

IONISPHERE 3



**Journal of the National Fantasy Fan Federation
Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau
February 2017**

Seems from the cover that the magazine should be called Eye-on-a-Sphere, or Ionic Sphere, or Ions and Sphere, but No It Is, Ionisphere, our third issue and marking its first half year as a new N3F publication. We strive to please you each and every issue with good fantastic art. Parting ways with science a bit, our title has an I for an O in its spelling; put these two letters together and you get IO, which may be used as a brief reference to the title. Published bimonthly.

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vacancies: news, conventions, files, authors pages and blogs research.

Editorial

IONIC DRIVE

Building another issue, ready on the right and on the left for any action, things are coming along well, to my satisfaction. Now to provide the issue with a little traction, editorial notes from the Thiel faction. We have a lot of work to do here to make this department a real asset to the N3F. We're looking for interdepartmental contacts, interest and activity on the part of the membership. Something is keeping the NFFF inert, and I am wondering if that is not, perhaps, computer problems of some sort. Perhaps we can find where members need assistance with the operation of the system so that it will be properly tuned in to N3F activity. I keep running into glitches myself, and I'm doing all I can to clear up communications problems. Of course we can't change the computer system any, but we can explore the ins and outs of it so that communication is more effective. Theoretically, after two issues of Ionisphere I would be receiving email from the membership. It's easy to do an email and send it here, and something is inhibiting a process that would normally be occurring. It is not normal to receive no feedback on a publication that is integral to the NFFF. Are these computer problems, or is it the result of politicking behind the scenes, to the exclusion of making the overt

scene? Are there power struggles within the NFFF? There used to be, when I was a member over two decades ago. In fact, sometimes most of the action was power conflicts, as if it were the function of the NFFF to arrange itself according to one design or another and see who could make out in it how. People might have forgotten what the NFFF is supposed to be as a functioning organization, with activities that are beneficial to the membership. Take notice of the fine magazine that has been produced recently with story contest entrants having their stories distributed—that is success among people active in the creativity department, and a good example of what the organization is really meant to do. The revival of Tightbeam is a good thing, too, for it is therein that activities take place. Reviews and discussions are all in order.

Not that the structure of the organization is a matter of no account. It's interesting to see what can be done here, and how various projects work out. It's interesting to keep pace with science fiction, and when things seem to be lagging in the success of science fiction as a literature, to see what we can contribute. How the NFFF is run is always a matter of interest, and what's being done in it is *per se* also a matter of interest; there's a lot to be had from just functioning within it. But we don't want this to overwhelm what's within the organization, particularly since it gets bogged down in controversy which would be eased if we had other things in order. We want members to relate to one another, not show adeptness in conflict.

Of course, that's what the fan-pro coordinating bureau is all about, interrelationship, functioning together rather than as worthy antagonists. Save that for wargames. You have to function together even to have a wargame; there has to be something there, not just the action. Toward what purpose is NFFF activity headed? Perhaps toward itself—in the past I've pointed out to the NFFF that being in it is an end in itself—the factor of enjoyment and interest in literature has been lacking at various times. An artist wants to do art, not sell it. Being an artist need not have a profit. Art is one of those things that money can buy; if you have money, you can go to a movie. So where is our satisfaction with being in the NFFF? Do we want to go somewhere else from here? You have it made when you are a member of an organization, now all you want is for there to be something going on in that organization.

That's what we want here: valid interaction between fans and pros, to make us the unity in science fiction that is so necessary in the pursuit of literature.

In demonstration of what was said above, our first interview is with a former NFFF member who is now an author.

IONISPHERE INTERVIEWS PAULETTE FORSHEY

George Phillies told Paulette Forshey that she might do an interview for Ionisphere in the following message: I have been telling people, not entirely effectively, that supernatural and scientific modern romance novels are part of science fiction, widely defined, and am delighted to hear from a writer who produces them. As you were a member 35 years ago, you may remember the Fan-Pro Activities Coordinating Bureau. BuHead John Thiel has very recently returned after an extended time elsewhere and is again producing zine Ion*isphere, dealing with fan and pro activities and interviewing fen and pros. You would clearly be an interesting choice.

He also asked her about rejoining the NFFF and she said she might consider it.

