar, for they would tolerate no breach in their contract.

When Sam-el heard of this, he hid sleeping medicine in his clothes and journeyed by night into the bowels of the city. In the sewers below, with the rats for his only companions, he travelled to the jail. On his way, in the dark bowels of the earth, he considered the city for which he risked his life. Her sounds above him assaulted his ears, sounds of the thieving, murdering, and drunkenness. This was the city he was saving. Why should he do so?

Then another thought came to Sam-el. He could not save Sindar. He had no gold to pay the Alcazars, and he did not really believe the Alcazars would ride back to their hills and deserts without it, but he could save a part of Sindar. Yes, a part worth saving. The Alcazars would grant him that much for their captain's return. Besides, his ancestors had been Alcazars. He knew, now, what part of Sindar he would save, and why.

Now he was under the jail itself. The sounds of dripping water and the foul smells of all sorts assaulted his nostrils. Other sounds, too, assaulted Sam-el. A drunken jailor laughed. He joked with the guards. One mentioned cell thirty. At least the guards were of some help to Sam-el. But to him the rats were better than the guards and the brutal jailor. He donned his robe of black which marked him as a witless one, a beggar of the corridors of the jail. Then he lifted the grate and stepped into the jail. He blinked in the dim light and saw that the jailer was alone. Good, now he could put the first part of his plan into action.

He coughed and laughed witlessly. The jailer put down the bottle he was pouring down his throat and smiled drunkenly. Tonight, he must be thinking, he would pass some of the long night having fun. Was that not Tom of the Corridor, the witless beggar? Sam-el could see that the jailor was drunk and did not really know who he was. The big man called harshly, "Come here, Tom, tell me of some of your travels and I'll give you a drink of my brew."

Sam-el smiled, displaying his fine, white teeth, and said, "Me chasing spiders, fat spiders, me travel with my friends the rats. Give me drink and I tell me tales."

The jailor passed the bottle and Sam-el drank of the fiery liquor, choked and nearly spilled it. But he was able to put the sleeping medicine inside the bottle before the jailer grabbed it back saying, "Don't spill that, fool, that is for drinking."

After a few more drinks and some tales, the jailer finally began to nod. When he was soundly asleep, Sam-el took the keys from the sleeping man. He traveled the dark corridors and at last reached cell thirty. He tried three times before the door would open and it seemed to take forever. Sam-el stepped into the cell and closed the door. He knew he'd better talk quickly.

The mercenary captain grabbed him, clearly meaning to kill the one he thought had come to kill him. But Sam-el spoke quickly. "Captain, you would not kill a brother? Look you at this."

The captain looked and said, "Where did you get this?"

Sam-el told him, "None know, but an ancestor of mine was an Alcazar. I want you to be free, so that I may save some part of the city, of Sindar, a repay a brother. I know the underground of this city. You can be back in your camp before dawn."

Then the Captain replied, "I will trust you, brother, if you can free me, I will grant your request."

The madman and the mercenary moved down the corridor, past the sleeping jailer. They saw a light ahead and heard a noise. It was the guards! The two men must go quickly to the underground to escape death. If Sindar would live at all, Sam-el knew he must find the stone that would lead to freedom. The guards were closer now. He could hear their shouts, but the stone moved to his touch and he signaled the captain to follow him into the bowels of the city. The stone closed and the guards beat against it, uselessly, for they did not know the secrets of Sindar's sewers.

Then after a long time in the winding sewers and tunnels beneath the city, Sam-el and the Alcazar captain saw the lights of the Alcazar camp in the distance, far from the city. The captain had his freedom at one of the larger openings of the city sewers. Soon he would be in his camp, safe. He smiled knowing this and said to Sam-el, "What is that you want to be saved? Tell me and the Alcazars will spare it."

"The madhouse," replied Sam-el, without hesitation. "But why, brother?" replied the captain, puzzled by his request.

"I live there and so do those who can rebuild the city."

"That is a most strange request, but if you want it so, then the madhouse will be the only thing left standing after we have finished with Sindar. It will be our monument," he said with a smile. Then the captain was gone into the night to return to his people and to keep his oath. Sam-el quietly returned to the madhouse, and thought, "Our monument too, Captain, We, the free men of Sindar will rebuild from the ashes of a greedy city a new world. Tomorrow morning, your people will raze Sindar. Tomorrow night we will rule Sindar. And we will be free!"

TROPICON V

Pam Parsons

If an alien being would suddenly appear before me and ask me to send him to the best science fiction convention Venusian pesos could afford, it would be an easy choice...Tropicon! And if he had a time machine, I'd send him to Tropicon V! Now, now, I'm not being biased! Just because I did programming doesn't mean I'm showing favoritism towards Tropicons or the people that go to them...

It's just that, as conventions go, I've had more more fun at the two Tropicons I've been at, than at any other convention I've been to. There is a spirit that lives at Tropicon that compares to none of the other cons I've been too. Granted, most of you know me well enough to know that I don't get a chance to go out-of-town to many fannish cons, and end up at mostly local media cons. (This is not to confirm any of the nasty rumors that I'm really just a media fan. Perish the thought!) However, even at the smaller media cons, that spirit does not exist.

