

TIGHTBEAM

109



"Yohimbe Inside an African Tomb"

NFFF

Editor: Dave Minch 3146 Smokecreek Ct. Atlanta, Ga. 30345 ; Irvin Koch, Scotty Matthews & Co. This issue only.

For Sept 1 & Nov 1 Deadlines--- Ed: Lynne Holdom P.O.Box 5 Pompton lakes, NJ 07442.

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Have I Got a Girl for You

TIGHTBEAM is proud to present these stories, from the N3F 1978/79 Short Story Contest. The winner this year was Rick Reichman. Rick's winner is tied up with other commitments. Have I Got a Girl for You was another of Rick's entries. It was almost a finalist. ###

Sharon ran out on him. It was always the same. He was in the middle of the sentence. She interrupted. "Psssst. Psssst. Psssst..." and his synthetic creation dropped amorously to the floor.

He picked up the mass of plastic tissue, the fabric muscle and wire circuits and dropped them into a heavy canvas sack. He reated a minute and then began to drag the slumping and sliding sack down the basement stairs. Under "spluss", "splusb", "clump", the step accepted the burden. The dragging was the worst part. The squeaking always sounded like his mother and he hated listening to his mother go on, and on, and...

He mimicked his mother's voice in his mind. "It's what you get when you mess with the goyim."

"Sharon was a nice girl, Mother."

"Nice girl, schmice girl. Did she go to Synagogue on Friday night?"

"Mama, please."

"Next time, a Jewish girl. I'm telling you for your own good, Herbie."

"You don't understand, Mama."

"What, don't understand. You're so smart Herbie, down in that stinking basement all day. No wonder they run out. Find a nice girl, one of your own. Get a good dowry from her."

"Bye-bye, Mama." He dropped the contents of the bag into (his own creation) the atomic body autoclave.

"Another one," he sighed as the hum of the machine filled the otherwise soundless room. Sharon had lasted the longest. Sharon was so good. Sharon was...but what the hell. It didn't take long to build one of them now. Sharon was completed in three, well, okay, four hours.

The Machine silenced, and the process was ready to begin again. He arranged the bones, and muscles exactly right. The facial cartilage was paramount. Sharon's nose had been bobbed too short, now that he thought about

it, and her hair had not been thick enough. She was cute, but not beautiful. This one would be strawberry blonde. She'd have a wide smile, and large, sincere blue eyes. She would be intelligent too, or at least well educated. The memory cells that formed her brain glowed from the tape images which were being implanted. Her program would be:

Gloria Connors. Attended Vanderbilt University. Graduated Extraterrestrial Socio-Psychologist in 2078. Had a number of affairs with Aliens (of which she wasn't even aware until many years, and much knowledge-- never learned at her prestigious University--later). Met Herbie Rothenberger after he won the 2080 Nobel Prize for Medicine.

Standard information after that, the first few dates, the magic bubbling love. Herbie played the remaining imagea into the well shaped figure. He turned on the buttons under the table and began the final fusion process.

In a while she'd be walking. In a couple of hours or so he'd have her upstairs on the mattress covered floor of the bedroom. With romance in full blossom he would...

Mama called to him again. "What's she this time, Herbie?" Herbie didn't answer her question; he hadn't thought about it.

Not Jewish, certainly. He didn't want his mother running his life. But what would she be? His mother complained whichever. Hindu, Zen, Moslem, Atheist, Catholic, Protestant, it didn't matter much to her. He figured whatever he made the girl his mother would still say,

"Shiksa one, and half dozen of the other."

-oo-

Deadly Things

Second place winner was Robert Sampson, who also placed two stories among the finalists. Now, if my notes are correct, Deadly Things was the prize winner and here it is. ###

When Bob Cochrane found the skeletons, he was hacking a wine cellar into the face of Monte Sano Mountain.

Monte Sano is rumored to be the Indian for Mountain of Healthful Air. The Indians likely didn't use that spelling. If the truth were known, they likely didn't call it that either. Regardless. The Mountain rears like a flat-topped wall along the east edge of Huntsville in Alabama. Eleven hundred feet high, it bars migration from the east and direct television transmission from Atlanta.

Bob owned a fragment of land high on the West face. His part acre was mostly vertical. The few level parts were studded by limestone chunks fallen among hickory and walnut.

Altogether an improbable place for a wine cellar. But enologists take on queerly.

His intuition was to sit in a fine and private place, glass in hand. Below would glitter the Huntsville panorama, energetically described as diamond cascades of light foaming across ex-cotton fields. The immediate problem was to open the fine fat crevice he had selected in the face of his cliff.

Two days of grunting sweat widened the entrance and cleared part of the floor. That got him an irregular hole into the cliff, about the size of a twenty-dollar carpet. It terminated in a tumble of rocks at the back wall.

These he attacked with zeal. Intuition told him that behind opened ever more yawning chasms, cool and dry, offering dark wonders.

Intuition failed him. What he found was a two by three shaft rising, through solid stone, into upper darkness. It was no larger than a broom closet.

With a skull in it.

It was small, not very white, half buried in blackish dust.

Feeling strongly that he would not like to put fingers into that soil, he hunted up a stick and fished out the skull. It promptly fell into pieces.

Perhaps an Indian burial place, very sacred, where the chief's much loved son...

When he thrust in the stick again, a long bone showed. Then a rib. Two ribs. And another skull, also small, looking out blankly from this place of death.

As he teased this up, a woman's voice behind him said sharply: "Stop that. Have you no respect?"

He jerked smartly from the shaft. He tried to turn and stand at the same time, unsuccessfully. Sprawled backward over some blocks and successfully rapped his elbow on the wall.

Then he got a look at her and forgot his elbow.

Without question, he looked at a ghost.

It, or she, was an angular, dejected woman, her hair tightly pulled into a bun. She seemed almost fifty, dressed in yesterday's shoddy. It did not fit well. Below the knees, she became insubstantial.

While Bob goggled at the rock showing clearly through her knees, she said:

"I sincerely hope that you will leave these poor children in peace."

"Er..."

"It is my unfortunate duty to care for them after death, as it was once my duty to care for them in life." She said this in a dispirited voice. "Therefore I must insist that you immediately seal this... last resting place."

"Cave." He was not quite up to full sentences.

"This cave. I insist on performing my duty."

"How'd they get cave. I mean, into. Er."

She sighed, a dreary gray sound. "They were without hope. Without future. Without means. Unwanted they were brought into the world by ignorant and indifferent parents, and, unwanted, fared nothing more pleasurable than a life of deprivation and misery. Moore was more keenly aware of this than I, being a person of character and sensibility, and so, in order that their sufferings not be unduly prolonged, I brought them here, an act of charity and kindness for which I am most unjustly punished."

Cochrane pried himself off the wall. In a voice full of tin overtones, he asked: "You sealed them in?"

"Certainly not. I am not an artisan." The dull eyes flashed. "I am a woman of education, a teacher of the young. I fed them generously till they slept, then placed them in the entrance at the top of the cliff, so that, for them, the impending pain and agony of a life already unpromising were then averted.

"There were only two or three of them," she added.

He felt light-headed confusion and eyed the door. "The fact is..." His voice wobbled.

"That I appear to you at all is merely to enhance my plea that the bones of these poor unfortunates be decently left undisturbed, so that I may continue my vigil."

A vision of gleaming five-gallon jugs lined in limestone cool flickered in his mind. "You mean, you're here all the time?"

"I guard them evenings and nights. Days I visit Huntsville, a town of increasing vulgarity and moral decline. The library is adequate!"

"I work at the Arsenal, myself."

"The rocket development is of some interest to a person of modest scientific interests. Although it is exceedingly noisy. Now, replace your work and go."

"I'll do this much for you. I'll collect the bones and have them buried..."

"No!" Her dull face twisted and he felt his skeleton turn to ice.

"You will not touch the children. They are fragile. If you move them, the bones will turn to dust. I have a... duty to perform. To guard and watch and see no harm comes to them."

He thought that she had contributed about all the harm that could reasonably come to them. "This is my property and I need it."

"Heed it." Spoken with bitter contempt.

"... and I can't use it with the skeletons..."

"If you disturb them, I will do what I must do, to protect them."

"Now, lady."

"I beg you as a poor woman, unfairly judged, whose kindest deeds have been misinterpreted in the most high-handed way. I sought only to help, to alleviate misery. My very generosity is systematically misinterpreted. Please help me."

"I'll get them a nice plot over in Green Hill, where you'll have a nice view..."

"Don't touch them." She stepped forward, raising one arm. He ducked. As she moved, her form became confused. Without seriously changing position, he found himself outside the crevice, breathing very fast.

The woods brimmed with evening.

He came away from there. At the top of the cliff, familiar pines smelled richly in warm breeze. The familiar odor didn't reassure him much.

Overcast summer morning, already hot. He drove past the guard post on Rideout Road, heading to the sanity of his desk in Procurement and a day of good healthy expediting. No dream, no hallucination. She was real enough, if you could...

"I trust you have decided favorably?"

"You!" He started violently, to the terror and rage of the Ford in the next lane.

"I came to receive your answer."

He glanced at the half visible shape beside him. Morning washed all detail from the figure, without eliminating the grave despondency that hung, like scent, about her.

"There are pressing reasons. Grave reasons that I naturally am reluctant to share with strangers. It is so needful."

He was in the process of saying all right, I'll forget it, I'll close it up, when he felt a strong intuitive throb that he was being fooled. How often had a contractor's representative said, in that low sincere voice, that the bid couldn't be cut another dollar. So, instead, he said:

"It's impossible."

She did not quite grind her teeth. "Please."

"I told you, I'll have them buried."

She considered, the long fingers wrapping and unwrapping each other.

A violent burst of horns advised that he was driving thirty in a fifty-mile lane.

She said: "If... if it were possible that I might, in some way, present you with more convincing demonstrations of my need, might you then afford my request further consideration?"

"I don't understand."

"I must show you then. You will, it seems, force a poor woman to lay bare her most aching secrets."

"I see no need."

"You must admit that you owe me fairness. Fairness, at least. And if you will grant me that, may I... dare I presume for an hour, hardly an hour, to fathom my grief. And deep shame."

"When?"

"In two days."

"Two..."

A red wagon shot around him, the driver passionately chalking a fist. He speeded up, glanced at her. "Why two..."

Gone.

In late afternoon, she directed him south. Down blacktopped roads between cascades of pine, rough red banks rising on either side. Off the road to needle-spread trails pounded hard. Forking, gradually covering with grass and branch litter. He lost direction. They jounced heavily.

"Here. Park under the pines. I would prefer the helicopters do not see."

He had no desire to get hauled before the Provost Marshall to explain why he was in Restricted Army Test Area, as he assumed.

After the car was deep in the pines, they walked. It took more than an hour.

He followed her along a sandy spine that gave every evidence of intense chigger infestation. At left glistened a shallow swamp. To the right, occasional white buildings clustered behind dense limbs.

She contrived to slouch and glide simultaneously. The air blazed with sun. Yet she remained joyous and graceless, unwarmed. She left (he noticed) no shadow and no trembling weed.

Ghost by daylight. Not at all classical.

He thought apprehensively of the long walk back through evening mosquitoes, and panted, and wiped his stinging eyes.

From off to the right, somewhere ahead, an enormous metallic whooping began. She stopped so abruptly, he almost walked through her.

She said: "So you will insist on knowing the poor woman's secret?"
"I guess so -- after this walk."

Her face floated in gloomy double exposure against fat limbs. The whooping had stopped. "Then if you will climb that knoll, you will perhaps understand more clearly, the difficulties I face and the necessity for your generosity."

"Aren't you coming?"

"I return to my charges."

"Wait a minute."

"Think generously of me."

Alone in the pine-thick heat. Sweat tickled his back.

He remarked hotly on his own lack of good sense. Then clambered slipping up a steep bank slick with pine needles.

Beyond stood a double line of pines. Like a TV comedy, he thought: One frustration leads to the next. He thrust slowly through these, came out before a steep embankment, more than head high, heavily overgrown with honeysuckle, and topped by a chain link fence. It looked dimly familiar. He could not quite make out where he stood. It...

That was...

The shock of recognition made him white.

Up the embankment he darted, using hands and knees. Flopped at the fence base, staring out past a narrow gravel road.

On the other side began a shallow, vegetation-choked depression perhaps 1000 feet wide.

At the far side of the depression squatted the massive battlements of the Saturn V booster stand. He was staring blankly, from only a quarter of a mile away, into the immense hole of the flame deflector.

Down across the deflector, cataracts of water foamed. Water sprayed gushed roared into the vast trough, slopped in torrents over the lip.

And up there, gripped in the heart of the stand, he saw the booster stage. A vast white bulk, its flanks frosted.

Frosted, his mind said neatly. Stage not venting. That whooping horn to test atmospheric sound focusing.

The ground slammed his cheek, chin, chest. And again.

The air went resilient as rubber. Thunder siezed him. Sound become force gripped him and shook him like jelly in a tube.

From the deflector jettted flame in solid mass. Orange glare against black-edged steam. Flame flailing like a solid thing. Vibrating. Blindly ferocious. Two hundred feet of angled flame, throbbing like a tuning fork.

The brutal air pounded him down. He slipped down slope, clutching through honeysuckle. Pressure beat him, slugged him, slugged him again, hammered.

A quarter mile away, the terrible thing boomed. Within the test stand, the stage strained to escape. Ice showered. It was a huge thing alive. It fought to be free. It heaved blind white flanks against steel and cement. Intolerably fierce. Intolerably violent, ramming out its blind power.

Sudden silence.

At the bottom of the slope, he struggled up deaf. Honeysuckle tangled his legs. His nose ran scarlet.

A five-second static test.

He fell down. Pain chiselled ear to ear. The slope had protected him.

He stumbled off into the pines. The deflector had angled up the worst of the sound. Spilled it elsewhere. Checks ached. Rough bark against his palms. He pushed numb, deafened, through low limbs. Hot pine smell. Underfoot, the hot hard dusty stable earth.