I also encouraged her to rejoin when I got the interview ready. She said, "I'd love to do an interview for you!" and sent me a bio to help get things started. Here is that bio:

J. Paulette Forshey is an award-winning author who lives in a small Ohio town with her husband and a rescue Papillion. Her mornings belong to her writing, her days are spent loving her eight grandbabies, and her nights belong to her husband, the inspiration for her heroes.

Paulette writes romance in the categories of paranormal, fantasy, contemporary, and erotica. She is a two times winner (2011-2013) of the Northeast Ohio Writers of America Book in a Year contest, Published Author Novella division, 1st place Winner, National Fantasy Fan Federation Short Story Contest, 1st place winner, Midwest Writers' Conference: Non-Fiction Great Beginnings, and she was a staff writer for nine years with Celestial Toybox (zine of The National Museum of Science Fiction) and part of their issue #16 which won the Star Wars Star Awards "Best 2000 Multi Media Zine" award. In addition, she's been a featured author on the WordShack dot com International Web Site.

She is a PAN (Published Author Network) member of the Romance Writers of America, and a member of the Central Ohio Fiction Writers, Southeastern Ohio Novel Writing Group, Northeast Ohio Romance Writers of America, and the Fantasy, Futuristic & Paranormal Chapter of RWA. At present she's published with Sizzler Editions, a division of Renaissance E-Books and an Independent Published Author on Create Space and Smashwords. Her past associations are with Whispers Publishing and Every Night Erotica.

You can find her at: www.jpauletteforshey.com and paulette.forshey@facebook.com , Also J. Paulette Forshey Award winning author of Deliciously Sinful Romances at www.jpauletteforshey.com , a different

setting on the part of the reader writing her from this perspective, I assume. Her email here is wylakat58@yahoo.com and her website is <http://www.jpauletteforshey.com>

And now the interview.

IO: What was your NFFF story contest winner about? Could you give me the name of the story and describe writing it?

PF: The story title was "For Sale: Quaint Two-story Stone Cottage." It was about a realtor who was trying to sell a cursed cottage.

IO: Was the story written prior to your publishing anything professionally? Did it contribute anything to your going on to professional writing?

PF: Yes, it was written before I signed my first contract in 2010. Winning the first place and the prize of \$50 was a huge ego boost which spurred me on to bigger goals.

IO: What years were you a member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation?

PF: 2002 if I remember correctly.

IO: You speak, in biographical notes at your site, of some supernatural occurrences. Has the supernatural been a part of your life?

PF: Yes, all my life. I've had several dreams and premonitions that have come true and once met a ghost that offered me tea and well wishes in a hospital in Missouri. I'm a Wiccan/Pagan and my husband, who was the one in the hospital for an emergency appendectomy, thought it was funny that a deceased nun would show herself to me of all people. I still have the wooden rosary she gave me.

IO: Do you write in any particular *genre*?

PF: Romance and in sub-genres of contemporary, paranormal, fantasy and erotica. I believe in Happily Ever Afters and think there isn't enough of them in the world.

IO: Do you keep very close to science fiction and fantasy? Do you read Analog, Asimov's, and/or F&SF Magazine?

PF: I used to read F&SF years ago, but I haven't kept up with it. I mostly read Romance Writers of America's monthly magazine now.

IO: How important do you think fantasy is to the novels you write?

PF: Very important, when I write paranormals and fantasy stories the "world" building must be on target and believable or the readers won't go past page one.

IO: What fellow writers of fantasy romances do you like?

PF: Maggie Shayne, Mercedes Lacky, Elaine Bergstrom, and Mary Buckham to name a few.

IO: Have you ever attended a science fiction or fantasy convention or conference?

PF: MARCON in Columbus, Ohio. I've attended several times and plan to go back.

IO: Is there anything else you would like people to know about yourself and your writing?

PF: I have one book out and hope to have a second book out next year in my TARCZAL series. I hope everyone will love my "new breed of biters" as much as I do. I have books with ghosts and angels, too.

Paulette also sent a copy of her N3F award story, which will appear later on in this issue.

News

Did you know:

Several sf and fantasy magazines have Facebook sites? Search them by name: Analog, Asimov's, F&SF, and Weird Tales.

Bewildering Stories, a weekly, publishes fan fiction.

There are numerous fan sites at Facebook: SF FANDOM, FANEDS, FAANEDS, SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF FANNISH FANDOM, FANHISTORY, SCIENCE FICTION, SCIFI FANDOM, FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association) and N3F (our own at Facebook).