Perhaps it's the fact that Tropicon is a small con. With 250 or so members, the atmosphere is more intimate, and definitely more relaxed. The guests are more accessible, and elevators actually come when you call them without waiting twenty minutes to decide whether or not they'll do you a favor and take you where you want to go.

O.K., there's the generalities...now for the specifics on Tropicon V. Ooohh...it was fun! Even the workers had fun! Take, for example, Judy Bemis. Judy is a registrar par excellence, and if you've ever worked registration, you know that there is usually just enough time to take a potty break and run back to the desk. This year, Judy had a great staff and everybody that worked registration actually had time to do all the fannish things people do at cons. (Like eat, drink....) And Judy, bless her furry little heart, said she had a great time because there she had people that actually worked at registration, and she was able to have some fun! (I suppose this qualifies as an ego-boo for Carol, Linda, Audra, and the rest whose names I can't remember. Ego-boo to you guys, too!)

The Art Show was just fantastic. I liked it better than the one we had last Tropicon, and I liked that one a lot! I was happy to see more of Diana Gallagher's "house dragon" drawings, and of course, Mary Hanson-Roberts' drawings. Mary was there, and next year, if you're smart, buy a bunch of her stuff. She's going to end up a Hugo winner for best fan-artist one of these years, and then you can say you knew her when... (Yes, that is an official prediction. And, Mary didn't even pay me to do it!) We

really have been very lucky, to have so many excellent artists submit their work. I hope they feel that it's profitable to them as well, and that they keep sending us their work. Becky Peters, as usual, did a wonderful job of keeping track of the artwork, and displaying it.

One big change, that I hope will now become routine, is Gail Bennett's targeting the dealers for the Dealer's Room. Last year, all I can remember was comics, comics, Gail & Sabrina's table, and comics. It was wonderful to have a variety of dealers there, especially people with books! Even though Rob Hittel's table miniature aquatic displays at both ends, he told Nancy he still had a good time, and I've heard the other dealers voice the same opinion. The aisles were a bit congested at times, but I have a theory that it's all due to the herding instinct inherent in most fen, that seems to manifest itself in dealer's rooms and autograph lines. I was at a con last year that had twice as much aisle space, and the fen still packed themselves in there. (Oh, yeah, they herd into elevators as well).

Now, for the guests. I hope they enjoyed Tropicon as much as we enjoyed having them here. Gardner Dozois can come back any time, especially with his list of slush pile doozies. He turned out to be, at least in my own totally unbiased opinion, the best GoH at a con I've been to. It was wonderful to have Susan Casper (Gardner's wife, if you didn't know) there as well. And of course, what's a Tropicon without Tim Sullivan and Somtow Sucharitkul! One of the best memories I have, was the Jack-the-Ripper panel with Gardner, Susan, Tim, Somtow, Sarah Clemens and HRH Vincent of Miranda. That was one fantastic panel! (Hey, how are you guys with vampires? Can we do that next year?)

Speaking of programming, people tell me they enjoyed them, especially the Dinosaurs in SF, Jack-the-Ripper, and the Sexuality in SF. To say anything more might be seen in a rather unquestionable light, since I was the person doing the programming this year. But, the guests said they had fun doing them, and that's what counts...that the guests and the audience enjoyed themselves. (Message to Nancy...Thanks for the help-and I'm over the mono now /yes, the rumors were true/ and I'd like to do it again next year. I promise not to get sick.)

Two items on the program deserve special mention, not only because the speakers were SFSFS members, but because I've had so many people tell me how much they enjoyed them, and would like to see similar things next year. If you haven't guessed by now, I'm talking about Sarah Clemens' and Vince Miranda's respective presentations. (Now, Vince, don't let this go to your head. Better watch him, Sarah...)

The banquet was wonderful (there's that word again...) Aside for food that was really edible, something that broke a much unrevered fannish tradition of bouncing potatoes & lead-filled peas, there was the romantic atmosphere, the guest of honor speech (many people were able to work off their recently consumed calories by laughtercize...Aieeee!!) we also had the Daedalus Awards. I hope that Tropicon will be the site of future presentations.

The consuite was very good, but poor Jay Packlick ran himself ragged. Hank Heath, Russ Dapp and every one who helped him out deserves to share his applause. One thing...can we have some fruit juices there next year? It was also a good idea to have a smoking and a non-smoking con suite, but the smoking consuite was all the way down near the end of the hall. Next year, what about keeping them closer? Most people chose to have their smokes in the hallway, and left Todd Hopkins all by his lonesome. Quite understandable though...who wants to go that far away from all the action?

Although the only time I was in the film room was to see Blood Beast Terror, I've heard Bill Wilson did a wonderful job, and that most people were really pleased with the films. I even heard the films ran according to schedule...now that must be a fandom first! I've heard Mark Baumgarden's 'alternate video/Doctor Who' room was good, too. Gee, they even had Blake's 7! (Which I missed, drat...)