His legs wobbled. At the far slope, he flopped down. Bent over. Held his ears.

Fifty yards away, shoals of rushes, dull green, rose without remor from black water.

At midnight:

In a tub of water hot enough to strip paint from metal, Cochrane sat sweating.

Rage glowed in his mind.

Fooled like a farm boy. Fooled by a transparent woman. She had calculated neatly. But she had not anticipated a short-duration test firing. She did not understand the mechanics of sound focusing.

A real death trap, like in the paperbacks.

He scowled, thrashing a parboiled foot. The water scalded. He hoped it would do so much for the chiggers.

Praise be, she didn't know. Even transparent women made mistakes.

"More than one mistake."

She could be forced, he thought. Oh, yes, he thought savagely, there's a way to force her. A good way.

He grimaced. His head ached. The bright bathroom tiles, blue and white, shone under electric light. There were the familiar towels, the familiar door. An incongruous place to plan how to strike back at a ghost.

By mid-morning, he had cleared the crevice of bones.

These stacked neatly into a cardboard box. From them rose an evil smell that mixed sickeningly with the gasoline stink.

Tiny bones. So many. So fragile. Their color between gray and brown. Any stress crumbled them.

He turned from the broken skulls. Set his teeth. Dug the little spade into the soft crevice earth.

Behind, a hiss of incredible rage.

"What does this mean?"

Arrived already.

He swung around slowly, sat on a limestone chunk. His heart beat thin and high.

"I'm moving your charges."

Between the narrow walls she glided, the dull face lined. "They're broken. They're falling apart."

Bent over the box, four feet away. The drab dress sagging in loose folds. "Generations they would have stayed. Generations. Hundreds of years. Look what you have done."

Their eyes met. Her face twisted, the lips thinning back. "Broken. They're broken."

He said: "I'll bury them decently at Green Hill."

"You'll not touch them again. My little ones. I guard them. Me. You've cost me centuries."

"Yesterday you almost cost me my neck. They go to Green Hill." And now his fingers slipped down over the match box tucked beside the rock.

"Then," she said, "I must do something about you."

Her face lightened slowly, like morning coming behind the window shade. Face to face, he felt panic.

It is not going to work. She is not going to be bluffed.

He struck a match. Lifted the blow torch from darkness by his foot. The gasoline ignited with a hard pop.

Blue flame barred between them.

One contemptuous glance at the torch. She glided forward, slipping indifferently through the box. The wide mouth spread in a sour glee.

"It is necessary that I stop your heart. I do regret it, you should know. I may be forced to stop your brain and perhaps I might enter you and walk your body for a time."

Cool limestone walls, the smell of dust and gasoline. Her arm moved. Through her body he indistinctly saw the box of bones. "It will be a quaint conceit to walk awhile in flesh."

Her hand vanished into his chest. A blow of terrible cold.

His heart stopped.

He dipped the torch flame through her to the bones.

Instantly, she jerked back away from him. Her arms spread. "No no no no no you must not."

His heart hesitated. He was full of great silence. The soft torch roar seemed fearfully loud. Then the heart struck and struck again, stumbling on its charge of blood. Flame poured over bone. His heart beat.

"No no no no no no."

From the cardboard burst yellow flame. Bones glowed.

"I bury ash." He spoke in a slow distinct voice.

"Trust me. Trust the poor woman."

Smoke poured up. In the box, fragments glowed and crumbled, fell to dark dust, collapsed and melted in yellow and rose glowing.

On her knees.

In his chest, the terrified heart bounced and raced. Flame splashed.

He said, using words as weapons, holding her, keeping her back, language filling time while the torch worked. "When they're gone, you go? Right. I guess that's right. Why'd you lie. Didn't have to. I'd have buried them."

Hunched on the far floor. "You've damned me."

"You damned yourself."

Not hunched. He saw with prickling shock that she was unaccountably embedded in the dirt floor. Was slipping into it, sinking to waist, to shoulders.

Between them wavered fat layers of smoke, twisting blue. Her eyes burnt his, as if, between them, passed a channel, corrosive, hot.

In an emotionally dry voice, she said: "It is your responsibility that this is happening to me. It was only my wish to serve, to protect. You must admit, it was my duty to defend my charges as best I might do."

Across the throat and chin the floor crept up, and slid above her lips. Covered her mouth. The dry voice continued: "You have caused this terrible thing by your own arrogance and pride. I implored you. Remember that as your mind burns. I did so implore you."

Forehead and tight hair, slowly dwindling, an unclean island on the floor.

Among the limestone rubble, a hand and wrist twisted.

He watched, shaken by his heart.

The fingers clenched and did not sink.

White fear rose in a solid wall to choke him. He felt her eyes straining up toward him through the stone mass. Concealed by stone, the contorted body strained, swimming in stone like dense liquid, murderously vindictive.

Briefly his thoughts rocked, uncontrollable.

He thought: "Bones. There's more bones."

He fumbled up the shovel and the light. Terribly naked he felt, putting down the protective blow torch.

He dug. Deep within the black soil of the crevice, two bones, three smaller ones.

These he collected. On these he played the torch. Fingers strained near the box edge. Ice-toothed hopeless horror tore him. He felt that her other hand slowly extended up through stone to grip his feet. He dared not reach for the flashlight. Smoke layered in the cave.

These few bones glowed, too, and fell apart.

Abruptly, the sinking fingers closed to a fist..

Very slowly, the fist sank from sight, shadowless, leaving no trace.

He dared not turn off the torch. Somewhere under the floor, she glared up straining to sieze him.

By some savage effort, he controlled jerking muscles. He forced himself to discipline, walked slowly from the cave, nauseated with the effort required to look ahead. Not to turn.

Sunshine on his face. He did not feel it. Gray smoke crawled from the crevice, bounded up the cliff face.

It was true, then. Personality survived after death. Sins were punished. You died. And down you slipped. Down through crust and mantle. Down through rock. Slipping down, at last, to drift and eddy alone within that indifferent raging darkness that cored the world.

Accounts were kept. You were responsible for your life.

No wonder she guarded, so dangerously, those small skeletons, those final fragile links that held her to the surface of the world.

He silenced the torch.

He slumped down among ferns and dead leaves. A different fear siezed him. It shook him and tore and shook.

He covered his face and, in that personal darkness, began examining the events of his life.

And we'll bet you thought it was going to be funny, eh? I liked that one; enjoyed typing it up, in fact. Elsewhere in the issue, you'll find a detailed rundown of the winners of the contest. Since I'm putting this 'zine together a piece at a time, using two different print media, you may notice a certain fragmentation. Sorry, folks, but I'm an amateur at this sort of thing and I have other pressing business. Matter of fact, I'm typing these stencils and copysheets in alternation with something else I must have finished by 1 July. Isn't interesting how all one's deadlines seem to coincide? Enough of this natter. The next story we have for your enjoyment is entitled Pyramid Power, subtitled, "A Fable". I regret that I can't tell you anything about the author, other than that she is Brigitta Henry. Enjoy it.

###

###

Erica was plain all right. Dog-faced plain -- oh, painfully so! at least according to Erica. Much to her adolescent horror and to the vexation of her friends (what friends she had, she would moan), she was also overweight -- a regular Two Ton Tessie to hear her talk, though in reality there were only some ten pounds between her and the Perfect Body. She harped about her crooked teeth, acne, split ends, dandruff, bad breath, cellulite and miniature breasts. She harangued all and sundry on the subject of her weak nails, bulging abdomen, facial hair and body odors. Her constant cry was "Why me? Why?"

Not that the poor girl had not valiantly tried and failed in her attempts to attain the most Perfect Body. Oh, attempted not once, not twice, but an untold number of times. She had tried bust developing exercises, bust developing creams, bust developing vitamins, and all to no avail. She had tried facial creams, depilatories, waxes, lotions, water diets, protein diets, carbohydrate diets, and shampoo after shampoo. And still she did not succeed.

Erica's current collegiate paramour, Bill, her live-in lover, so to speak, generally received the brunt of her complaints. Bill took it all in calmly, a true Stoic. For unesthetic though Erica seemed to herself, she was not at all horrifying to Bill -- in fact, he was quite fond of her physical quirks, having a few of his own, and would gently reassure her that she was not at all ugly. Erica rarely listened. She was always too busy struggling with her latest diet and/or exercise.

One day Bill came home from campus to find Erica hard at work assembling what appeared to be a jungle jim. Only she was assembling it right in their tiny efficiency apartment, which threw Bill for a loop. On the floor, shiny metal rods lay clumped together or strung out in illogical lines, an oversized I-Ching. A cardboard packing box sat in a corner, obviously raped and pillaged; peanut styrofoam crunched everywhere underfoot. Bill scratched his fuzzy thatch. Was she planning to exercise in her sleep, that crazy girl?

"What," he said, "are you doing?"

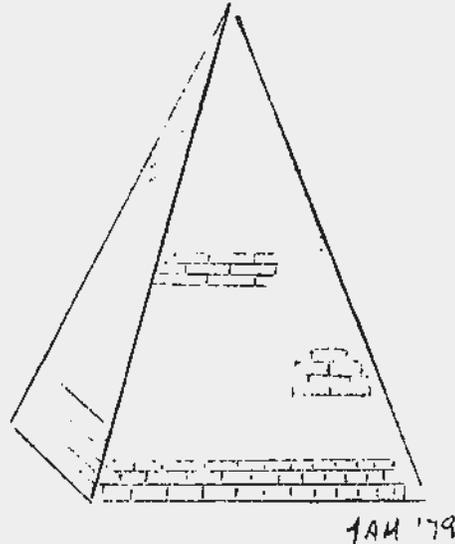
Erica turned swiftly, dropping a pole on her foot in surprise. Despite the pain, her plain-Jane face broke into a beaming smile when she saw her room-mate.

"Oh, hi Bill! You know, I found the greatest thing the other day in a magazine and so I --"

"Yes," Bill said, still calm, "But what is it?" He eyed the rods dubiously.

"It's a pyramid. Haven't you ever heard of pyramid power?" Erica looked pleadingly at Bill, but he just stared dumbly, first at her then at the rods strewn over the worn wooden floor. Finally, Erica stooped by the unmade bed and picked up a well-thumbed magazine.

"Here," she said imperiously, sticking the open periodical under his long nose. "Read it." She folded her arms across her meager chest as Bill silently accepted the magazine. It was turned, he thought, to a rather lurid ad:



WISDOM OF THE ANCIENTS
(the ad proclaimed)

The way to health, wealth, love and beauty through the ancient mysteries of the pyramids. See yourself grow more beautiful every day! Watch the money come rolling in! Feel your aches and pains disappear! See admirers flocking round your door! For only \$49.95 YOU TOO can see your most precious dreams come true -- and all you have to do is sit 10 minutes a day under the magic pyramid. Let the power of the ancients work for you -- send for your pyramid today! (Results guaranteed in ten days or your money back.)

Slowly, Bill lowered the magazine and looked straight into Erica's puddly blue eyes. "Are you crazy?" he asked.

"No, no!" she denied. "You'll see -- in ten days I will have changed. I believe in this," she said, nodding solemnly at the disconnected poles.

Bill merely shrugged his shoulders (scrawny) and said nothing, and helped her erect the pyramid. He knew better than to contradict her. He also knew that Erica had used her parents' money for this gimcrackery, not his, and this was some comfort to him.

The first day Erica sat under the pyramid nothing really happened. Nothing outwardly, that is. Erica swore up and down that her nagging lower backache felt much relieved, along with her hemorrhoids. Bill remained silent but skeptical.

The second day, Erica sat under the pyramid a full twenty minutes, carefully following the free instruction booklet. This time, she was sure that all her various aches and pains were considerably diminished and her posture improved. She stood in front of the bathroom mirror for a half-hour, scrutinizing her ill-lit reflection. She was positive her pimples were receding and her hair, a lackluster chestnut, seemed bouncier and shinier. Bill persevered.

On the third day, Bill came home from a night class to find Erica diligently taking her measurements. "Look, See!" she rhapsodized, thrusting the tape measure at him. "I've gained an inch on my bust and lost one on my hips!" She was ecstatic. Bill merely humphed.

The fourth day, full of brilliant spring light, was the beginning of finals week. Bill was so busy cramming he didn't have extra time to lavish on Erica's idiosyncracies. Erica crammed under the pyramid, believing she would receive straight A's by doing so. Bill thought this would be no small feat considering that Erica was failing Calculus and Spanish II.

Four more days passed in frantic efforts to cram and stay awake. Bill came out of his coffee-and-pill daze long enough to eat breakfast with Erica on the day of his two most important finals. However, he wasn't prepared for the stranger who sat eye to eye with him across the little breakfast nook.

Who is this? thought Bill, staring intently at the beautiful stranger. Same tilted nose as Erica; same chestnut brown hair; same light freckled skin. But what a difference! If this was Erica she had certainly changed. The skin glowed, creamy soft and perfect. The eyes were wide as ever, but now a bright sparkling blue; the hair was thick and rich, cascading luxuriously. And her body. Bill blinked and looked again. Swelling breasts, taut under the halter top; flat supple belly; firm slender thighs encased in tight jeans. Bill's mouth hung agape. Here was a veritable Aphrodite! Or at least the Bunny of the Year.

"Erica?" he croaked.

For an answer the lovely stranger merely nodded, a satisfying smile spreading slowly over her lips. Yes indeed, Erica it was. Bill was so flabbergasted he could only sputter incoherently for several minutes. Finally, he got a grip on himself.

"What did you DO to yourself?" he shrieked, staring wildly at Erica's Perfect Body. She chuckled. "Silly Bill. I told you the pyramid would work. It's marvelous, don't you think? I'm BEAUTIFUL! And it's only been eight days." Erica's eyes flashed with delight.