SFF Forums has numerous forums for sf and fantasy fans.

Surprising Stories, <http://surprisingstories.thiels.us> has science fiction by fans and pros, and a fandom column.

efanzines, <http://efanzines.com> has a wide selection of recent fanzines on display.

Wikipedia has science fiction and fandom information for research.

Fancylopedia 1, 2, and 3 are available on the net.

IONISPHERE INTERVIEWS RICHARD LUPOFF



Richard Lupoff has a long background both as a fan and as a professional writer of science fiction and other forms of writing. He was in a sort of general movement when a lot of fans were turning pro, among them Harlan Ellison and Terry Carr, and there was a lot of talk in fanzines about all the fans who were becoming professional writers. Some of that talk was in YANDRO, and it wasn't so long before its editors, Robert and

Juanita Coulson, joined them, along with their columnist Eugene Deweese. It was a kind of turning point in fan-pro transitions and for a long while was improving fan and pro relations, with remarks being made in the magazines about all the new writers who were coming out of fandom. Recently he was seen in F&SF with one of his time-binding short shorts about a man trapped in a day. It took the man over a decade between the first and the second story to escape. His email is lupoff1975@att.net . On with the interview:

IO: You're said to have been notable in fandom before becoming a professional writer. We know you had a fanzine called XERO, and were active otherwise. Can you describe your various activities and associations, with your own fanzine and the fanzines to which you contributed? In other words, the milieu at that time?

RL: Actually I became a professional writer before getting into fandom. I was fifteen years old, and worked as a "stringer" covering high school sports for many newspapers and radio stations, including *The New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Newark Star-Ledger*, and *Philadelphia Inquirer*. I was a student at a dreadful boarding school at the time, was already an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy, and at the age of seventeen published my first fanzine, SF52.

In science fiction I found a field that valued intelligence and creativity, and this became a central part of my life. In fandom I found a community that valued these same qualities, that was welcoming and supportive.

The fanzines that I read were QUANDRY, published by Lee Hoffman, SLANT published by Walt Willis, OOPSLA! Published by Gregg Calkins, FANTASY TIMES published by Jimmy Taurasi and Frank Prieto, and a marvelous little offset-printed double fanzine, printed Ace Double fashion, COSMAG/SCIENCE FICTION DIGEST. I believe that the editor was Henry Burge, but I'm not sure.

The fan community was relatively small in those days. It was one of those "everybody knows everybody" situations. Worldcons would draw a few hundred members, and of course there was no such thing as the Internet, so most fanac was based on paper correspondence or through fanzines.

XERO came much later—in 1960. I'd been through high school, college, a few years in the army, been married and started a career in the computer business. My wife, Pat, and I had planned this as a conventional science fiction fanzine, but Xero took on a life of its own and turned into a broad-based journal of popular culture. Many historians credit Xero with being the first significant magazine devoted to the comic book as a serious cultural phenomenon.

If anything, I suppose I'd have to say that Xero was a victim of its own success. Circulation grew from 90 to 300. Page count grew from 30 to 100. We added color pages and gatefold inserts. Everybody loved the magazine and we won a Hugo in 1963, but by that time careers and a growing family competed for time and energy, and we had to cease publication.

IO: What was your first professional science fiction sale?

RL: In the early 1960s I started moonlighting as an editor at Canaveral Press. At my employers' request I wrote my first book, EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS: MASTER OF ADVENTURE. This was non-fiction, of course, and after more than fifty years it's still in print. I tried writing short stories with no notable success, but my friend James Blish suggested that I try a novel instead. He argued that the novel was a more forgiving and less rigid literary form than the short story.

I thought that was pretty silly. I remember saying to Jim, "I can't dig a foxhole and you want me to shovel out the Grand Canyon." But Jim persisted, and with the support of my wife, Pat, and friend Andrew Porter, I produced three sample chapters and an outline of a novel called ONE MILLION CENTURIES. I showed the proposal to Terry Carr at Ace Books. He wanted to buy the book but his boss, Donald Wollheim, vetoed the idea, in part, as he put it, "I notice that your protagonist is a Negro and we know that Negroes don't read books so who would buy this one?"