Another bright spot was Brian Norcross, channel 10's wacky weatherman. ~~Elizabeth~~, er, um ~~Patricia~~ ~~Vader~~, (one more try...) Brian broadcast his 5:30 report, from Tropicon, with may have been the first time any con has had a weather report broadcast listed as a special event! Well, after all, weather's fannish...it's celestial, isn't it? Kinda? Oh, well. Anyway, Brian's ~~forecast~~ turned out to be pretty accurate. Saturday, Tropicon was renamed Hurricane because it was so incredibly...hurricane-like. The ocean looked like it had been taped from one of those old gothic horror movies---rough seas, with whitecaps hurling themselves onto the misty rock strewn beach, sharp, stinging needles of salt water striking the face of the innocent heroine as she cried desperately "Heathcliffe, Heathcliffe!" Oops, sorry about that. Have to stay away from the eggnog when I'm writing, I guess.

Last, but not least, (ghod, how unoriginal!) there's a certain con-chairman who deserves a big pat on the back. Nancy Atherton really made Tropicon V a con to remember. Mark Star, Nancy's hubby, even chipped in and made the beautiful signs that adorned the halls. For all the work, for all the late night panic calls, for all the M & M's: Nancy---thank you!!! You done good!!!

Let's do it again next year, O.K.? Nancy? Nancy, where are you? You can wake up now, it's after Christmas! Nancy????? (The Jolt Cola must've finally worn off). Night, night all...z z z z z.

THE BEMIS GUIDE TO BOSKONE

Judy Bemis

Boskone was one of the largest regional conventions I'd ever attended. As of Saturday at 3PM, there were 3,269 people attending the convention, and there may have been as many as 441 no shows. I found this to be too large to find people I had hoped to see. One reason for the large attendance, I discovered, was that there had been a prominent pre-con article about the convention in the Roston Globe, and the week after the article, 500 more registrations than predicted were received. The large number of people also changed the tone of the convention, in my opinion. There were more "punkers" and obnoxious partiers.

Tony and I had significant difficulty getting to the convention. Our flight from Orlando to Raleigh-Durham to Baltimore was delayed 20 minutes getting into Raleigh and another 20 minutes leaving because the radar was not working. We were delayed an additional 20 minutes in flight to Baltimore because the Baltimore airport was temporarily closed for snow removal. As a result, we missed our connecting flight to Boston and arrived at the convention on another airline 5 hours later than we had intended, after registration had closed. This proved not to be a serious problem, as their services department ran after-hours registration, fortunate since there was strict badging at the con suite and programs, which ran on multiple tracks until after midnight.

I looked in on the non-smoking con suite party (there was a separate smoking room) and saw many friends and acquaintances, including fellow SFSFSian, NANCY ATHERTON. I also looked in on the New Orleans in '88 party. We quit for the night fairly early, as it had been a long day.

Boskone knows how to schedule programming - nothing before 10 AM, and only two tracks from 10 to 11 AM, one of which was "Your First Convention".

I went to a writer's workshop at 2PM, in part to see Jacqueline Lichtenberg, who was running it, and in part because I was stuck on a story I was working on. Jacqueline discussed how the opening scene often reveals one of the main story plots, and how that leads to the crisis and resolution of a story. She also explained how she does characterizations using the people cards in a tarot deck to be sure of getting a well-rounded "real" character.

The other program item I attended on Saturday was the filk concert. There were four acts: Jack Carroll, Gravity's Rainbow, consisting of Fred Coulter and Lisa Osterman, Technical Difficulties, a trio consisting of T.J. Burnside, Linda Melnick, and Sheila Willis, and Julia Ecklar. Of the four acts, I liked Technical Difficulties the best. They performed many songs with close harmony, some songs accompanied by one or two guitars, and two songs a capella.

Saturday night was the big party night, with 21 parties listed in the late edition of the convention newsletter. I attended many of them, including the New Orleans in '88 bid party again, the Bermuda Triangle in '88 party (the cruise), the St. Louis in '88 bid party, and the Readercon party (promoting the con that's not ashamed to be called sercon). The Boxboro fandom party was really spectacular, with a "Lost Temple" altar displayed prominently in one room of their suite. They had two homemade bars and were serving a variety of mixed drinks from behind them.

Sunday morning I went through the Dealer's room, looking for new and used books mostly, but I also found two tapes at the Off-Centaur table and one of Clam Chowder (a D. C. area folk group) at another table. In the afternoon, I attended a tarot workshop, again run by Jacqueline Lichtenberg.

One of the things I look forward to in Boston are interesting dinner expeditions. This year we went to the Durgin Park Annex, both Saturday and Sunday nights. I had hoped to go to Legal Seafood on Saturday night, but when we got there, we heard there was a 2-hour wait for a table!

Sunday night, the LA in '90 party was very interesting. Many NESFAN's including Boskone chairman Mark Olson collapsed there and did some SMOFFING. I also went to the filksing, offering some Tullimore Dew I had brought for lubrication. Jordan Kare was there and performed some wonderful new (to me) songs. Monday

Monday we had an early flight homeward to Orlando with a stop and a plane change again. The trip was uneventful in comparison with the prior one, for which we were MOST grateful), and we arrived back in Orlando around 4:30.

((Ed. note: (yup, it's another typewriter I'm using.) This is not for this years Boskone, which hasn't happened yet. It's for last year's. This year's Boskone was next year's last year, and next year's Boskone won't be this year's Boskone until the year after this one.))