Bill was still agog. He simply couldn't believe the evidence that sat before his eyes. Where was the mousy little Erica, his tenderhearted, weak-willed human companion? He was now confronted with a goddess, straight from Playboy's pages, and it made Bill mighty nervous.

Erica gave him no time to reflect on this. "Well," she said, "Got to run. That Calculus final's at nine." She rose lithely from the table -- something the old Erica was incapable of doing -- grabbed her books and bag, and waltzed out the door.

Bill sat stone-still at the breakfast nook a full five minutes, his mouth still unhinged. My God, he thought, My God, that's my Erica, and his blood began to race.

Somehow Bill managed to get out the door without forgetting his books and keys, or where his finals were to be held. Even so, he barely made it in time to his first exam. Important though his finals were, he could not keep the lovely vision Erica had become out of his mind. He fantasized a thousand variations of their homecoming this afternoon, sweating over finely detailed scenes of himself removing Erica's overflowing halter top and tightly packed jeans. The people sitting closest to him during the finals threw strange covert glances his way now and then. But Bill didn't notice -- he was blissfully unaware of anything said or done -- or written on his exams, for that matter.

Still caught in a haze of anticipatory lust, Bill stumbled home that afternoon. Sweaty handed and body atremble, he fumbled several times before he found the right key. So wrought up was Bill that he nearly dropped the slippery piece of aluminum while inserting it in the lock. Fine beads of perspiration slid down his back and sides as he soundlessly turned the knob and entered his tiny domain.

Ah! There sat Erica, her back to him, on the dilapidated couch that divided the room. She murmured low in the direction of her lap, but Bill paid scant attention to this. He tiptoed to the back of the couch and leaned over it, intending to surprise Erica. But it was poor Bill who was surprised, because Erica was not alone. A large and handsome man lay on the couch, his head cuddled comfortably in Erica's lap. It was to him, Bill realized, and not her lap that she had been murmuring.

Bill was spotted immediately by the large and handsome man; their gazes locked momentarily. Erica did a double take and sat bolt upright, knocking the man from her lap and into an awkward sprawl, half on the couch, half on the floor.

"Bill!" she cried, a vague look of alarm in her darkly lashed eyes. "You should have knocked!"

Arms akimbo, Bill surveyed the situation cynically. He felt an olive-green rage spurt suddenly within him. "'Should have', indeed," he spat and glared at the man. Handsome picked himself up off the floor, dusting dirt from his red T-shirt with great dignity.

"Um, Bill..." Erica said, sensing impending disaster, "I'd like to introduce you to my Calculus prof -- um, Gordon, this is my friend Bill."

"How do you do?" Gordon said stiffly, as he picked lint off his perfectly creased brushed denim jeans. Bill made no answer; he merely clenched his fists and teeth and glared all the harder.

"Well. Um, I -- ah -- must be going," Gordon said, noticing Bill's beet-red color. Keeping an eye on Bill, he sidled quickly to the door. "Nice meeting you. See you later, Erica," he said, and slunk out of the apartment.

Bill stood rooted in the same spot, clenching and unclenching his puny fists and looking daggers at Erica. He was turning a lovely shade of royal purple.

Alarmed, Erica tried to sooth him. "Now Bill, don't get so upset. Gordon only came over for a friendly chat --"

"CHAT!" Bill squeaked. He fumed for a few seconds. "Chat -- HA!" he cried, for lack of anything better to say. Throwing Erica his nastiest look, which consisted of making his beady brown eyes even beadier, he stomped over to the door, opened it dramatically in preparation for his exit, and almost tripped over his feet. He recovered his balance in time if not his poise. Hovering between apartment and hallway, he sent another visual dart of venom her way before slamming the door and storming out of the building.

Poor Erica. She simply stood by the couch, staring dumfoundedly at the door.

Ah, but pity Bill -- intent on fantasies of pleasure with his newly revamped girlfriend, he hadn't reckoned on any competition. He had received a huge blow to his unstable male ego.

Bill wandered about unconsciously for two or three hours, paying no attention to the buttery spring sunlight or the campus' expanse of tender green lawn. He roved back and forth, forth and back, from common to town, a small eastern borough hoary with ivy-choked buildings and student slums. Eventually he came out of his daze long enough to find himself in front of the local head shop, staring at the window. Vast amounts of smoking paraphernalia impressed themselves upon his rods and cones (but not his brain). Bill's wandering attention was riveted by a display of little gaily colored pyramids. That's what started this whole shebang, he thought remorsefully. He stood in front of the window a minute longer, silently brooding on the little red and blue pyramids and the evil they had wrought. He could never hope to compete with the suave movie star looks of someone like Gordon. Not me, he thought glumly, with my skinny legs and long nose --

Suddenly Bill's equine face lit up with what could only be described as an incandescent glow. His heretofore inert and slumped figure jarred itself awake and started striding purposefully down the street, back in the direction of the apartment. Fight fire with fire! he thought, and chuckled fiercely.

When he reached the apartment he hesitated a second before entering, afraid Erica might still be there. But no, she was absent. Probably went to Gordon's, Bill thought maliciously. He strode over to the pyramid, took a deep breath, and plunged into the triangular space defined by the aluminum bars.

Nothing happened. Bill felt intense disappointment, but decided to give it a chance. After all, nothing much had happened to Erica the first few times she sat under the damn thing.

Bill spent more than ten minutes under the pyramid; in fact, he fell asleep there while studying Russian history. The watery dawn woke him up, thin rays of light prying his crusty eyes open. With a huge yawn and a stretch, Bill sat up, working the kinks and dents out of his body. And then he noticed his body.

His arms were no longer the lank and stringy members he recalled but were fully fleshed, rippling muscles illuminated feebly by the dawn's anemic light. Bill gasped in surprise. So it worked! The pyramid actually worked! He raced to the bathroom to goggle at his image in the mirror.

And, oh, what an image it was. No longer was Bill faced with his puny and scrawny former self, but with an Apollo. His messy brown thatch was miraculously converted into a perfect dry-look coiffure, a bit of gold glinting here and there in the rich ash brown. His face had filled out -- along with the rest of his body -- and the long drawn proportions of nose and chin had somehow realigned themselves into a picture of heavenly manhood. Bill stood flexing his muscles and gazing at his solid manly chest, euphoric at the sight of the curling hair covering it.

Thus raptly engaged, he did not hear the snick of the apartment door opening, nor the padded footfalls that followed. And he was surprised, then, when a haggard (though still beautiful) Erica leaned warily against the bathroom jamb.

Erica stared at Bill for a second, then blurted, "Who are you?"

Bill smiled condescendingly. "Why, Bill, who'd you think?" He flexed his biceps.

Erica's eyes opened wide in wonder in wonder. "BILL?" She rushed into the bathroom and grabbed his arms. "Oh -- you tried it too! How WONDERFUL!" Both went into ecstasies, now that they were equally beautiful.

In the several days following this touching reunion, Bill and Erica gave no heed to the outside world, so engrossed were they with each others remarkable transformation. Finals no longer held any significance. They seemed trivial in comparison to the lovers' newly forged sexual attraction. Bill had his Aphrodite and Erica her Apollo -- and they had one another in every conceivable (and inconceivable) manner.

After the passage of a week, though, their ardor began to diminish, and shrank to more normal proportions. The novelty was wearing thin; each began to notice that the other was growing less beautiful, and indeed starting to regain his and her former features.

"Bill," said Erica one day, "Why don't you go out for awhile? Do some grocery shopping -- we're awfully low on food."

Bill agreed to this reluctantly, but went anyway. Beautiful as Erica was, he found her company a trifle tedious. He told himself he needed a change of pace, and almost gladly went out to do the shopping.

Erica sighed with relief when he left; relief because she secretly wanted to be alone in order to sit under the pyramid and soak up its beneficial rays. Though Bill was unaware of the changes in himself, she noticed that the transformation was beginning to reverse itself not only in him but also in her. It showed in her slightly sagging breasts and fuller hips; she was sure this was because neither of them had been sitting under the pyramid, preoccupied instead with amorous pastimes.

While Erica made haste to sit under the pyramid, Bill was wandering around the small college town and campus, admiring the Eden-like site's luxuriant plant growth and coeds. The hungry stares of the more forthright females and the envious glances of the males erased all thought of shredded wheat and chicken soup from Bill's mind. He actually planned to get back to Erica as soon as possible (he told himself), but the limpid spring air, and the lavish greenery, and his appearance's effect on people caused him to strut around campus for a few hours. Ah, Nature! Ah, Education! Truly he was in a Garden of Eden, one where everyone was welcome to taste the fruit of knowledge and not be cast adrift, but welcomed with open arms into the mysteries of Life and Love. So ran Bill's muddled thoughts, until he noticed dusk descending. With a guilty conscience he headed for home.

Halfway to the apartment Bill remembered the groceries and stopped for them. He reached home without mishap -- no coed stopped him or attempted to attack his beautiful body. Silently he let himself into the apartment, set the groceries on the stove, and scanned the room for Erica -- she was so quiet! There she was, asleep, sprawled underneath the pyramid. For some reason this angered him.

"Erica, wake up!" Bill said in his nastiest voice. He strode over to the pyramid and shook her shoulder roughly.

"Wha -- who?" Erica mumbled, struggling to sit up. "Oh -- it's you Bill." She yawned and struck sleep from her eyes.

"What are you doing under that thing? You don't need it anymore!"

Erica hesitated a second before answering. "But Bill, I -- we -- do. Haven't you noticed? Look at yourself in the mirror."

Bill certainly did notice something. Erica was twice as beautiful as before, if that were possible. Her proportions were more voluptuous, her eyes, hair, skin more luminous and inviting than before.

"You're just trying to be more beautiful than me!" he burst out in a fit of jealous rage.

"Oh, no!" Erica wailed, dismayed. "Go look in the mirror!"

Grudgingly, Bill entered the tiny bathroom and flicked on the light. He stared intently into the tarnished mirror and gasped at what he saw.

Erica was right. He was beginning to lose his wonderful good looks. His hair was a tad rumpled, a touch dull -- his body was beginning to regain its hollow-chested gawky look. He noticed a small pimple on the side of his nose.

"Omigod, Erica! A PIMPLE!" he shrieked. Distraught, he rushed from the bathroom, unceremoniously shoved Erica aside, and plunged into the pyramid.

"Hold on a second," said Erica, "Make room for me!"

And so they spent the night and the days that followed exclusively in the pyramid's grasp. They did not lack for amusements -- each day they grew more beautiful. They sat for hours marvelling over their physiques or staring at their images in Erica's diminutive cosmetic mirror. And, occasionally, they would make love.

The act was in no way as satisfying as it had once been. Erica accused Bill over and over of a narcissistic interest in watching the bulging play of muscles on his forearms and the diminishing view of his torso astraddle her; all he was interested in, she complained, was watching himself. Bill's complaints were no less bitter. He grew angry when Erica primped in front of her small mirror, ignoring him while he manfully pumped away. Each grew more demanding. Watch me! they would cry as they argued over who would possess the mirror and for how long. They began to despise each other's presence, longing only for someone who would look only at them, and fall down in worship and adoration.

Such bliss was never meant to last. One day Bill grew so annoyed and irritated with Erica's posturing and preening (well, she wasn't paying any attention to him) that he snatched the mirror from her hand and dashed it against the wall. Erica screeched her displeasure as the mirror cracked into tiny pieces.

"You brute, you egotistical, stuck-up, snot-nosed CLOD!" she screamed, extremely vexed.

Bill may have occasionally thought Erica a simpleton and at times a bit of a fool -- but never, no, never ever had Erica stooped to such odious name-calling as this. He felt a sudden spine-snapping rush of adrenaline; something went "pop" inside Bill. And, oh horrors! red-eyed and menacing he grabbed lovely Erica's ivory throat and commenced to choke the dickens out of her.

Erica was at least as he and tore and scratched and kicked and beat and bit at Bill's exquisite figure. She inflicted a goodly amount of damage, too. The lovers thrashed wildly in the tiny apartment, knocking over chairs, books, knickknacks, all their paraphernalia. They screamed and cursed at one another in their blind rage. Erica was failing fast -- beautiful and strong as she had become, she could not match Bill's bigger biceps and in the end gave in. Yet not without one final try, pure bravado, surely, but -- she managed to grab a handy iron skillet and bonk Bill on the cranium just before she blacked out. Together they crashed into the pyramid, bringing it clangorously down on their inert bodies.

EPILOGUE

Oh, what a sad scene there was when the police arrived. A beautiful naked dead girl (yes: Erica), nasty blue and black marks imprinted on her throat. Funny aluminum bars (a jungle jim?) thrown this way and that amongst the other trash in the room. A devilishly handsome young man (also nude, to the policemen's embarrassment) covered with scratches, bites and bruises, a large lump swelling on the back of his head. He, however, was not dead.

Poor Bill. They dragged him away, after finding him some pants, and stuck him in jail. No bond, pending his trial; no plea bargaining, either -- how could anyone think of it, after such an obvious and horrendous murder? Lucky Bill -- he received only a life sentence, living in a state that had abandoned capital punishment.

The last the author heard of Bill, he had constructed a pyramid in his jail cell. The authorities assumed this just an innocent diversion, a hobby to while away the hours. Bill sat under it constantly, or so his cell-mates reported. The resultant buildup of his mental and physical powers enabled him to make a jailbreak -- a clean getaway. To date, "Baffling Bill", as he is known in police circles, is still at large. Noone knows his exact whereabouts, but there are rumors. Some say he was last seen in the vicinity of a large, well-known midwestern university, a lush Eden-like campus built around a small ivy-covered town; funny -- those rumors were heard just a few weeks prior to a heinous double murder at the

same campus. It seems two top Calculus professors were beaten to death with some odd-looking aluminum pipes (a jungle jim?)...

— oOo —

Now, where can I get one of those? It seems worth the risk.

I mentioned before that this is being assembled in segments. The last item I have for this chunk is another story by Robert Sampson. The One Out There has some similarities to his other entry and we think you'll enjoy it as much.