Next I showed the proposal to Larry Shaw, an editor at the old Lancer Books. He said he'd have to get approval from one of the publishers there, Irwin Stein and Walter Zacharius. I'm not sure which of them signed off on the book, but Larry got me a contract and the book was published successfully by Lancer in 1967 and later reprinted by David Hartwell at Timescape/Pocket Books.

I finally did sell a short story, with Frederik Pohl's encouragement. Oddly, although Pohl was editing GALAXY at that time, he didn't actually buy the story. Ed Ferman bought it and ran it in THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. And since then I've lost count of how many short stories I've sold. I'd guess, around 100.

IO: Rather outstandingly, a three-part-story about time paradoxes appeared in F&SF over a period of thirty years, the titles relating to a time of day. Would you describe what you had in mind in writing these stories? They appeared to be a kind of jape. Did you hear a lot back about these stories? We'd like to look behind the scenes a bit about the circumstances surrounding this ongoing fictional exploit.

RL: Did I hear a lot back? Are you kidding? The first of these stories, "12:01 PM", was made as a 30-minute TV film, scripted and directed by Jonathan Heap and starring Kurtwood Smith. It was an academy award finalist. Then there was a feature-length film called simply "12:01" starring Martin Landau, Jonathan Silverman, and Helen Slater.

There was also a serious uproar when a film called GROUNDHOG DAY was released, with large chunks copied from 12:01 PM. The result was a lot of lawyering but no settlement, and I finally dropped the matter as too much of a headache to continue.

As for a "jape"? Certainly not. 12:01 PM was a very serious story, a piece of metaphoric autobiography. Myron Castleman ("I am the MAN in my CASTLE") was my stand-in. He was doomed to

relive the same crushing hour over and over. I had felt, in the late 1960s, that I was doomed to a drab corporate career while I wanted to sit in front of my tomato-red Selectric and write books. A number of my works are autobiographical, and 12:01 definitely falls into that category.

The story (and the 30-minute film) end on a note of despair. Many years later I took pity on poor Myron Castleman and wrote 12:02 PM, in which he escapes from his time trap. 12:03 PM describes a further adventure, and there's a plot for 12:04 PM slowly taking shape in my brain.

IO: What would you list as your science fiction and fantasy works? We were not able to find a really clear bibliography on the internet.

RL: Several years ago Dave Nee created a pretty good bibliography of my works. It appeared in my collection *BEFORE 12:01 AND AFTER* (Fedogan and Bremer). More recently my editor at Bold Venture Press, Audrey Parente, created a more up-to-date and more comprehensive bibliography, which is included in my collection *DREAMERS' DOZEN*. I recommend the Parente bibliography because it includes many works published more recently than the Nee version.

You'll also find a pretty good bibliography on the ISFDB (Internet Science Fiction Data Base) website.

IO: Do you still take part in science fiction fan activities? Do you attend conventions?

RL: Some years ago my friend Frank Robinson asked if I would consider getting back into fandom. I'd never considered that, but I finally devised a reply, "No." Frank asked "Why Not? Do you have anything against the fans?"

"Not at all. My years in fandom were some of the happiest and most enjoyable times of my life. I have nothing but good feelings about the fan community and gratitude for my grand experiences in fandom, and nothing but good wishes for today's fans.

"But those days were a past chapter in my life. Now it's somebody else's turn to do those things. I could no more put on a propeller beanie and become a fan again than I could go back to college and become a frat boy again or re-enlist in the army and become a soldier again."

I do occasionally contribute a piece to a fanzine, but very, very seldom. Pat and I do attend the annual Southern California Collectable Book Show and Sale, held in Glendale each spring. And I do bookstore readings and similar events from time to time. But as to major conventions, as I said, I'll be in the cheering section but it's really the turn of another generation to get out on the field and have all that fun.

IO: Were there meeting places in New York City where you met such people as Pohl and Blish or did you see them at conventions?

RL: There was a long history of science fiction fan clubs in New York. Once I was out of the army and Pat and I were living in Manhattan, we became active members of the Fantasy Film Club—a group run

by Chris Steinbrunner, who was film manager for a TV station and set up a wonderful series of screenings. Remember, this was before videos. Once a film was out of the theaters, it was almost impossible to get access to a print, but Chris had all the right connections and the club put on many memorable screenings.