Extraterrestrial Life on the Mississippi

H. G. Twain

(Editor's Note: Those attempting to dismiss this story as a fit of imagination do so at their own risk. Those who use it as proof positive that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the cosmos, do so with the knowledge that intelligence is pretty much in the eye of the beholder. Those wanting to prove the claims in this story are probably addle-brains, and deserve whatever they find.))

No one would have believed in the early years of the Nineteenth Century, that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than Man's and yet as mortal as his own. But, as men busied themselves about their various concerns, they were scrutinized and studied, perhaps almost as keenly as a man with a microscope might scrutinize the transient creatures in a drop of water that swarm and multiply like Frenchmen. With infinite complacency, men went to and fro over this globe, tending to their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger, or if they did, they had sufficient wit to hold such thoughts to themselves and not give sensible folk reason to doubt their sanity.

Yet across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to the minds of beasts and congressmen, intellects vast, cool and unsympathetic, regarded this Earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us.

THE FALLING STARS

The very first falling star arrived on the pleasant evening of August Ninth, Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-two, some seven miles west of Dawson's Landing, Missouri--a moderately prosperous river town about thirty miles north of Hadleyburg. The earliest indication that something unusual was "in the air" (as they say), was a tongue of flame that shrieked across the star-strewn sky. It tasted the Earth with a mighty thump, bouncing from their beds whatever inhabitants hadn't already been awakened by the shouts of family or friends who happened to witness the fiery descent.

The flame and thump could've been a great boon to the citizens of Dawson's Landing, providing the town with a state-wide reputation. The incident might've gotten the town's name in some of the great eastern newspapers, and certainly would have provided years of satisfying summer evening speculation about the Great Mystery of August Nineth.

Alas, the Great Mystery was not to be. Before daybreak, the falling star had been tracked, and with much disappointment, the trackers realized that they would have to report to their fellow townspeople that the wonderous messenger from the heavens, the marvelous visitor from the cosmos, the very basis for the Great Mystery of August Nineth, was a rock. A big rock, true. A rock large enough splash a great circular hole in the ground. A singular rock, indeed. But, for all of that, still a rock.

Thus was the Great Mystery demoted to a mere mystery, for of the twin question "what?" and "why?", the question more easily open to the curiosity of the common folk had already been denied them. And with this truly neolithic evidence lying about in the open, learned men would arrive to claim the second question, and carry it away from the villagers.

It was a hard thing, then, for these townsmen who had ridden miles across the dark hillsides hoping either to witness a miraculous vision or to return exhausted to their fellow citizens with assurances that nothing was to be found--and a Great Mystery it was indeed--it was a hard thing to sit astride their horses staring into a pit one hundred feet across and sixty feet deep, its earthen walls smouldering from the collision, and see the fragile possibility of Dawson's Great Mystery shattered by a rock.

Still, there was something to be said for the rock. Cleb Howley, owner of the feed store, suggested that they might try burying it; there was certainly enough dirt flung about to do the job. But, John Gidson, the towns most prominent (and only) attorney said no, that wasn't quite honest, and would take at least a week to accomplish. By that time everyone in the county with a twig of curiosity would've seen it. No, they had to leave the rock there; huge, black, smouldering, and embarrassing. It was no fault of Dawson's if rocks chose to plummet from the sky onto their countryside! People would understand that, and perhaps, feel some sympathy for their situation.

The others in the party of twelve agreed, but were in no hurry to carry the disappointment back to friends and family. Midnight having already passed, Gidson thought it might be a marketable proposition that they camp there for the night. The others were sold on the notion with little persuasion.

The horses were tied and the men found comfortable locations on the grass to doze the last hours of that warm summer night. It was shortly before dawn that they heard the sound from the pit.

The sound that roused our boys from their slumber was a sound of scraping. Stone scraping on stone, so heavy and loud that it would later be likened to the sound of the gate to Perdition swinging slowly open. The men gathered at the edge of the pit, squinting into the hole, straining to make sense of the noise. Their spirits had picked up considerable, for while a rock might be a grand disillusionment, a rock that made noises was another thing entirely. A talking rock, you might say. Now here was an item of some uniqueness. Here was a true marvel from Heaven. The last lingering notion that the rock might be buried evaporated in the heat still radiating from the smouldering stone as the men proudly stood on the ridge of earth the rocks landing had flung up.

The trackers decided they'd best high-tail it back to town to convey the news. One of the men suggested that they post a watch on the hole, military fashion. The others laughed; they weren't much concerned that someone might make off with the hundred ton object, and it certainly wasn't going to get up and walk off by itself. They mounted up and rode triumphantly back to town.

THE PIT

By noon of the next day, the townspeople of Dawson's Landing had assembled themselves at the site of the "Speaking Stone". Many decked themselves out in their Sunday best, making a picnic of the occasion. The pit the falling star had excavated was located (either by good fortune or by alien calculation) in Myerson's Meadow. This broad, grassy plain afforded a much pleasanter gathering area for the curious-minded than the surrounding low hill would have.