The One Out There

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~ ~ ~ ~ robert sampson

That night the moon looked far away. It balanced remote above the backyard, spilling cold thin light among the trees and bushes.

Edna in the house. She made small sounds. She straightened this, adjusted that.

I called: "Come out."
"I can't"
"Come out."
"There's all this work to do."
"Come out."

Across the yard ran a white line, straight as a razor cut, moonlight on the length of wire along which the poodle pulled his chain. The dog wire led from the house out into the silver and darkness. Into the brown and green odor of warm plants.

Out there, a trace of some odor more musty. An odor rising among the other odors like a single thread on a coat sleeve. Old wood, rotten a long time. Like a pocket put away wet.

"What's that smell?" she asked.

"What smell?"

"That little smell."

"I don't notice little smells. Only large boisterous stinks."

In the thin cold light, her eyebrows were thick black curves. She looked up at me and made the familiar face of discontent. "You don't suppose something has died?"

I said: "It's a mild and beautiful night. Up there is mild, beautiful Mars, all full of swell rocks, and silver Voyager, out of the launch pad, endlessly televising them."

At the end of the yard, some ninety feet away, there was a small confused movement. Shadows slid on shadows. Edna said, "Oh!" Vision swam. Silver and black, a confused shape, a thin reaching. The dog wire gave a sharp metallic twang. The moon-streaked wire shook across the backyard in a crazy flickering, pale jittering in the dark.

I walked to the end of the dog wire. Nothing. The cool, luminous night. The pungent odor of leaves, the soft warm palpable dark. Only a thread of must, thin and old, slid among the other odors.

Before we went in, I fastened the poodle to the wire. He pranced across the pale stones in the path to the flower bed and out of sight.

It was comfortably cool.

Later, long after eleven, I called him in. He didn't come. Still later, I went out.

He was on his side by the end of the path. His gray wool was bloody. The ground was ripped. He seemed to have no eyes.

I went for a flashlight.

His name was Andy. We were tired of fancy poodle names and he was a miniature, too, what do you name a miniature, Lautrec, for God's sake?

Under his wool were a dozen, two dozen slits, quite narrow. Like stiletto wounds. We bought him when we moved here. Edna said: "You don't keep poodles in the country." I said: "It's only the edge of the country. Look off over there, you can see the city and buildings and air pollution and everything." Andy had been stabbed full of thin-edged slits.

We just had him clipped Friday.

He was wet all over. He died by a brick-lined flower bed in the musty moonlit dark. He had no eyes.

As I bent over him, the dog wire throbbed again, hard, loud, a deep burring twang.

"What did it?"

"I don't know."

"Did he suffer?"

"I don't know."

"Is he out there now, who did it?"

"I want to call the police."

"There aren't any police in the country."

She was crying. Her mouth stretched wide, the muscles hard over the cheekbones. She cried without much noise. I had wrapped Andy in newspapers. As the blood came through, I added other layers. Her tears made gray circles on the story of a local election.

Morning with dew and cool air. The sky was fragile blue-green, like painted egg shell. We drank coffee. Afterward we buried him by the pear tree. A small brown bird with a white and yellow-freckled breast sent a single thin cold line of sound into the air. Each crumb of dirt concealed a speck of shadow. The mound also concealed.

She said: "I want to go into town with you today."

"Nothing's open yet."

"I don't want to stay here. It's horrible out here."

We drove slowly into town. Traffic rushed by. I let her out on the corner by a dime store and said I'd pick her up in the afternoon and went on in to work. I was designing a treaded vehicle that would travel over either the medium rock fields or plains of dust, featureless and deep, that lie perfectly silent and shining on the surface of Mars.

That night, warm under a single sheet. She said: "Listen. Listen."

Creaking as the house cooled. The smooth fresh feel of a clean sheet. The abiding warmth of her arm.

"Listen."

"Go to sleep."

"I heard the wire twang."

"I turned over on the springs."

"Listen."

Nothing. We lay in a room without shades. Through the upper windowpane, the feet of Orion gleamed. Below his three-starred belt you were supposed to see the Great Nehula. I didn't. She pushed me. "Hear it?"

At the rear of the house, the slow deliberate twang of wire, slowly depressed to tension, slowly released.

Planes of moonlight ashen among the growing things. The moon lay behind the house, projecting an island of shadow deep into the backyard. The path slipped into the shadow. Above it, the dog wire, a brilliant streak, rode back into the shadow, then stopped, cut off in mid-air.

Back behind the fruit trees, behind a complex triangle of light and dark, I heard branches rattle. Then silence. Then rattle and silence.

Come see me rattle in the silver dark.

No wind blew. I looked straight up, out of the galaxy, out to the great hollows where the thin starlight flickers between great walls of dust.

"Who's there?"

Something slipped secretive, softly.

Night leaves clashed together.

A branch rattled.

I thought, "It's inviting me out." The realization slid over me like iced skin. My hot heart ran beneath. I saw the island of shadow where I was to walk, the branches and small trees beyond and, above them, the interstellar walls of dust. The tumble of leaves and moonlight and shadow. Fear like a whisper running iced along the inner bones of the wrists, the forearms, the thighs.

The backyard, an open mouth, rustled softly, inviting me in.

I stepped back, taking care to move toward the light. The screen door closed me into the kitchen. Thin gray rectangles of wire mesh. My dry tongue wordless in a dry throat. My unsteady eyes.

There was nothing to see.

A rattling in the bushes. The wind. There was no wind. I studied my fingers on the door, listening. I was hollow inside, all hollow with unprotected back. A breeze passed through the wire mesh. It did not smell of interstellar space, but of stems, roots, blades. A thin odor of must. I gripped the doorknob, watching my fingers go white. Outside, leaves rattled together.

All night, the dog wire twanged. Three times. Then two. Or once, then twice. Or once. And so we waited, hot in the locked house.

I returned from the window.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"What is it?"

"I don't know."

The wire twanged, hard, brazen, loud. I rushed to the window.

Nothing.

I did not open the door. Her questions suffocated me. I did not go out. She sat upright in bed, rigid, still, not permitting our eyes to reach. I slept in a chair by the kitchen door.

In the morning when the light was strong, I stood by the bed, looking down on her. "Hello there. Good morning."

She opened her eyes. Closed them. They were brown. Her hair tumbled, long, flattened by sleep over one cheek. Her body warm and mounded under the effacing sheet, her mouth old rose with red lipstick.

The clock grinned. I shut it off. I padded quietly through early May morning to the kitchen, to the morning preamble to work. The old familiar pressures in my throat. The rose contained a scorpion. The closer I approached, the more swiftly she receded. Beautiful. Remote.

In the late afternoon, through planes of long soft light, I walked to the end of our backyard. On the right, pear trees; on the left, apple and cherry. The end of our property was closed by a wire fence interlaced with blackberry. Well, we wanted an inexpensive place to rent. We had found it. The gate was open, probably forever. You couldn't force it shut.

Beyond stretched the Great American Cow Pasture, grazed flat, studded with small brown stones and larger droppings. The light red earth supported numbers of plants with many forking stems and a tiny, finely fringed yellow flower.

At the far end of the field, a herd of cows shambled along the stream. They bellowed hollowly across the close-cropped field. Brown and white cattle under a slanting sun. The strong-odored field already fumed hotly.

The stream was barely a trickle, shallow and full of stones. Where the cattle had watered, the edges were cut to soft mud. Beyond was a brush pile, not very high, full of silvered limbs and brittle sprays.

Beyond that, a field, a scattering of short thorn-trees.

Nor was there anything in the sky.

I knelt on the brush-pile side of the stream. Impressed into the mud was a slender print, ten inches long, two-three inches wide, shallow, neither wet nor dry.

Someone might have dropped a plank butt first into the mud. But this print had toes, the naked marks filling slowly with shadow, as pits fill with water, while the sun, hugely orange, settled in layers of strawberry clouds.

She asked: "Do we want another poodle?"

"Do they make giant poodles?"

"We could get a standard. A nice curly standard."

The sky was running full of night

I said: "How about a golden retriever? They fetch and also take. Don't you find a dog comforting that's willing to take instead of this endless give, give, give?"

Her wide mouth curved. I sat on the arm of her chair and tentatively put my arm around her shoulder. The soft odor of flowers. She gently bent forward to flip the tip of her shoe with a careful finger. She did not lean back. She said: "I never want another miniature." Her face turned toward the window. Outside, night washed over the house, drawing out the stars.

When the wire twanged for the sixth time, she sat upright, shaking, in bed. "I can't bear this."

"Edna!" Sharply.

"You're letting it go on and on."

"Yes," I said after a pause. "Yes, I do that."

"You let it."

"Lie down. I'll go see."

"You don't ever see anything. You don't want to see. Who is it? What does he want?"

The yard was empty. No movement behind the shadows. No rustling in the far branches. The door locked with a sharp metallic sound. I went back into the bedroom. Moonlight reflected, white and tense, from her open eyes. She said: "It's hilarious. I never realized it till now. You're angry all the time, aren't you? All the time. Even when you laugh, you're angry."

The moon set. The shadows intense. Outside, the dog wire throbbed at two separate intervals. Hard strokes. Triumphant strokes. Like cymbals clashing during a minuet. She lay awake all night, her back to me. Her feet did not touch my leg.

The clerk had a drinking man's complexion. He dropped the square box on the counter, yellow and red cardboard on brown wood. The hardware store smelled of oiled metal.

"Well, now, sir, that'll be just about \$8.65 a box. Lots of good shooting there."

He grinned engagingly. Small red veins streaked his eyes.

I paid, took up the heavy square of shotgun shells.

"Thank you, sir. Will there be anything else, sir?"

There wasn't. I left him behind the counter, grinning into a display of aluminum pans, and drove fast across town to work. But there was no work. We had a conference, instead. I sat in a too-cool room, watching the butts pile up in the ash trays and thought of the square box of shells and night and moonlight and stealthy movement behind the branches, and felt fear. Fear, at two o'clock in the afternoon in a conference room room washed white by neon, listening to a PhD, who would be thirty next month, try and guess which angle in a proposal was most likely to hook NASA dollars.

There was a pact, now, made without words, that we would not open the back door after dark.

The television was turned very loud. Its shallow story jangled into our faces. Once I thought the dog wire sounded. She did not move or take her eyes from the shining square.

"You want coffee?"

She did not want coffee. I went softly into the kitchen and softly opened the back door. Light reached into the dark yard, a silent fan of yellow.

The screen had a strange look. I bent close to it.

Thin puckered mouths scattered over the surface. Stiletto slits, a dozen or two, the sliced wires bent toward my face.

I closed the door, calmly, gently. I poured the coffee, carried in one cup. Steady hands. They did not reflect the tight burning skin. The dry vacuum over the heart. The high iced floating of the stripped nervous system.

She went to the television in lovely flowing strides, and turned it off, and came to sit beside me and drink coffee from my cup. "I think we need another dog."

"Sure." Wary.

"What would you like? I want a bouncy one. A little fast bouncy one. We have a whole yard for him to play in. I would like a terrier. Wouldn't you like a terrier?"

"OK."

"I want a terrier. I want a terrier and let's get several babies. I would like several fast bouncy babies."

"What breed?"

"I'm not particular."

"Here?"

"No. Someplace else."

I said: "It'll be alright here after awhile."

"Not here. Let's change our luck. It's contaminate here." Her long fingers gripped my wrist. Coffee slopped on the rug. I didn't look. Her lids, half closed, were gray. "It's contaminated," she said.

I stood in the dark, alone, standing over the bed. She slept, her hair dark on white linen. The slow movement of her breath. Through the window, the white circle of the moon, intersected by lean limbs.

The shotgun stretched in my arms. Heavy, long, smelling sweetly of gun oil, three shells in its machine-slick guts. I had fed them in, one by one. Now I stood by the bed, alone in the dark, holding one, watching the other.

The warm, slow, nurturing female sleep. Sleep that lays cell on cell, a warm drowsy piling up and differentiating. Life asleep. I stood awake, death holding death, listening to breathing soft among the covers.

The wire twanged.

My hollow heart beat hugely.

I carried death from the room toward the harsh, silver harmonics. I threw open the back door.

Dark on dark. The shadow of the house spread across the lawn to the single, sharp line, fifteen feet away, where moonlight tilted down, like visible cold, into the grass.

"All right. I'm coming."

No sound. No movement. Far down the path, the still bushes curved downward in the pale light. Beyond them, the fence. Beyond that, the cropped field.

So I would go out into the silver and the darkness. The smell of must was very clear. I had been called and called. But the fear was banked now, like coals in a waiting fire.

I thought, the door opens out and left. It blocks that side. Nothing visible forward. From the side then. The footprint was not deep, not much weight. Undoubtedly from the right side of the door.

I shoved open the screen with the muzzle. Stepped out quickly. swung the muzzle right.

Something huddled there to catch me on the side.

A confusion of shadows. Something leaped. Something struck the muzzle.

But hardly a jar, hardly an impact. Musty. I thrust hard sideways.

Saw something tumble out of the line of moonlight. Crouch there, no shape, lean, black, long-armed.

It leaped hugely in silence. Came in, terribly fast, one arm forward, pointing.

I dodged, struck. The barrel hit it. Pitched it to one side.

It was very light.

I was confounded. I had expected strength, blind physical strength. Great muscles striking.

It bounced, scuttled, recoiled. Came swiftly in again in quick bounding rush.

It had limbs. You could make that out. The screen door slammed shut behind me. Alone in the arena now. But it was light, very light, it had no strength.

I caught it against the muzzle of the shotgun. It reached down the barrel at me. It was the size of a large child. The moonlight showed no detail. It twisted free and darted in, mindless. I heaved it off, furious at its feebleness, it hit the side of the house, a garbage can crashed over, the lid rolled, it darted up and rushed again.

The smell of must, thin and dry.