As for more mainstream science fiction clubs, we joined the New Futurians (a revival of a club of the 1930s and 40s). In the fashion of such groups, there were weird fan politics that led to the breakup of the club, but out of its broken parts there emerged the Fanoclasts. This group attracted many present or would-be pros including Algis Budrys, Larry Shaw, Lee Hoffman, Ted White, and cartoonist Steve Stiles.

James Blish had been a member of the original Futurians, and we invited him to join the revived club, but he was commuting weekends to Milford, Pennsylvania and the club met Friday nights, so he was unable to participate. Still, we became friends and Jim would occasionally join us at a favorite restaurant for dinner, or we would exchange visits between our apartment on the Upper East Side and his *pied a terre* in Little Italy.

I didn't know Frederik Pohl nearly as well as I knew Jim Blish, but we may have met at a meeting of the Hydra Club, a sort of forerunner of SFWA that met periodically in New York. We struck up more of a postal relationship, although I do recall a telephone conversation that we had not very long before his death. He had remained active and his mind was still sharp when he was in his nineties.

IO. What do you think about today's science fiction as compared to earlier days?

RL. My reading is pretty varied nowadays. The two most recent books I've read were *THE MANOR*, a huge, brilliant novel by Isaac Bashevis Singer set mainly in nineteenth century Poland, and *THE WATCHER AT THE DOOR*, a collection of science fiction, fantasy, and horror stories by Henry Kuttner, all of them published between 1937 and 1940. That won't tell you anything about present-day science fiction.

My general impression, however, differs from Sturgeon's Law ("90% of everything is crap"). Rather, I believe that the normal distribution curve applies to science fiction of any era. There are a few pieces of utter garbage that somehow manage to make their way into print...and also a few works of sheer genius...and the great mass of writing that falls between those two statistical book-ends.

I'll only mention two relevant books that I've read recently. One is *VERSION CONTROL*, a very long and staggeringly brilliant science fiction novel by Dexter Palmer. The other is *THE BURIED GIANT*, a wildly overrated, vaguely Tolkienesque fantasy novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. By all means, read the Palmer book and by all means avoid the Ishiguro!

Paulette Forshey sent a copy of her story that won the NFFF story contest:

FOR SALE: QUAIN TWO-STORY STONE COTTAGE



By Paulette Forshey

The Realtor stood there unaffected by the beauty surrounding him. Because he truly knew all about the cottage, its appeal quickly faded away. The whiteness of the picket fence and quaint two-story cottage would have blinded the eye if rose vines hadn't softened the glare. Those lush green vines and deep-red flowers were a beguiling splendor. Their fragrance permeated well beyond the confines of the sharpened picketry with an excessive sweetness, a scent that seemed to coat one's teeth and mouth with a sugary substance by just taking a whiff.

He watched as the couple exited their car, and in pure reflex, he glanced back towards the cool, shadowed woods, surveying the area for any movement. Noting a slight rustle here and there of the undergrowth, he glanced upwards and sighed in relief. *"The sun was still high enough in the sky he should have plenty of time to show the cottage before..."* He shook his head as though this would help him clear his mind of the thoughts that had crept in. Turning his attention back to the couple, he unconsciously began drumming the fingers of one hand on the hood of his car. The young husband and wife broke into smiles catching sight of the cottage, and the Realtor smiled too. The cottage and grounds always had just enough whimsical wildness to its orderliness to charm even the most die-hard unromantic. To those who lived and breathed romance, well, sighed the Realtor to himself, it was like an aphrodisiac, and these two were certainly romantics. As the couple approached him, his attempt at a sincere smile was nearly betrayed by the slight twitching of one corner of his mouth.

He took them upstairs to see that area first. He was not going to show *this* couple the cellar...that cursed dark hole. "You should see the master bathroom. It has a beautiful mosaic tiled hot tub big enough for four people." The Realtor rambled on, listing this item and that about the upstairs as he led them into the room. "Indeed, the master bedroom is suitable to include a small office. In this corner you could place one of those antique writing desks. You did mention you collected antiques." He prompted then let them

chat as his thoughts drifted. *"Antiques. Old things. Ancient things. Things that no man should know exist. Oh, Bloody Hell, he'd still love to burn this place down. No, he gritted his teeth. No, he'd tried to do that once and learned to value the old woman's parting words the hard way."* His left hand flexed its fingers around the handle of the cane it rested on, the cane that was now a constant reminder of that mistake.