The day passed in a quiet and largely satisfactory manner, the villagers alternately marvelling at the noises of the stone, and planning for the prosperity it would bring to Dawson's Landing. One and all were of the opinion that the newly acquired boulder would certainly put the town "on the map" as you might say.

By the time the Earth had rolled over once more to swing the Mississippi River basin into the Sun's rays, a traveling revival preacher had set up his tent in the meadow, much to the consternation of Reverend Muldrew, Dawson's Landing's resident spiritual leader. It would be a monstrous injustice in the Reverend's eyes if this wandering scripture-screamer should get the first Sunday's use out of the celestial Stone. Here the Reverend had spent the

last twenty years dutifully guiding his flock, living in poverty and obscurity, and generally paying in advance the bill of freight for this shipment from the Almighty. And now that he and the good people of Dawson's--his people--had laid sufficient prayers on the object to sink it down from the clouds of Heaven, here was this side-show pulpit-pounder dashing in, arms wide, to catch the glory that came down with it. It was enough to make a less Christian man with for another, more precisely targeted rock to help the revival preacher on his way to Glory.

By that afternoon, the prominent citizenry of Dawson's had temporarily appropriated the chatawqua tent of the intruding preacher as a place to assemble and consider the future of their town. There had been in the first day several inquiries at the Land Office concerning ownership of various "unimproved" parcels of land in and around Dawson's. Some of the town's leading citizens realized that this was an indication that others of the towns leading citizens were intent on acquiring the available land in Dawson's. The meeting was a step toward preventing the funneling the town's future into the hands of the rich. The business community was prepared to argue vehemently for the democratic distribution of Dawson's future.

This marked the last of the gross misapprehensions that Dawson's citizens would have concerning the cylindrical stone from the sky. The cylinder's passengers were by that time prepared to introduce themselves to the local representatives of Humanity.

THE INTRODUCTION

One of the boys of the town dashed into the tent, unable for a moment to speak because he had outrun his own breath. He ran to the head of the assembly and informed them in frantic tones that the rock had opened and that a shining serpent had emerged from it.

Those directly involved in the discussion at hand were ready to ignore the lad's wild prattling and perhaps cuff him sufficiently to impress upon him the foolishness of telling tall tales. However, curiosity got the better of many of the crowd, and they left the enclosure to see what, if anything, had emerged from the rock. Upon hearing their startled cries, the remainder of those assembled followed them out.

That was the saving of them, for scarcely had the last of the crowd left the tent, that it burst into flames. Black smoke boiled up from the blazing canvas. The drama of the horrifying scene was heightened by the dark clouds closing off the mid-afternoon sky. A solid shaft of yellow light winked briefly from the pit to the tent--the connection of illumination alerting some among the villagers to the startling activity in the pit. A giant metallic serpent rose tall and slender, bizarre and malevolent from the pit. When its single red eye glowed yellow, a shaft of light erupted and new flames leapt high from the tent.

A few further moments of observations would have revealed the true nature of the serpent: that it was not a metal snake, but a metal arm with the fire-producing apparatus in its fist. Attached to this tentacular appendage was a crab-like body of awesome proportions. On three tree-trunk sized legs, the giant stepped out of the Pit and stood mighty and terrifying, the master, if you will of all it surveyed. Or rather, the Martian master, for it was an engine of Martian mechanics, not entirely unlike a human locomotive steam engine.

This leviathan crustation was not alone in his domination of the landscape for a brother crab soon joined him to stand guard over the Pit, from which the Martians planned to produce several more of their kind.

The twin tripodal machines swung their fire-lanterns around and threw a few more bolts of flame here and there to convince any remaining humans in the area of the sincerity of their intent.

Alas, there were no humans left nearby to witness these final displays, for the people had each independently decided that the appearance of the

first metal giant was a matter that warranted long and careful deliberation in the privacy of one's own home, or perhaps even a restful visit to the home of a friend in another county.

The first giant, standing now on the ridge of earth around the pit as the summer rain began to patter down on its metal skin, noted the direction of the human retreat. Its occupant Martian scanned the distant landscape carefully until a flash of lightning illuminated the countryside and the site of human habitation known as Dawson's Landing. The off-world visitor had it in mind to obliterate any hope of human resistance by destroying the village.

It is to this decision the casual historian might point to as the first great Martian blunder. But, the mistake is easy to understand and forgive if one recalls that Mars, having long since lost most of its atmosphere and water into the Void, does not experience what we would call weather. The blunder was caused by lack of experience, and for all their earth-watching, their inability to peer through clouds.

When the first Martian machine raised his metal arm high over his metal head for a good clear shot at the innocents in Dawson's, in the midst of a summer, it would not not require a Missourian of particularly distinguished intellectual abilities to note that he was reaching for trouble.

It is perhaps more interesting, for a moment, to view the situation from the point of view of the lightning bolt. Now, here was an electrical discharge dashing about inside the swelling tide of black clouds, searching the ground for some likely target. The bolt must almost always settle for some odd tree or another, with a church steeple tossed in for variety. But, lo! Out of nowhere has appeared a monumental tripodal lightning rod reaching up above the trees, seeking out this particular lightning bolt. It would have been downright unfriendly to refuse this invitation!