Once alive. Now dry and small. Withered about its skeleton. Only rage remaining. It had been alive. It had been dead. Now it bounced and rushed.

One arm extended. A long thin glimmering projecting from its hand. It was all mal-
evolence, dry, weak, full of anger and agility.

It flew against the muzzle. It had been human. I jerked the trigger.

A brief bar of orange, intensely glaring. A shock of sound.

It was quite brittle.

It flew back in two pieces. They dropped at an angle to each other. Each half moved.

The dry feet jerked and rocked. I heard grass tear. There was no blood. Of course. A section of spine, a clean nub, shone in the moonlight.

The top half thrashed its arms, pushed up on the stump of its belly. Where the face was, all seams and creases.

I fired again, not knowing or aiming. The purifying bar of orange. It slammed over, bounced, rolled. The torn grass rippled. The arms thrashed. Headless. The legs kicked.

A light came on behind me.

I did not approach the fragments.

I heard her pant. She said nothing.

After a time, the pieces stopped moving. Its hand pointed at the house. The fingers were thin bone wrapped tightly with dry skin. There was a ten-inch nail on the center finger. The nail was black to halfway down, then lighter, like an unwashed stiletto.

Edna brought kerosene. The flames were orange at first. Then they became green, blue, red. Zinc, strontium, I don't know. It flared and spat. There was not much smoke. Nor ash.

Afterward, we ran the flashlight beam down into the dark slit that opened into the base of the brush pile, beyond the fence, beyond the stream. As I looked, I felt afloat,

huge, unsteady, greatly amused, very strong.

There was no real sign that it had been in the brush pile.

We burned it anyhow. The flames thrust up blue and green, and red and red and red.

The shotgun between us. I took it in my left hand. Put my right arm around her.

She said: "While it was burning, I shook. I thought I'd fall."
"You scared now?"

She didn't answer. The brush mass flared and smoked and settled. Orange sparks sprayed up in a rushing shower.

She said: "I'm just sick with it. I'm empty. Oh, my God, how empty I am."
"Let's go in," I said. "Things change. Things'll be different tomorrow."
"Tomorrow we'll get a dog. Won't we. A wirehair. Won't that be nice?"
"Tomorrow," I said. "A nice wirehair."

But these were only words. I wanted nothing. I said the words for her to hear but I wanted nothing at all. The brush burned snapping in the warm night. The shotgun dangled heavy in my fingers. I had stood in the warm night grass. Death awake, dried, tense, watching. Huddled with rage, mobile with rage, silent, furious. Rising suddenly to strike and strike the wire.

Moonlight plunged silently into grass. I knew why. Cool and silent. Some thoughts are better silent.

But thoughts came.

For I had felt it twist and strain against the muzzle, furiously reaching. I had felt my pulses shock hotly.

I had recognized its rage and anger and despair flooding down the shotgun length.

Like mine.

Like mine, like mine. That's all you need to know. That's all. Down in the circuits of my nervous system, the scald of rage and anger and despair surged and rose. Fury and rage, rage and fury. Meeting along the oiled barrel. I didn't call it. Who needed to call? It felt. It responded. It came. Death kneeling among the leaves. Peering with consuming passion toward our house. Never looking away. Indifferent to moonlight.

While far overhead, unseen in utter cold, the cameras of the spacecraft scanned the Martian rocks line by line by line by line.

*** ————oOo ————

So much for the story contest. Those are the only manuscripts which I have in my hands at present. A pretty good lot, I think. I hope you all enjoyed reading them, since they are likely to be as entertaining as this TB gets. Of course, as I mentioned before, things can change suddenly -- and probably will.

I want to extend all necessary apologies to the authors whose stories I ~~MAILED~~ typed, in advance of any complaints. As all readers have doubtless noticed, I don't get along with mimeo stencils. Sorry about that, authors, but if your entry ended up on a stencil, that was the best I could do. I have not consciously altered any of these pieces but I must plead nolo contendere to involuntary alterations. After awhile, I turned off my fore-brain and stopped correcting your spelling, too.

To close out this page and begin the next, we have some reviews, from Chris Mills the official TB reviewer (because I'm the editor and I say he's the official reviewer; besides, noone else volunteered).

Pro & Fan Reviews ~ ~ ~ *chris mills* ###
Watchtower Elizabeth A. Lynn, (Berkley, \$9.95, 247 pp., 1979)

Elizabeth Mill's Watchtower is an interesting but flawed book. The flaw lies not in her handling or in her style, which is a good, mature one. It is easy to see why Lynn is a nominee for this year's John W. Campbell award for best new writer, as she has great potential. However, the basic plotting of Watchtower leaves something to be desired.

It is set in the land of Arun, which at first glance would seem to be another fantasyland indistinguishable from so many others. The plot concerns a group of down-trodden people (two originally) whose home is captured by invaders. The original two escape from their perilous situation and enlist the aid of a group of... anarchists? They return to their home castle, enlist the aid of another castle with a sizable army and overthrow the invaders. My first reaction was: So what?

Watchtower has no real magic to catch the attention. As someone else has pointed out, it could be set just as easily in medieval Europe. The only thing even verging on magic is the use of a set of cards to foretell the future. There is no concrete evidence, though, that these even work. There is nothing like the magic of the Witch World or Katherine Kurtz's Deryni series. This leaves the book in an odd gap for classification. Is Watchtower fantasy or science fiction or either? Even SF has wonders, albeit technological ones. Watchtower has nothing.

The main impression one is left is one of pointlessness. The villains are killed or captured but the worst villain, the instigator of the whole affair, is shown in a mildly favorable light. We are shown all the killing and degradation, from beginning to end, and suddenly it is as if the positions were reversed. The forces of the good guys, so to speak, are shown to be just as bad as the forces of the villains -- or worse. As I said, pointless. [Quoth the editor; maybe she's leaving room for sequel(s)]

Perhaps Lynn is espousing the notion that wars of any kind are evil. Possibly this is true, though I doubt it [so do I], but moral tracts do not generally make stories. The only thing I can really believe about Watchtower is that it was conceived as the first part of a trilogy and sets the stage for the later books in the series. The Chronicles of Tornor, I believe is its name. There is a forthcoming book called The Dancers of Arun which should be interesting to read. Watchtower does not stand up on its own. It has good characterization, pacing and style. It has no wonder, no magic that would have enabled it to transcend its plotting. It left me feeling empty, I'm sorry to say.

[Editorial rambling -- What is the feeling of you folks out there about what makes a work fantasy, or science fiction? Assuming that these two streams of fiction are separable from the rest of literature, what differentiates one from the other? What is Goblin Reservation? What is Dragonrider? The Incomplete Enchanter? A lot of sercon effort has been expended on defining SF, by any name it's called. There's Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation and stops in between. The best definition I know is the one where the definer points at something.

[Now, assuming all fen have more or less the same things in mind at which to point, which of those things are fantasy and which are science fiction? Who cares to venture a definition or distinction?

[Next question... How do you feel about "continued" works, such as Watchtower appears to be? Is it right for an author to write such a thing without letting the readers in on the fact that it will take more than one book or story?

[Was I the only one who wanted to kill Zelazny after finishing Nine Princes in Amber? Who else wants to kill him since Courts of Chaos? Who would like to give Farmer a quick ticket to the Riverworld? Comments, please?]

The Science Fiction Voluntary Annex, edited and published by Steve Perram, 2920 Meridian Street, Bellingham, WA 98225 Probably available for stamp or 25¢ donation.

The SFV Annex is what Steve Perram does when he's not doing SFV, which is a good letterzine. The Annex is where the longer reviews and articles go and, at ten pages, it's slightly longer than SFV. #2 starts off with a pretty decent short-short by Steve and continues with reviews and articles by Robert Fester, Steven Duff, David Palter, Lee Pelton, Chester Cuthbert, Weiner J. Smith and yours truly [that is, Chris] and also a poem by Rick Jansen. I can't truly comment on the poems but the reviews and articles are rather interesting and bring Annex closer to the sercon criticism ideal than SFV is. Annex has a very irregular publication schedule but possibly Steve still has some copies of #2 left yet. Why not write and ask for one?



The Wandering..... greg hills

Well, I was wrong. I have two more stories from the contest for you. First of them is The Wandering, by Greg Hills. A review of Greg's fanzine, Tanient, is elsewhere in this issue. If Greg runs stories like this in Tanient that's another reason to look into it. Here, see for yourself.

###

###

None knew the true ages of the Star-house of Humanity. Even in a time when recorded history stretched back more than a hundred millenia, the Star-house was so old that not even legend came down from times before it; only a distant rumor of gigantic heroes of mist and light who crossed the galaxies and the star-paths with thunder and storm and, passing beyond them, fled the slopes of Creation in ceaseless quest for some elusive goal.

Yet one fact stood firm, fixed immovably in the lore of the Star-house: Earth was Home-world. Where fish-human and sky-human and land-human met, from whatever planets they hailed they spoke of Earth as Home. And, more, by the arts of forgotten genetic engineers, they could interbreed fruitfully. No changes ran so deep that true-human could not mate with true-human. Indeed, the definition of alien had come to be "cannot interbreed with Mankind".

And as a symbol of this unity, a great building had been raised above an obscure African valley on Earth; and there, at whiles, would come Humans from strange worlds whose stars could not be seen from Earth; and each member of such parties would carefully prick their fingers and deposit a single drop of blood on the Altar-stone. The coating of blood was several centimeters thick.



The Star-house was stable. Far away and long ago, the final limits of the Universe had been charted. In many times and places since, the limits had been refound, tested, probed; and always found ultimate and unbreakable.

Yet there was always something new to find: for with time came forgetting; and the amount of knowledge was so inconceivable that noone could gather it all in one place at one time. Man had plenty to occupy Himself.

#

Bendon was a Terran. He was short and stocky, his eyes fire-red, his hair the identical color; his skin the natural brown of the ancient Pacific Islanders. His step was light and lithe; his movements the pantherishly swift ones of perfect health. He wore many scars, proudly; proudest of all was a pale line across the bridge of his nose.

Athlil was Alcenian: born on Alpha Centauri III. She was not tall but not short; her body was thick-waisted and heavy-hipped, after the nature of Alcenians, who had been shaped to fit the 1.5 gee field of their adopted planet. Her eyes were green, her skin honey-brown, her hair pure white. In the gravity of her parent world she moved with swaying grace and swiftness, breasts high and firm. On a lighter world she was delightful beyond description. She, too, wore many scars; her proudest was a zigzag that ran from sternum to groin. In later times, when they had found one another, Bendon would trace that scar's length late at night; he called it the Road to Glory.

The tale of the Road is not as simple as it will be told here: no words can capture the delicacy and complexity of the web that drew Bendon and Athlil together. Yet there is no need to oversimplify, nor to leave out important events; and so the tale must start with the Beast that Screamed in the Night.

#

Bendon was on 359 in the 4,987th year of his life. He had gone to 359 in search of peace and strangeness. His friends had told him of the wonders to be found on that wild globe: and of the inner peace that came to many who went there and returned, having pitted their otherwise immortal lives against the balance of sudden death.

So slowly, and with many doglegs, he had come in the end to 359: returning from long forays even into the galaxies Beyond: Fornax, mighty Andromeda and others, far, far, further still.

He had landed his vessel on 359's Starfield, signing it in trust to the Guardians of the Field. If he returned the ship was his again; if not -- well, in a millenium or so the Guardians would sell the ship and his belongings. The Guardians had no need to charge a fee. They had grown very rich without one.

Bendon left all his belongings in his ship and, naked, had set forth into the wilds. Stone axes he painfully chipped there and used to secure food and clothing. Weapons and tools he made from wood and stone and gut. A kiln he built, hot enough to smelt the rich ores he gathered until he could smelt bronze from the tin and copper; the bronze he cast and beat and sanded until it made better weapons, tools and utensils. Plants he dried and pounded and wove into cloth, with which he warmly clad himself for sorties into arctic wastes where he hunted swift, deadly creatures of claws and cunning. Bronze armor he made and travelled to tropic heats, to fight with subtle and savage semi-intelligent natives and the children of Humans who never left 359. Seas he crossed in boats and on rafts; he walked the faces of many deserts.

And in one desert he heard the Beast. In the twenty-fourth year of his wandering he camped one night beneath a great dune and, lying half buried in the sand to conserve heat against the biting chill, drank from his dwindling water stores as he mused upon the flames of his small fire.

For 359 had brought only a temporary forgetting and still he felt no inner tranquility. Beasts he had killed and men and women and aliens -- and all he had loved in some way. He had built his own tools and weapons. He was pleased with his achievements.

But not satisfied. This was not the solution to his ennui.

And then the Beast Screamed, far off in the Night; and the wordless cry spoke to him, filling his mind with a vast wonder. The Scream went on and on, wavering and quavering across the cooling sands, filled with such an unbearable burden of sorrow and grief and eternity that Bendon felt himself dwarfed and renewed as he listened. In that instant he became young again in his soul; and when the Scream echoed away and down, down into silence, purpose crashed into his brain like a rogue moon: Go to Earth! Go to Earth! GO TO EARTH!

The next day when he awoke, he packed his painfully-won belongings and set his feet on the new paths that forked before him.

He reclaimed his ship, thirty years after leaving it; it was unchanged. The holograph of his relatives still lay on his bunk where he had cast it: no dust lay on it, for everything had been cleaned daily by the Guardians.

He lifted the holo and gazed long into the eyes of his parents and their parents, back through many generations. Seventy thousand years separated him from the oldest sires there; yet only ten generations and the resemblance was sharp. Indeed, it was not totally impossible that somewhere those ancestors still wandered the endless Ways of the Star-Trails.

Bendon turned and carefully placed the picture at the foot of his bunk. The old place he left bare.

And he took an Earthward road. The journey back took two centuries, for he stopped at many places en route. But he made the distance and sold his ship and toured the cradle of his species. He stood awhile before the Altar in the great Hall of the Star-house. When he left, he left a drop of his blood, bright red and glistening against the brown of countless similar offerings.