Two weeks after he'd shown the cottage for the third time and lost another prospective buyer to the creatures, he thought to take matters into his own hands. The fire had caught nicely at first. Only instead of following the path he'd made for it, the flames behaved as if they had a mind of their own. They leapt onto him, eating at the flesh of his left leg even as he tried to smother the flames with his jacket. It wasn't until he begged the forgiveness of the cottage for his transgression that the flames died out, leaving him with a twisted blackened limb as a reminder of the bargain he'd made.

The couple milled around the room, and he closed his eyes as his thoughts flew back six months before when he'd signed the papers that gave him ownership to this place. He'd been very pleased with himself that day. First for the bargain, he'd made, and second for profit he was already tallying up in his mind. That's when the old woman had smiled. Then before the ink was barely dry, when the few antique coins she'd insisted on being paid with had passed from his hand to hers, she'd laughed a dry brittle laugh. With eyes ancient, Hematite dark and shining, she told him just how much his bargain and profit were truly worth.

"Heed my words." She spat the utterance at him, shaking one puny, gnarled finger in his face. "Heed my words, merchant of abodes. By only silver and coin may ye rid yourself of this accursed home. Without any heirs of my own, I was forced to do as those in time past must and what you must do now. This house you have purchased for silver and coin now rests on what was once the lair of the Dark Lord of Toberon. Silver and coin, cold and hard, must pass from hand to hand, that was his curse. To try all else will lash ye back three times fold. Ages past when man was but a feeble thing crawling about on this earth, Great Dragons, Wizards, Fairy Kings and Queens, and Dark Lords ruled unchallenged. One such Dark Lord, the Lord of Toberon, stole a Great Dragon's Fairy Bride. Not for love or lust did he do this deed, but for mere silver and coin did he. The Great Dragon who worshipped his new bride understood lust and love, but something unimportant as cold, hard, silver and coin were beyond his realm of reasoning. His bride stolen by the Lord of Toberon was killed trying to escape those who had bought her. The Great Dragon's grief was so vast he cursed the Dark Lord and those who had bought the Fairy Bride for all times to come, trapping them to this plot of earth and turning them into feral minions. As was the first bargain, and this ye just struck. All bargains that ye make of this place must be done between a day's setting sun and a new moon's full bloom, or the beasties of Toberon will overrun not only ye nights...but thee days as well."

Now, he was a man schooled better than most of his boyhood chums. A man who was known to keep his wits and wallet about him at all times. He remembered laughing at the old woman and originally thought her to be quite senile if not melodramatic, until she introduced him to the *other* inhabitants of the cottage, or to be more precise the cottage's cellar. He shivered in revulsion of *that* particular memory. She had taken him to a narrow door nearly hidden, nestled between a wall and a shelved storage case in the far reaches of the pantry. Down into the cellar she led him; he found his will would not let him do anything else but follow her. She had spread her thin, frail arms wide and proclaimed, "These are the descendants of the Dark Lord's and his minions of which the world and even time has forgotten." Horrified, he stood as they had gathered eagerly around him watching, grinning and drooling as the old

woman introduced them to their new keeper.

The Realtor tore himself from his thoughts as he watched the couple inspecting the room. So alike, and yet he hoped so unlike the last couple that had viewed the house—well, at least he was able to cover up that. He shuddered as if cold. The husband noticed.

"Is there a draft by that window?"

"No, oh no, there isn't, but please feel free to see for yourself." The Realtor stepped to one side as the man came over to the window. The young man ran his hand around the glass and frame. The woman disappeared behind a narrow door. Both men were suddenly startled, the Realtor more, when the young wife squealed shrilly as if harmed in some way. The Realtor glanced out the window as they hurried over to her. "*The sun was still high enough, wasn't it?*" he thought. "*Besides, they never came up this far into the cottage, well, that he knew of they didn't.*"

"Oh, Jonathan, the closets are huge!" the young woman gushed. "I never would have guessed! This house must have many surprises to it."