The instant the bolt struck the tentacular arm, the Martian machine seemed to jump slightly, as if startled. The whole of the leviathan crab glowed blue. Then, its arms fell to its sides, its legs buckled, and the giant fell over.

It would be a mistake, also, to characterize this moment as the point of another Martian error, for as it has been noted, they had no reason to suspect one of their engines could be so easily disabled. They certainly did not anticipate its falling into the Pit and exploding, either.

Indeed, the unpredictability of these events undoubtedly made them all the more alarming to the surviving Martian in machine number two. The second crab wasted no time attempting to sift through the flaming debris in the Pit. The three legs that supported the machine were hinged near the mid-point, and now by using those hinges, and by taking very long steps, the remaining Martian contrived to stay as low as possible while he and his giant machine scuttled into the woods to hide.

The unfamiliar torrential weather continued through the night to confound any hope that might have been left to any surviving Martians in the Pit. Although ten hours of rainfall served to extinguish the fire in the Pit, it also half-filled the Pit with water.

THE HUMANS RESPOND

By their reaction to the fantastic apparition from the Pit, it is possible to divide the inhabitants of Dawson's Landing into two groups: those who ran, and those who ran to get their guns. The villagers who sought their weapons that they might defend their homes even against overwhelming forces, silently noted their own undaunted spirits and were encouraged the observation. The villagers who sought safety through escape, consoled themselves with the knowledge that numbered among the activities frowned upon in Christian scripture is suicide.

These townspeople, interested in the preservation of their families and themselves, dashed, as a group, to the center of town. Once they reached the church hall with reasonable certainty that they hadn't been pursued, they

fell, as people will, to discussing the nature of their peril. After several hours of discussion and debate, they had worked out pretty much to their satisfaction a logical explanation of the events. The stone that had fallen from the heavens--no one could yet say just what it was or why it had fallen, but that seemed unimportant--had, in striking the ground and gouging its crater, cracked a hole in the roof of Perdition. The sudden appearance of the flame-spouting serpent seemed likely the demonic equivalent of rapping the ceiling with a broom handle to quiet an upstairs neighbor. Or it might be a lower form of one of Perdition's indiginous inhabitants making a break for freedom. (In which case, those who had chosen to fight might argue, it made sense to contain the beast in his pit so that his master need not search all of Missouri for him).

With this interpretation of the events as the spectacles throught which they viewed the situation, their reaction to the next Martian provocation is easily understood. When, just at dawn the following morning, another falling star crossed the sky to strike the Earth with a familiar thunder, the populace of Dawson's had amongst them the single thought to hitch their wagons up and light out. They had spent the night in the sanctuary of the church hall, the last few hours in silence, but this new shock had the room instantly buzzing like a bee hive. Not quite five minutes later, the cry of "Steamboat a-comin'!" sailed in from the self-appointed watchboy, who would be dislodged from his proud dockside post by no mere cosmic cataclysm. The crowds obsession with escape now combined with a universal notion of the means for that escape. With scarcely a word between them they rushed from the church hall into the morning light and charged down to the docks with the intention of greeting that steamboat, and then seizing her.

THE SECOND FALLING STAR

The second falling star the townspeople had seen was, of course, the second Martian cylinder, the salvation for which the surviving crab-machine was waiting. Here were the reinforcements that would make the invading army invincible. Here was the insurance that any resistance from any pitiable human ingenuity could be quickly overcome. The bolt of fire the villagers had seen was a sign for all humanity to abandon hope.

The thunderous crack they had heard, however, was not its landing. The thunder was merely the cylinder's ricochet. Its landing was a splash. Due to an excellent job of piloting, the second cylinder had approached the ground at an extremely oblique angle. The intention was that this should decrease the shock of the impact. And perhaps it would have, had not an outcropping of granite not suddenly intervened. The cylinder struck the ground, slid along as expected until it reached the granite, whereupon it careened high into the air. The Martian in the surviving machine, who had raised his mammoth crab-machine once more to its full height that he might observe the coming of these, his saviors, watched, amazed and disbelieving, as the second cylinder, the remainder of the invading force, arced up into the sky, and then down into the Mississippi River.

Despite the sound drubbing the Martians were receiving by the hand of Providence, it would be a sad thing to overlook the valor with which a segment of humanity did respond to the invasion. This defiant spirit was most completely embodied in the person of Colonel Alexander Drew, leader of the Dawson's Landing Voluntary Militia. He was the most learned man in the town on the business of war, having read many books on the subject and having almost been involved in the most recent struggle in Mexico. From this store of experience and knowledge he now planned the militias campaign against the invaders.

Since the enemy was equipped with an engine capable of throwing fire, the situation seemed to demand they receive a return of artillery fire. Unfortunately, the only cannon in town was an ornamental relic rescued years before from the wreck of a French gunboat that had run aground at New Orleans. A keelboatman had brought the iron barrel upstream and, after being mortally wounded in a riverside brawl, bequeathed to the town of Dawson's Landing

in exchange for a proper Christian burial. His offer was accepted and the rusty cylinder was cleaned up and mounted in a flimsy frame. Alas, the inside of the barrel was left untouched and was flaking away, rusting back into the earth.