He settled on Earth for a time and founded a Line of his own, siring a new generation that fused his ancestral line once more with several others. And he studied the people he met and learned much about his kind.

But in the seven-thousandth year of his life he heard the Call and it was a far-off echo of the Scream. So he closed out his involvements and took passage on the ships that plied the ways and roamed a little once more; and in the long drawing of years he arrived on Alcen.

#

Now to tell the story of Athlil?

She was born on Alcen, spending her first three millenia there. But the beckoning of stars called even louder, and she passed trusteeship of her Line to her eldest child and bought a ship and spent many years in wandering.

She gained riches of knowledge in those years. Once she needed an arm regenerated after joining a small war on some nameless planet in a galaxy at the furthest borders of Human penetration. She met her great to the sixteenth grandfather and carried a child by him. She slew, in single combat, the fourth cousin (twice removed) of Bendon's grandmother. She spent five centuries trapped on a tiny world before she could build a crude ship and escape.

She came to 359 and heard the Scream of the Beast in the Night, and bent her path Earthward. Standing beneath the vaulting roof of the Star-house, she pricked her little finger and gently deposited a drop of her blood on the Altar. Unknown to her it spread and touched the drop Bendon had deposited there two centuries before.

Then Thlil left Earth and returned straight-away to Alcen, then seven light-years distant. She lived happily awhile but eventually followed the Call along the Star-Trails once more. Twenty years Bendon's senior, her wisdom was wider than Bendon's, though perhaps not so deep. And eventually she followed Creation's Bend back to Alcen.

#

Bendon and Athlil met on the ship that returned them both to Alcen. They did not speak, felt nothing; barely noticed each other in passing.

They met in disembarking. The passenger-tube was graded, with ship's gravity at one end and a smooth progression to Alcen's gravity at the other. A slight discontinuity as he stepped out of the tube caused Bendon to stumble. Athlil, preceding him, heard the misstep. She turned and caught his arm, steadying him. He thanked her and they went their ways.

Both toured the planet, getting the feel of it and wondering at the changes since they had last seen it. They met again several times, even made casual love once.

One evening, Athlil was standing atop a bare, windswept cliff as dusk crept down. She was gazing out to sea, watching the way the wispy clouds swept in before the rising gale. Golden Alen had set, that face (so like Sol's) dropping down and down, reddening until it fell with a great smouldering into the eastern seas. Tiny Bedeh was still high, a starlike orange speck far brighter than any star could be: it cast a muddy brown shadow behind every rock. The scudding clouds did little to dim it; rather, they cast a flickering, dreamlike aura over all.

As Athlil stood there, a freak gust of wind curled on some chance outcropping of rock and, catching her off-balance from behind, cast her from the heights into tumultuous seas that broke cruelly on jagged rocks.

Bendon was out gliding nearby, defying the winds near the cliffs. He saw the fall; robes fluttering madly. He banked in the dense, troubled air and swooped low over the spot where a swirl of silvery hair marked her fall. Loosing his straps, he dropped after her.

Deep he plunged, then rose and swam a little, where the rocks reached out greedy fangs for him. There his hand wrapped itself in tangled white strands. Pulled by the gloried mane, Athlil was snatched back from waiting death as Bendon frantically sculled them both away. Bendon grasped her shoulders and raised her head above the water. She coughed, brought up water, then recovered. Together they worked along parallel with the cliffs until a small bay yawned and rocks gave way to sand.

Ashore they lay awhile, clutching each other. Then they rose and began the painful ascent of the cliffs.

Partway up, Bendon slipped. His face came down hollowly on a jagged edge, splintering his nose and stunning him. He toppled backward.

Athlil reacted desperately, catching his wrist, but his falling weight pulled her loose. Sliding, she passed over a needle pointed-pointed spur. It tore brutally into her groin and up her right side, finally grinding on the junction of ribcage and sternum before tearing loose. Ribs broke and mangled bone plunged into her right lung.

With a bubbling scream she made a mighty, convulsive jerk that carried both of them onto a small ledge, where they lay for long minutes, until the Rescue Squad, alerted by a drop in blood pressure registered by the small implant in Athlil's shoulder, arrived to carry them off.

#

And that's how it happened then, in the endless days of the Star-house. They married: a rarity -- and, when the wounds healed, took the Star-Trails together. Maybe they walk there yet. Stranger things have happened to those who walk the Highways that pass between the ancient stars.

*** -00-

The other story is by Elizabeth C. Vineyard, a name which is not likely to rouse any great associations in your minds. The style and the story may, however. If you are a fan of the horror magazines of days gone by, you may remember the name Ms. Vineyard used then: Mary Elizabeth Councilman, a name which often graced the pages of Wierd Tales. We have graciously been given the permission to publish a revised version of the story she submitted and here it is, without further ado.

###

Overture ### **m.e. councilman**

I have realized for some time now -- about a week, say -- that we are all dead.

That neutron flash, on May 15th at five minutes past noon. Doesn't anyone but me realize that it happened then? At the plant, I have tried and tried to tell the other clerks in the bullpen... but they just won't listen. They go right on with their familiar daily routine... typing triplicate

forms or hanging around the watercooler telling dirty jokes everyone's already heard. Midmorning they go out for a "coffee" break; Tony's Bar, across the street. Then they drift back, making cracks because I bring a lunch from home and work through both breaks, morning and afternoon. "Bucking for private-sec to Mr. Falkenheimer?" they snicker. "Or Mrs. Falkenheimer, when the ol' lady kicks off with cancer?"

Mrs Falkenheimer is already dead, I tried to tell them. So is Mr. Falkenheimer. And the four little stairstep Falkenheimers who drop in daily to bug Daddy for spending money. I am dead and so is everybody else in the whole world.

Physically, we are all dead. The nuclear explosion, however they used it, is geared only to destroy animal life. They will need our plants and mineral resources, of course -- whoever or whatever has been zipping around our atmosphere in those "Flying Saucers" the Air Force is so determined to ignore. They finally made everyone afraid to admit sighting a "UFO"! Afraid of arrest or ridicule in the papers -- even confinement in a mental institution!

So I stopped trying to tell those potheads in the outer office. I went straight to Mr. Falkenheimer and told him.

I wish I'd kept my big fat mouth shut! All he did was pat my shoulder and tell me lots of women can't adjust to divorce. Especially childless ones, who... He left off there. Ralph always told me we musn't have kids... not until we saved up a "nest-egg" to pay down on a house in the suburbs. "Some place where we can raise kids. Not a crowded third-floor walkup, where they'd get mugged on the way to school." So I saved. Every cent! Then he met this cheap little blonde with her story about the operation her mother needed. Ralph drew out our entire joint account, without telling me. I only found out when he wrote me, from another state, saying the girl said she was going to have his baby so the only "decent" thing to do was marry her...

Well; I was in therapy at the Home, for quite awhile. That was a year ago and I'm fine now, really I am! I mean... I was fine, until that neutron flash, like I said, that scared the wits out of everybody. We're all gone now.

Our bodies are all disintegrated, now. All that's left is... "psychic residue", the science-minded call it. They're just programmed memories. The superstitious used to call them "ghosts". Whatever it's called, what it is is a kind of electronic afterglow from our personalities, like a light image on a blank wall when you stare out a sunny window and then look at the wall. Try it! There; you see? That's all we are now. We're all going to fade away just like that, too.

Mr. Falkenheimer was nice, really. He didn't even try to pinch me, like he does when he talks to some of the girls in the bullpen. He asked me if I'd like to take my vacation early, maybe go on some sort of tour. I just thanked him and went back to my desk, with the realization inside me that all those covertly staring coworkers were already dead... dead. All of them DEAD! They just don't know it yet, that's all.

Last month, a new guy had been added to the usual hip-talking crowd, after that cute Miss Perkins got married and resigned. All the girls zeroed in on him, of course. They didn't make much off him, not even Winnie Burns, who gets wolf whistles every time she steps off an elevator. He seemed kind of shy and standoffish but I noticed right away how he kept smiling at me. He would meet my eyes every time I looked up from my work load, too. He had a face like Tyrone Power, with straight profile and nice dark eyes. Serious looking eyes, just like Tyrone's. Just about as unlike Ralph's as any eyes I ever saw...

After the other's left and I was still typing, overtime, dreading the empty apartment and a lonely dinner someplace cheap, he came right over to my desk. Just stood there, twiddling a pencil and watching me. Then he blurted, like a schoolboy with his first crush:

"Miss... er, Mrs. Peebles? Agnes? Prefer your married or maiden name? I... heard one of the guys say you're divorced. So am I." His nice smile twisted wryly. "Worked my fool head off to buy a nice house and furniture for... Gloria; that was my wife's name. She had to have the best! But it wasn't enough," he muttered. "Guess we're in the same boat, huh?"

Yes, I thought, we're both dead and the "boat" is the one Charon is supposed to row across the River Styx. "I'm sorry," I said, rather stiffly, "I mean about your wife. Hurts, doesn't it? I mean to trust someone and then find out they aren't... trustworthy."

"Yeah. It does," he said and then blurted rather boyishly: "Hey, I've got tickets to a concert tonight! Ducats. Newspaper pal gave 'em to me, if I'd cover for him as critic. Would you, uh, have dinner with me, and go to the concert after? Debussy?" He grinned. "Somebody told me you like Debussy. Apres-midi d'un Faun? Claire de Lune? I guess it's pretty silly to like Claire de Lune, cornball, but I play my Philly Symphony record by the hour..."

"The Philadelphia Symphony?" I brightened, almost won out of my withdrawal. "I've almost worn mine out..." Then I remembered Ralph. No. NO! I wasn't about to let myself get hurt again by a man. Hurt and then swindled and humiliated and...

"Sorry," I said briskly, "I have other plans for tonight. Raincheck, maybe?" I softened the refusal, as the nice brown eyes looked like a puppy I'd just kicked for wagging his tail.

I got out of there fast, with my typing unfinished. At the bus stop, I frowned in annoyance -- still, with a little flutter of excitement -- to see that he had followed me for another try. I got on the bus quickly and didn't look back to see that kicked-puppy look again.

Because what did it really matter? "Smitty", as the office crew called him -- his name was Smithgall, or Smithfield or somethingSmith -- he was dead and so was I. It was a scary thought, a gloomy thought, but I held it, as long as my bus ride lasted; the ride I thought I was taking.

I walked to my apartment complex, wishing I had picked up a pizza or something. Cooking for yourself is no fun..! Even less fun than cooking for someone as critical and picky-picky as Ralph. I realized, suddenly, that I only thought I was hungry. The food I ate, perhaps, was consumed by

some kind of microwave thing that I had become. Funny, it didn't burn up the things in my apartment, my clothes! But maybe if I thought it would, it would do that too! Some alien's thought had invented a Force, a new kind of nuclear fission... and here I was now, like the middle part of Hiroshima had been, after the bombing!

Only this time the Force was so much beyond that bomb, it was like an H-bomb was to napalm. This time... POOF! The people were gone and nothing else. Homes, businesses, schools, libraries, hospitals... they'd be taking over soon.

I tried not to think about it. I sat down on the couch beside McTavish, Ralph's Scotty, and turned on the TV. It was a newscast; all about the turmoil in Europe. I turned it off. A drink? I just would not let that cheap little tramp do that to me! A lonely alcoholic...

Then I grinned slowly and with deep pleasure.

The little blonde was dead. Ralph was dead. Their baby would never be born and the money he took from our account would never do them any good!

I started violently at a light, hesitant knock on my apartment door. I stiffened and McTavish, beside me, began to growl softly; at least I thought of him as growling, since that poor little waggy-tailed fellow was dead, too.

I strode to the door, unlatched the safety chain and flung it open. It was Smitty, all but scuffing his toe on the hall carpeting in wistful eagerness.

"I... just thought you might let me in for a cocktail, at least?" he wheedled. "Just talk for awhile?" His nice brown Tyrone Power eyes met mine nervously. "About... what you told the others at the office? That we're all... er..."

"Dead?" I laughed lightly. "Just my macabre humor," I shrugged it off. "Don't you like black humor? Grue-talk? More damn fun, more blood in the gutter? Eyeballs rolling all over the...?"

He nodded slowly, watching my face so intently I stopped.

"Look," I snapped, "Did Mr. Falkenheimer send you? Is he checking up on me? Well, tell him... tell him I was wearing a Napoleon uniform and yelling! Wellington shall not reach Waterloo! Tell him I think I'm a refrigerator, and a little light pops on when I open my mouth!" I saw his brown eyes start to melt with compassion and pity, stopping me in mid-rave.

"Agnes," Smitty said quietly, "I came on my own. I believe you. That is," he hedged, "I believe it's possible we could all be dead. We could just be seeing lightwaves, the way things show up in those Kirlian photos in the lab!" He reached out suddenly and touched my hand. "Like this!"

Little squiggles of electricity cracked and sparked from our contact, as if we had shorted a wire in a lampcord or something. I felt a little shock and jerked back.

"There," Smitty said. "Can't I come in and discuss that? Don't make me go back to the Y. Please! Not... not till I mix us a drink, okay? I see you have a roll around bar; any Scotch? I heard you prefer Scotch, if you drink at all." He produced a bottle from his overcoat with a Houdini-like flourish.

"On the rocks for me," I shrugged and nodded dully, still upset by that electric touch of hands. "Why not?" I gave a hollow laugh, imitating Bela Lugosi, and said, "Ve are ze ondead! Vot can ve lose?"

Smitty didn't laugh. He shivered, handing me a drink from Ralph's bar, the one his lawyer griped about when he didn't get it. I patted McTavish fondly. My husband and the blonde didn't get him, either.

"You, uh, really think we are?" Smitty jerked out the words suddenly. "Dead? In the physical sense? You think these, uh, aliens know how to disintegrate the whole world's population? Did it, when that flash happened in May..?"