The Realtor feebly smiled, relieved. "*If they only knew,*" he pondered to himself. Then, "*Oh, dear*" as the wife insisted on inspecting the kitchen next. The prospective couple was opening and closing cupboard and closet doors in the kitchen. Peering in, glancing about, the woman would occasionally make a sniffing sound as she checked for heaven only knew what odor. He knew there wasn't, shouldn't be any smell. The lime *should have* taken care of that. Oh, how he wished they would clean up after themselves.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a small dark form dart around a corner. He jerked his head around. Did the couple see what he had? No, they did not seem to notice. He hoped it had been a mouse and not...no, he would not think what else it might have been. Perspiration broke out on his forehead. He mopped at it with his handkerchief and then, spying a small muddy taloned handprint on the wall, wiped it away quickly. Smiling weakly at the couple, he mumbled something about the heat, hoping the couple hadn't observed his actions. He made a mental note to fasten the cellar door more securely, since it appeared they were becoming bolder now that no one was living in the cottage. "*This would not do. This would not do at all,*" he mused.

The man moved over to and entered the pantry. The Realtor held his breath, praying and yet knowing his prayers would not be answered. The young man stepped back out into the kitchen. "There's a door way back inside here, where does it lead?"

"Door? Really, are you sure? I wasn't aware of another door." The Realtor nervously smoothed down his tie.

"Yes, there is a door, and that seems to be where the funny smell is coming from." The young man stepped back into the pantry, his wife following him. She stepped closer to the door. "Yes, there is a door, where does it lead?" The man moved over to the cellar door, grasping the doorknob. First, he twisted it, and then gave it a hard jerk. The door remained stubbornly stuck.

"*Please don't let him ask me to open that door. Please don't let him ask me.*" He prayed silently, to himself. "*Let him move on to another room.*"

The man stared at the cellar door and wrinkled his nose. "What is that funny smell?" The Realtor did detect some unusual scent. "*Could they have dragged something home on their own?*" he wondered.

The Realtor fumbled in his pockets. "It must be a basement." Basement sounded much better than cellar, but the word *cellar* described perfectly what it was. Basements were dry, clean, smooth-walled, hard

solid floored, with lights, many lights, lots of light.

This place had none of those things and plenty of...other...things.

A wetness that seeped up into and on the partially concrete floor to form intricate delicate patterns of symbols and writings long since forgotten or perhaps never known to man. Stones cut to fit expertly together forming walls that even the thinnest blade of a knife could not clip between their seams, walls that nothing should have been able to pass through but *some things* did. Walls and overhead rough beams glowed brightly with a luminescent purple mold that at times appeared to expand and contract as though it might be breathing. Shadows that flickered, fluttered, and became frightfully cold.

He patted his jacket and fumbled in his pockets. "I must have the key to that door here somewhere." *"Why must they always find the cellar and ask to see it?"* Unfortunately, he knew the answer to that question.

The couple was beginning to eye him suspiciously.

He wanted to be rid of this house and everything that came with it, but at what price. *"Oh, please don't let this end like the last viewing. Let them wait until the time is right."* He repeated this over and over in his mind as he placed the key in the lock and slowly turned it. He stepped to one side, allowing them to go first. They oohed and ahhed at the rich seasoned oak lining the corridor leading down into the cellar. Since the cellar door swung inward to open, one could not see the deep grooves and gouges to the back of the door. These could only be seen once the door was closed. Thankfully, the mold that grew back daily to cover the stone stairs like a carpet (which many thought it to be on first sight) hid the deep scratches left forever embedded on their surface. The couple didn't notice that upon seeing a shadow flickering dancingly on the wall ahead. The Realtor first hung back, and then silently crept up the stairs as best he could to shut the door behind them.

The prospective couple continued on to round the corner into the dimly lit orifice oohing and ahhing at the patterns on the floor.

The Realtor came out the front door, locking up carefully. He looked up to the sky. The sun was beginning its descent. Those in the woods waited, watched and drooled. Small, only three or four feet in height, they were naked save for the thick dark hair that covered their bodies. Their eyes would glow red in the approaching eve-light matching the crimson of their wide mouths where many sharp teeth glowed dully. Those in the woods waited, watched and drooled. The Realtor entered his car and drove away at a leisurely speed. There was no need to hurry. There would be no sale today, he mused. He would be back in the morning to clean up any leftovers and dispose of the car. Those in the woods waited, watched and drooled. The Realtor's car disappeared around a bend out of sight. Those in the woods scampered joyously to the house to join those already in the cellar, grinning and drooling as they hurried.



Quote from Clark Ashton Smith

“The amber sail was taut with the favoring wind, and the barge sped onward all that day, cleaving the amaranth waters with its dark prow that reared in the carven form of an ebony goddess.”



End of Issue