Howard Tolay, a carpenter widely respected for his handsome cabinetry and coffin-work, suggested that a catapult of medieval design might serve the cause. Given the right materials and assistance, he judged he could produce a first-rate catapult in four to five days.

That would not answer for Colonel Drew, who was anxious that they should meet the invaders sooner than that. Immediately, in fact. Grudgingly, the Volunteers gave in.

Thus deprived of artillery, the Colonel reasoned that he had only two operable military strategies open to him: to reconnoiter, and to flank. By reconnoitering the area they could keep watch of the enemy and note any weakness. By flanking they could be ready to exploit that weakness.

With a rousing speech outlining his tactical design, Colonel Drew led the proud warriors onto the field of battle. With skill and ingenuity they would reconnoiter and flank the Invader to his knees!

They spent most of the day reconnoitering, flanking only when one or another of the men reported sighting the enemy. Alas, they would only just have drawn themselves up for a mighty go at flanking, when it would become apparent the "enemy" was in this case only a deer or a dog that had followed them from town. They might've maneuvered in this fashion the entire night and the day as well had they not accidentally flanked into Myerson's Meadow just at dawn. They'd have marched right through the meadow, too, had not one of the men suddenly recognized the dreaded Pit, its walls now fallen down inside. Now here our Volunteers stood, frozen, two rows of nails ready to be driven into the ground. Fifty infinite, uncrossable yards stretched between them and the nearest tree. Their hearts in their throats, our warriors waited for that terrible of fire to cut them down.

"STEAMBOAT A-COMIN!"

The Princess of the Orient was a Mississippi steamboat of the first class. Pearly white decks and railings, trimmed in red and gold-leaf, with fixtures of brass; deck attendants uniformed in the same color scheme, buttons and epaulettes polished bright; twin chimneys, fancy-topped and with great volumes of black smoke boiling out of them, stretching tall. She was far more the picture of an other-worldly vessel than any mere rock.

The Captain stood on the texas deck, a proud sight in his regal uniform and cap, one hand on the spotless railing, the other raised in gesture to the mate. At his signal the bell sounded, the mighty wheels stopped, hesitated, then reversed momentarily, bringing the Princess to a full stop but a few yards from the dock.

A boarding stage craned out from the bow to the dock; perched at the tip of the stage was the crewman whose job it was to make fast to the dock. It was all-over a splendid display of precision and order, of seasoned men performing tasks they had performed a hundred times before and drilled a thousand. And it would have been finished with the usual proud sounding of the gauge-cocks, debarkation of passengers (were there any to debark), and exchange of cargo, had not the peaceful population of Dawson's Landing arrived on the dock at that moment.

The deckhand securing the boarding stage was unceremoniously tossed into the river as the first and the fastest made their way onto the suspended bridge and dashed for the boat.

Captain Samuel Putnam had a reputation as a serious man willing to take as much time as necessary in a difficult situation to weigh alternatives and make the correct decision. So it was, that, before the Captain could decide to move his boat out of danger, the bell again sounded and the mighty wheels seized the river and hauled the Princess backward. The Pilot--the true lord and master of the steamboat; he who guides his charge past shallows and

towhead; through impenetrable rain and fog and darkness; he who's hand truly moved the steamboat--had assessed the situation and lost not a moment in pulling the Princess beyond the reach of the charging townspeople.

The few villagers who had made it onboard were quickly and firmly in the hands of the deck crew. Captain Putnam made his way down to the main deck, while the Pilot put the Princess out to free water to continue the journey down-river. They must swing wide to clear the flats around Sloan's Curve before making the twenty easy miles to Royceburg.

Only as they rounded the tip of the bend did the story told by the invading villagers reach the Captain's ears. Thomas Dickans, who handled freight on the Dawson's dock and was thereby known to some of the members of the steamboat crew, was among the first who stormed the great vessel. He was delivered before the Captain to explain their motivation.

Dickans described in clear and lucid terms (and therefore wholly unbelievable), the incident that had led to the panic of the town. The story was interrupted once by the Second Mate's report of a peculiar raft in the water ahead.

Having calmly listened to as much of Dickans' wild tale as the Captain felt any reasonable man could be expected to tolerate, he ordered the freightman silent and proceeded to describe the penalties for piracy. The Captain was again interrupted by the Second Mate's report of, not a raft, but a strange sort of tower in the river.

Captain Putnam left Dickans with a stern gaze, then ascended once more to the texas deck to have a look at the obstruction before them.

Others on the deck were already staring in wonder at the moving tripodal tower they were approaching. It was as odd an item as Putnam had ever encountered in his many years on the river. Atop the three-legged frame was what could easily be construed as a sort of body and head, if one accepted as arms the two snaky projections on the sides. But far more striking than any crude resemblance to the human form was its movement. It was "walking" out into the middle of the river on those legs, and was keeping the arms out of the water. Then it seemed to notice the approaching riverboat, and turned to face it.

Captain Putnam stood staring. Now here was a puzzle that deserved a bargeload of consideration before action could be taken! Preferably from the other side of the river.

Once more the decision was made by the Pilot, who had reckoned that the novelty of the situation was such that, long before Putnam could make up his mind on a course of action, the Princess would be upon the walking tower, running it down. The bell rang once more, and again the giant wheels changed direction.