I nodded, wearily, and told him about the time I had walked in my sleep. Had walked right through the wall. Into old Mr. Schultz's apartment next to mine, where he was asleep on the couch with the TV going and his hairpiece and teeth on the table. I woke up and found I could only get out by the door. It was locked, just like mine; had a safety-chain on, since we'd had some burglar scares. I slipped out without waking him and got back into my apartment with a hairpin I found on the floor... it's easy, really, if you know how. That's when I knew, I told Smitty, solid-flesh people can't walk through a wall, not even as thin as the walls in this place are.

Smitty listened to every word, not smiling or laughing. He whistled, shaking his head in wonder, without derision.

"You and I?" he said softly, "We're not really here at all? The solids, I mean. All we are is... a shadow? The soul? Something electrical, then, not tangible. Our personalities -- life is an electronic kernel?"

"Like a nut with the shell gone," I giggled. "That's what we are now. Time and space will eat us eventually."

Smitty chuckled, "I never thought of it like that!" He casually reached for my hand again, with an air of easy affection.

His fingers -- what I thought of as his fingers -- closed around his mental image of my hand. I wondered for an instant if he saw them as slender and graceful, instead of stumpy and dishpan red. A stream of bluish flame crackled from our contact. Strongly, he pulled me toward him, pressed his lips against mine in a long, hard kiss. A fan of blue sparks sprayed from our lips, so violently I jerked back, panting. Smitty reached for me again, this time with both hands; insistent, demanding.

"Please," he whispered, "Please let me..."

"NO!" I was screaming, "You men are all alike! Dead or alive, all you want is a conquest! Not love..! Not companionship, not some good, hard-working helpmate you can trust!"

Smitty's mouth worked, his eyes glittering, very close to tears. "But that is what we want!

A companion!" He whimpered like McTavish, watching and whing on the couch beside me. "I've waited so long!" Smitty whispered, "So long alone..."

Both of his hands closed around mine with vise-like strength. Slowly, my fingers began to feel numb, adhering to his like the dry ice on an old-fashioned metal ice tray. I felt, horribly, that if I should jerk free, the skin would tear away, adhere to his.

"Please," Smitty moaned, "Don't send me out there again, alone, you don't know what it's like!"

The numbness was creeping up my wrist and arm. Blue-white curls of electrical energy, snakes, curled up my arm. As I stared at it, it began to look bloodless, as if from frostbite, or a blistering burn. I shuddered, unable to move, incapable of resistance. At my expression of horror, Smitty abruptly let go of my hand. He stood, emitting a gusty sigh.

"Too soon," he muttered, backing away from me toward the window. He set down his drink, carefully. What I saw terrified me. The drink was a solid block of ice. Not just the cubes, and the mix, the Scotch! The alcohol was frozen, too!

"Too soon," Smitty repeated, cold and dry and precise, like a computer clicking out forms. "Our females manage it sooner... with males like that fool husband of yours! Our males are not winning empathetic mates among you; but we must! Our matings are sterile! Our race is dying! We must!"

He shook his head again and I saw his Tyrone Power face waver, then dissolve, like a bad TV picture, into speckles and snow. I was glad I couldn't see under that mental mask!

"I was so sure you were as lonely as I," he muttered. "And I went to such lengths to program myself to your liking! The music you like, the appearance I took... and you seemed so much more intelligent than the rest! You know what we've done!"

He shrugged and sparked, like a cat brushed in cold, dry weather, or a plastic seat cover that stings when you slide across it... hotcold, hotcold, hotcold...

"Unfortunate," he said in a voice as thin as cracking icicles, "What we've done to this planet can't be undone. Now we have to do it again, quickly. Before we 'wink out'..."

All at once he doubled up, arms under knees, and became a ball of flame. Hissing and crackling he shot through my windowpane, leaving a smoky blur on the glass and cracks from the heat.

I stared at my hand, imagining that I saw it shrivel and blacken, my frozen flesh dropping away from bare bone that was charred beneath it. Hotcold. I retched weakly and whimpered absurdly: "Ralph! Ralph! Ralph! Help me..!"

Beside me, McTavish lifted his muzzle and began to howl... I thought.

***000-

LETTERS

LETTERS, we get letters... herewith, samples of the correspondence that's arrived in recent days. There's been little of it; are all you neffers still alive out there?

Lynne Holdom Dave
Box 5 Here are some letters I
Pompton Lakes, got for TB.
NJ 07442 Lynne
[Thanks, Lynne. I need all the help I can get.]

Owen K. Laurion Dear Fanfriends:
1609 Roma NE I thank you for welcoming
Albuquerque, me into your number. You have
NM 87106 invited me to make suggestions
on what N3F can do for me, so I'll tell you, but
first some background to lead up to it.

I have been reading SF since grade school but didn't get into fandom until just after my divorce 3+ years ago. Just as I was looking for something to fill the sudden void in my life, I heard that a Star Trek club was forming. For the first few months, I was just a member, then began to contribute to the newsletter. Then, when a feud shook the club a couple of years ago, I took over one of the offices and editorship of the newsletter. Last election I became club president. Along the way I've also joined the Albuquerque Science Fiction Society and FAPA and I've gotten involved with D&D.

Now my problem: Alpha Centura is shrinking and I need to know how to revitalize her. I mentioned a feud. It was mainly a personality clash but what issue there was "Do we stay a Star Trek club or change to SF&F?" (The de facto outcome has been a compromise -- our emphasis is now media with strong input from both extremes) Only 3 or 4 people walked out but a dozen or so others said, "I was only in it because of _____, so now that she's gone, I'm going too." With them gone, others have said, "I was only in it because _____ was, so now that he's gone, I'm going too, good-bye." [personalities are an important factor in all fandoms, it seems. What you have described has killed many other clubs. I don't want to be discouraging but it can be very tough to beat something like this; neffers, can you help the man?] We're now down to 70-80 active members from the 150-200 [!] we used to have milling around at our monthly meetings. [Owen, 200 people could support a small con, which has been the only place I've ever seen that many fan at the same time; would you be willing to lease some of your excess to a really struggling club? Seriously, if the drop-off is affecting your organization, the best answer would appear to be attracting new members] Aside from reactivating the officers who originally walked out, what can I do to revitalize my club?

Hopefully,
Owen K.

[I'm sure there are neffers abroad who started in Trek fandom. Can any of you suggest a middle course to this troubled neo?]

Ira Lee Riddle It's been a long time since I
365 Newton Rd F24 was able to write a letter to
Warminster, Tightbeam but here goes. For a
PA 18974 long while I've been reading
about how horrible SF is on television and in the movies. Well, I'd like to go on record as one who thoroughly enjoyed Battlestar: Galactica. My wife and I often rearranged our schedule to see it, as long as 60 Minutes was not being delayed. I am well aware of the lousy science in the show, especially

seeing spacecraft with rudders and ailerons in order to dive and swoop to one side, especially when there is no atmosphere in space. However, it is still a fine story. [eh?] I also enjoy reading Perry Rhodan! (Now did that startle people?[yes])

I also enjoy Shakespeare but even the Bard had his off days. I think Heinlein wrote that in one of his stories. [I'd still take Troilus and Cressida over B:G] So what if Battlestar has lousy science? It's still a lot of fun. I don't think that this is the final exposure of SF on television, nor do I think that intelligent people believe that either. (I know that TV is aimed at the 6-8 year old viewer, I've a degree in the field [yet you still watch it?])...

On a more serious matter, I will probably again be a candidate for the Directorate this year... I will not be at either Season or NorthAmeriCon... My wife will be at Louisville so all of you out there say hello to her. PS: I saw Buck Rogers... it was a bad imitation of B:G and a waste of time and money [what would a good imitation be like?]

Tony Davis
The Star
47 Sauer St
Johannesburg,
RSA

Just a short note to say
"hello" from South Africa.
I'm chairman for SFSA (Science
Fiction South Africa)...

Box 1014 A few words here about SFSA:
Johannesburg 2000 close to 100 members, centred
in Johannesburg area, annual short story contest
with an average of 100 entries, a quarterly
publication called Probe, a monthly social and
general meeting... more recently -- a convention.
(Last year's attracted over 200 people, SF films,
lecturers, discussions, etc.) More recently we've
been getting a Durban branch going. SFSA is 10
years old this year.

We're always interested in getting overseas links going -- and maintained. Drop me a line and let me know about N3F or anything we could publish in Probe. [neffers?]

Myself, I'm a Canadian working on a newspaper here with SF interests in many fields and a fan of: Philip Dick, J G Ballard to name but two. Oh yes, what ever happened to Ellison's promised Dangerous Visions 3 [I've wondered myself]

Keep well and remember that SF is alive and well and thriving in South Africa. [the two addresses at the top are both from Tony's stationery, both for The Star newspaper. I don't know which you should use to contact him, if either. Remember the possibility of your mail being opened, too]



1870 Dresden Dr NE B9, Atlanta, GA 30319. 404-636-1156(calls after 11pm are cheap)
18June1979 JULY TB FREE MESSAGE

Lynne not only lost my letter for May, she garbled the one I gave her on the phone. The correct message was; Nick Grassal's homecomputer address label maker is ready. Maybe Lynne can get him to do her labels using month and year of membership expiration. I also hope the excellently done WAHF section continues.

Clifton Davis may note that it isn't even necessary to be an official NFF Activity to have reports carried in TNFF. It only takes the editor deciding to carry it. Usually any show of interest by members will do. Likewise as long as someone wants to carry on a project and others want to donate to it; it goes on. (Are you listening Art Hayes Photo/Slides?)

Those who haven't realized it is no longer required, please cease paying partial year dues. Also, everyone with membership forms, please change them to simply indicate dues are \$6/year, just like a magazine subscription. There have been some minor hassles in record keeping. Paying only in multiple of \$6 would prevent these. Thank you.

The last sentences Lynne put down from me in May TB are gibberish unless you make two paragraphs of them and find the relevant letter in Mar TB to which they refer. (It's Chris Martin's letter.)

NOW ON TO MAY TB

The suggestion that we advertise NFF everywhere and anywhere, cons, clubs, prosines, etc. but for a \$1 sample zine, seems to be a consensus. So why hasn't it been done already? Because the Directorate hasn't appropriated the money. I'm sure any number of people, including News/Publicity Head John Theil or maybe YOU(volunteering to work on News/Pub)would be glad to write & place the advs.

I'm also going to object strongly to Lynne not running a WAHF section in May TB. I know of several letters(copies came to me too)that weren't run in TB. While all of those, I eagerly agree, were just the thing to NOT be run, the NFF letterwrine should have had a one sentence summary of each like "Joe Phan bitched about so&so and agreed with Blah blah." This is NOT to show that masses of letters are not being crowded out, as Lynne said. It is to let Joe Phan and all his friends know the clubzine did indeed get his two page totally unconstructive misleading letter full of false statements on issues which we shouldn't even be worrying about, and which it would take many hours and pages to tell everyone what and why his errors were. But we do owe the person acknowledgement that his missive was duly noted and those further interested can write Joe Phan directly.

And my condolences to David Travis who has been watching this waste and perpetual bogdown for 20 years, as indicated in his May TB letter. A lot of letters that did get in, should have been cut, at least, much shorter.

Lastly, the 20th of the month of publication deadline which Lynne sets for TB is totally unacceptable. It HAS to be the 1st, and every copy of the zine needs to be in the mail by the 15th. Lynne was informed that if she didn't get me the May TB by June 15th, and Nick was informed that if he didn't get me the "Apr-Jun" TNFF by June 15th likewise, I would have to find new editors. While each has had a long series of "compelling reasons" why the zines would be late, and good excuses why they would be out "real soon now", no matter how excusable their problems, this club simply ceases to function when the zines don't come out, and near to on time.

Also they are supposed to tell the President when they aren't going to be able to do a zine in the month scheduled. A Standby Editor is then supposed to do it if possible. This "I'm not going to make it, but will be out in a week or so", does not do the job. Lynne finally mailed the nonUS mbrs their zines and did get me a TB minus one page & the Hugo ballot by the 15th. Nick told me on the phone on the 13th(?) thatTNFF would be mailed the morning of the 14th, 1st class. I haven't got it as of the 18th.

*** **

Sigh Both Dave Minch and Scotty Mathews(who is helping do the roster and other work)are pro non-fiction writers. Dave makes his entire meagre living at it, incl. writing computer programs. He just (2July79)got a contract to program a disco minocomputer to sort records while play was in progress. They want it yesterday and his(Dave's)rent is obviously due. Guess who gets to finish TB as well as do TNFF?

Anyway, Nick Grassal did get that TNFF out for those he could afford first class on by about 24June and it looked very good. He also had another long list of problems stretching from Detroit to Tishomongo(Tishomingo?). Since he really had wanted to do TB in the first place, and Owen Laurion could be talked into taking TNFF for a while, that's how it went. By the time Lynne turns it over, as her attempt at a pro writing career heats up, Nick should have everything settled and be ready to go.

---ooo000ooo---

Matt Hickman
708 20thSt
W.DesMoines, IA
50265

Dear TB: Only one of my fiction nominees got on the Hugo Ballot this year: "Hunters Moon, by Poul Anderson--Best Novelette. Maybe I'm not in the mainstream of thought when it comes to the Hugo nominations, but I have a theory. Stories that get talked about in connection with awards are looked at by the fans who listen with a view towards that potential. Spider Robinson wrote a letter in LOCUS(I believe) that stated he expected his & his wife's "Stardance" to do well in the awards. Lo and behold, it won both Nebula and Hugo. It wasn't a very good story. The premise was nonsensical; that a null gee dance overcame malevolent alien invaders. Bah.((Did you read the sequel, Matt?...imk)) But the characters were well drawn and it did a terrific job of stroking the egos of the self conscious "artists" of sf, both pro and fan.