The pilot of the Martian machine was experiencing his own sort of directional problems. The force of the current against the machine's legs forced it to stagger. The invader was entirely unused to the presence of water in quantities larger than those suitable for immediate consumption. This sudden encounter with so incomprehensibly vast a drink as the Mississippi was bound to give him pause. But it was a shock coupled with elation, for here was the element for which he had rafted down the æther. Here was that element so rare and precious on Mars, the slow evaporation of which was bringing the evaporation of his civilization. For this element they had sent two cylinders of pioneers to begin the conquest of this new world and its savage inhabitants, and report back on their success or failure.

But wonderment and elation could not deter the Martian from his mission; somehow finding second cylinder, which rested on the river bottom. He swept those great iron limbs forward as he waded further into the full stream of the river's main current. He had hardly reached the spot he approximated to be the resting place of the second cylinder, when a new distraction was introduced that would require off of his attention. The Princess of the Orient was comin' round the bend.

The Princess had just gotten into heat-ray range when the order was given to reverse direction. The mammoth boilers that drove the paddlewheels were

heated to their limits as the engineer strove to gain enough power to fight the relentless current. Given a moment to maneuver, the Pilot would doubtless have gotten the Princess to slack water and turned her pack up-river. Unfortunately, the Martian did not allow him that moment.

Believing, as he did, that humans were responsible for the electrical discharge that felled his brother Martians, the master of the machine felt that he must act instantly to destroy the vessel that had steamed so impressively into view. The humans must be given no chance to use their horrendous weapons. He raised the arm of his awesome crab and sent a bolt of flame down upon the Princess.

His unsteadiness in the water caused his shot to be a mite wide, so that it struck the starboard paddlewheel. Amid the steam and smoke, the portions of the wheel that had not been completely incinerated were burning. The drive-shaft still gamely turned the fragments in their customary circle, lifting them high into the air and then plunging them into the quenching water, but it was a pitiful show with most of what had not been burned away now being torn off by the water.

The loss of the wheel caused the Princess to veer strongly to starboard and thereby present her port paddlewheel to the Martian's second shot. The port paddlewheel met the same fate as the starboard. Fire-bells rang and smoke clouded the decks.

Now powerless and aflame, the doomed vessel drifted helpless under the Martian's gun.

For the crew of the Princess, the occasion was unforgettable, not because of the destruction of their beautiful mistress, nor because that destruction was at the hands of a seemingly supernatural enemy, but because that calamity prompted Captain Putnam's first and only instantaneous decision. ABANDON SHIP!

A few of the larger, most-probably-bouyant articles about the deck were hurled overboard as a possible aid to weak swimmers before the passengers, crew, Captain, and finally the Pilot followed. The Princess was ablaze far beyond any hope of saving her. Flames enveloped the mid-section of the craft, and the superstructure began to collapse just before the current that was sweeping her along pushed her between the mighty metal legs of the Martian machine.

THE FATE OF THE INVADERS

Now here was a predicament.

Knocked off its legs by the force of the collision, the Martian machine was now seated atop the collapsed deckwork of the Princess. Inside the rapidly warming control chamber of the machine, the Martian was frantically attempting to puzzle out an escape from his entirely undignified situation. And, given a moment to consider the problem, he might have arrived at a workable solution. Unfortunately, the Princess did not give him that moment.

Directly beneath the Martian machine, where the fire was burning hottest, were the ship's boilers. Having contained a remarkable overload of pressurized steam when the Martian machine had sat down on the gauge-cock and bent closed the only possible safety-valve, the boilers evidently decided that they had gotten the Martian machine at the greatest disadvantage they could likely expect, and so, they let go.

Such was the magnitude of the explosion, that, not only were the two machines blown into unrecognizable fragments, but the sound was heard clearly as far away as Meyerson's Meadow.

It happened that this confrontation between Machine and Earth machine had transpired during the very same minutes in which our intrepid Dawson's Landing Volunteer Militia were making their last great flanking movement. Recognizing the enemy Pit they had petrified in their tracks, their hearts pounding like the blows of a woodsman's ax. But that tree never fell. The distant thunder so surprised them, they were startled out of their horror.

Unmilitary though it was, and over the Colonel's blustering, the troop cautiously perambulated to the edge of the Pit to discover what was holding up their destruction. Peeking in to find only fragments of metal and rock now visible amid the collapsed mud in the Pit our warriors now began to feel that the danger was at least momentarily passed. Reasoning that the Pit itself, being a gateway to Perdition, was the source of their woes, the conclusion the men came to was an obvious one, and one Cleb Howley never tired of pointing out he had suggested before their troubles began. In a general unspoken agreement, they began to fill in the Pit.

Thus the good men of Dawson's Landing entombed their chance for a most singular historical notoriety. The story of the metal monsters was told thereafter in whispered tones, but proof of the occurrence could never be produced. There will always be those people who do believe this story, and those people who do not. And the evidence lies waiting to be uncovered by a few hours of laborious digging. But those who do not believe will not take the trouble, and those who do believe will not take the risk.



((Mr. Twain, by a curious act of nature, looks and acts amazingly like SFSFSian Gary D. Douglas.))