So I have an idea. The year is half over and a number of works have appeared that I feel deserve consideration for the 1980 Hugo nominations. I am listing these in an open forum for consideration. It is by no means a final listing, but I believe these to be of Hugo quality.

Best Novel: THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE by Arthur C. Clarke. Clarke's name alone is enough to insure award consideration. The central concept is the most evocative of "sense of wonder" since Niven's RINGWORLD. Of course, it isn't as original as Niven's concept, and Clarke does his best to make it seem mundane; but it is still an awesome and well written work.

Best Novella: "Spirals" by Niven & Pournelle. They show stylistic improvement with each outing. Here they add a bit of meat to the 'slick' style they used in LUCIFERS HAMMER. Conceptually it is the best they have done since THE NOTE IN GOD'S EYE. "Spirals" was published in Spring (Apr-Jun) DESTINIES.

Best Novelette: "The Locusts" by Niven and Steve Barnes (June ANALOG). Another excellent Niven collaboration and very thought provoking. Also, "The Ways of Love" by Poul Anderson (DESTINIES#2), an excellent speculation into an alien viewpoint.

Best Short Story: "Can These Bones Live?" by Ted Reynolds, Feb ANALOG. This is the best mood piece I have read in quite a while. Nicely done. Also "The Speckled Centry" by Joseph Green and Pat Milton, another excellent mood piece.

There are also a couple of short-shorts out that are excellent. Too bad there isn't a category in the awards for these. "Hall Creatures of the Third Planet" by Steven Robinson, OMNI, Feb, and "The Schuman Computer" by Larry Niven. That's the third time Niven's name has appeared; it'd be four except the final installment of RINGWORLD ENGINEERS is scheduled for the January 1980 GALILEO and not eligible for the Hugos to be given out next year. I'm sure of its quality after only one installment.

In the last year or so there has been several references to Ian Ballantine, favorable, from the point of view of the publishing industry and from the point of view of sf authors. Apparently he singlehandedly established sf as a paperback publishing category and paid his authors above the going rates. (While you'll get little argument on the rates, I'm glad I don't have to edit the million letters from D.A.W. supporters protesting the "singlehandedly" claim. ...ink) A little perspective is needed here. Doubtless sf would have become a paperback category without Ian Ballantine for the simple reason of its popularity as a magazine category in the early fifties. I am sure his support of various authors led to the publication of some important books. But from the consumers' point of view, when Ian Ballantine was editing Ballantine Books, it was always an inflationary step beyond the price of other sf lines. When others were 50¢ and 60¢, Ballantine's were 75¢; when they moved to 75¢, Ballantine moved to 95¢. Since the DelBey's took over editorship this is no longer the case. (What about Betty Ballantine? Also note that when the Ballantine's sold out, successive editors like those at most houses, probably had much to do with the price.)

Has anyone else noticed that "fan" is becoming a dirty word in certain circles of sf dom? It is, I think, part of a growing rigidity in the sf class structure. The pros are aristocrats who are the great artists and intellectuals, where as fans sole purpose is to support pros. When a fan utters an opinion of a story that the writer disagrees with, that opinion is obviously without merit and beneath notice. (Well, if that Steve Barnes is who I think she is, she's an old sf fan. I apologize for all these interruptions, but this particular letter is just too much fun not to.)

Poul Anderson considers only one critic, Sandra Meisel, capable of intelligent comment. Arthur Clarke has stated his opinion of the lack of intellectual capabilities of those who consider RENEVOUS WITH RAMA to be better than IMPERIAL EARTH, which it is. And Harlan Ellison has built a career upon heaping contempt upon fans. This is one of the reasons I avoid conventions.

Another example is considering all fans to be failed pros. And fans put up with and encourage bullshit like this. (Would you believe most pros who show up at cons consider, very very often quite correctly, all fans to be pros who just haven't made it yet? I am informed Meisel has just sold one. I have also seen so many people I've known in fandom turn into pros--Chalker being the biggest example--that I've quit counting.)

A story does not exist in a vacuum. In fact it has no existence until it is read. The author is in partnership with the reader because the story has no real meaning outside the mind of that reader. And when a story goes to press, it no longer belongs solely to its author, because it is the reader who renders his/her personal meaning to the story. A story has an infinity of possible permutations equal to the infinity of potential readers. (That last note ye ed believes most people will agree with and the following postcard, not intended for TB/TNFF/MAYBE, but arrive this very day, will demonstrate.)

-oOo-

Joseph L Green
1390 Holly Av
Merritt Island, FL 32952

Dear Irvin; Patti and I
are going to Brighton, after
a European vacation, and eo
won't be at NorthAmerican. I

highly approve of what you are doing, though. (Take-a-pro-
out functions, Autographing sessions with 3/time and afternoons
instead of mass parties, etc.) It seems a fine idea, and I
hope it is a big success.

Hope to see you at DeepSoutCon, the only other Con we
anticipate making this year.

Keep them cards and letters coming in: We miss the Irvin
Koch letter if our mailbox doesn't sound its chimes shortly
after pubbing. ((As you can see, Joe, I've been too busy to
read. You'll have to take Hickman's note on your story this
time, and a fanzine. Matt, if you went to cons, you might
meet some pros you get along with rather well; while Ellison
would probably--just for example--not speak civilly to you,
Barnes, Ted Reynolds, or some other relatively new pro, might
become a lifelong semifriend or better, regarding YOU as the
only one who speaks intelligently on their work ten years from
now.))

-oOo-

Sharon Albert
Box 80925
College, Alaska
99708

I agree with Don Franson about sending
samples to people who express interest
in N3F from advertising. I'm new enough
to fandom that had I sent money in and
waited for a zine for a while after

joining, I probably would have felt ripped off. Receiving
a sample and info on how to follow up if I were interested
would have felt right. ((Don is paying for an adv in the
NorthAmerican ProgramBook whether he gets reimbursed or not;
when I got the NFAS update and other info--the issue # of
this zine--on the phone, he said he'd do this if someone
else did the copy. So I'm doing the copy.))

Susan Schwartz: I'm glad someone else has the nerve to admit
how much they were anticipating DRAGONDRUMS. I got tired of
waiting for books to get to Alaska and called a bookshop
in CA to special order one? I liked the section where Plemur
was at Dragonheights the best. McCaffrey has a way of making
a lifestyle very real. I just wish she hadn't moved on to
dinosaurs. I was very disappointed with DINOSAUR PLANET. I
couldn't keep races or the characters straight in my head.

Greg Hills: I think Jack Vance is an acquired taste, like
caviar. I don't like caviar, but I am an avid fan of Vance.
You left out one source for CITY OF THE CHASCH: Tim Underwood
Productions. He and his partner have been producing some ex-
ceptionally beautiful hardback editions of Vance. They are
expensive, limited editions, usually with wraparound dust
jackets and interior ilso. I recommend them to the Vance
fan(atic). They will be doing the entire Planet of Adventure
series. I also believe VANDALS OF THE VOID was Vances first
sf novel. It was a juvenile published in the 1940s. If I
knew a 12year old who needed a good introduction to SF I
would have no qualms about starting them with this. The
characters are real and fleshed out, the plot interesting,
plausible, and fast-paced.

James Wilson: Leiber stories and ideas are interesting and
often humorous, a rare thing in SF. I often find myself
sitting back and just enjoying how he used his words to set
a mood or an atmosphere. He is both a readers' writer and
a writers' writer. That's why he keeps getting so many

awards. I am delighted to see that he is finally getting the recognition I think he deserves. Ellison at his best just tosses me around emotionally, and I love it. Try going to your local bookstore and ordering his books. They are pretty much all in print from Jove (was Pyramid) but aren't marketed as SF. If you start a zine, let me know.

Sally Syrjala: Surprisingly enough for Fairbanks, after a long drought with rotten movies, we are being inundated by good ones, including Superman. It's been a long while since I've been able to say this, but I enjoyed the dialogue more than the special effects in Superman. I DON'T believe a man could fly, but the subtle, self-aware humor of Christopher Reeves' portrayal of Clark Kent and Superman was well done. And this weekend I'll be going to see the Lord of the Rings. That means that I will have seen most of the Hugo nominees for dramatic presentation. I was worried, two months ago, that I wouldn't be able to see any of them in time to vote. I think Battlestar Galactica is pretty awful, but found something even worse last Sunday: Salvage 1. My friends and I got so bored by it (and we were gathered together to watch it, among other things) that some of us started playing backgammon. I find it hysterical that they are cancelling Battlestar and replacing it with Mork & Mindy. Will Hollywood never learn that special effects do not a good show make? More is needed: like dialogue, plausible plots, and consistency, not to mention good characterization.

Jane Quaski: why a person from Minnesota on Darkover? Why not go all the way, and try someone really used to cold weather, like Alaska? We do exist, you know, and would probably know how to survive in the cold weather of Darkover. That weather is probably one of the reasons I like the novels so much. Gasoline under 75.9? Amazing. The cheapest you can get it in Fairbanks is regular (self serve) for 94.9. By the time you get up to \$1.50, I hate to think what we'll have to pay. And speaking of weather, to all of you who are being drowned by the thunderstorms I hear about: the average temperature in Fairbanks right now is 75-85 during the day, with 22 hours of sunlight. It doesn't get dark; the sun just dips behind the mountains and comes back up. And the sunset/sunrises—magnificent. Eat your heart out, Oh You with the mundane weather...oOo-

Vernon Clark
6216 Janmer Ln,
Knoxville, TN 37919
June 27, 1979.

The first Knoxville club meeting had a light showing, mainly media oriented, that is movies and ST. That's okay, hopefully other types will drift in eventually.

The first program was way, way too long. In 2 1/2 hours, all we finished was a discussion on defining SF and Fantasy. All the people attending enjoyed my presentation and it promoted much discussion. The last 1/2 hour was spent on organizational type stuff. Hopefully next time we can get started on some sort of formal organization and club fund raising. The next meeting should have a video program as one of those attending expressed willingness to bring a video machine and his tapes.

What few originals of artwork I've completed with any degree of skill are all out to other zines or apas at the moment. However these copies can be of some use to you though I'm unsure how they'll reproduce.

I'll get to work immediately on "Other Division" and hopefully have something ready for August TNFF. Do I send this material to Owen Laurion as per your letter?

((Yes you do. And thank for the letter to me that was usable for the odd page of TNFF that had to be filled. Nick Grassel, by the way, made it from MS and helped some on July TB & TNFF...but we (Scotty, Dave M., Nick, and myself) could fill an entire zine just with horror stories on what went wrong. Those who think they can do better---...we will put you to work....))

-oOo-

Michael Roden
982 White Oak Rd
Cincinnati, OH 45245.

TB editors, next time let me know in advance. I can make you a new cover for each issue if you like. Just let me know.

Enclosed is a membership form (not run) for our Stellar Fantasy Society. A new development is that Ben Fulves

Final CONTEST Info.*

In case you are a moneyed wouldbe semipro or pro editor, we will now give both names & addresses of the Story Contest winners. Once again thanks to Bob/Wilson Tucker for being final judge and Gerry Page for prejudging the Horror entries. 1:Rick Reichman, 2001 21st Av S B8, Nashville, TN 37212 with "Christmas Kapora". A maybe-reincarnation of Jesus Christ loses at an attempt to break a gamblers bank on Christmas. It was too close to sellable for us to use so he let us have the top story not in the finals(9th). 2:Robert Sampson, 609 Holmes Av, NE, Huntsville, AL 35801; "Deadly Things" was #1 Horror pick but not placed otherwise among the finalists while "The One Out There" was #3 Horror and 2nd general. 3:Steve Antell, 64 1st Place, Brooklyn, NY 11231 with "Sedna's Fingers", horror?among the Eskimoes. He's won in the contest two or three times before and obviously is still trying to sell--not printed. HonMention: Dale Hammel, 7500 Bridge St, Richmond, BC, Canada V6Y257--"Dalkane's Bane"--25,000words on a witch, a gnome, a human, and a fight. Dale publishes COPPER TOADSTOOL. 6th by virtue of #2Horror pick is Mary Elizabeth Counselman/Elizabeth C. Vineyard, 239 E.Cherry St, E.Gadsden AL 35903. 7th&8th: Greg Hills, 22a Polson St, Wanganui, NZ; and Brigitta Henry, 812 Forest Av, S.Bend, IN 46616, with "The Wandering" and "Pyramid Power" (Not any special order.) 10th, effectively, was A.J.Manachino, 50 Bloom- ingdale Rd, Hicksville, NY 11801, with "The Possession of Amy," which was literally sold out from under us tho I wanted to print it. It was about an angel possessing the child of some demon worshipers---cute.

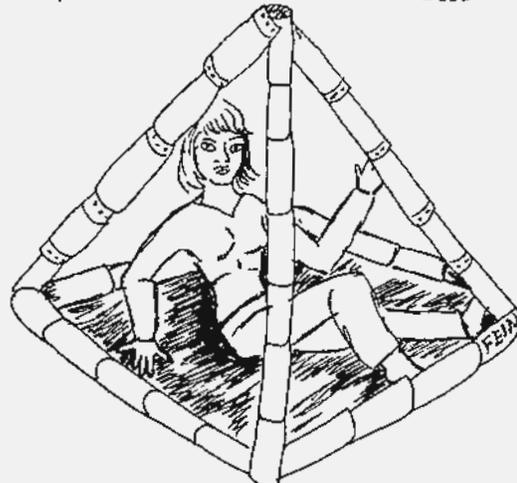
For the benefit of people like Franson, Koch, & Eisenstein, the other entrants were (whose names can now be found) Rick Brooks, David Schorer, Emily Blankenship, Gail White, Larry Atchley, Philip Schuth, Renee Boutin, Mary Joyner, & Ted Duffield. Several had multiple entries.

we Also Heard from for THClint Hyde, nonmbr.

of THE LOOKING GLASS zine has merged his zine into STELLAR FANTASY MESSENGER (NEWSLETTER). This is produced 4 times per year and STELLAR FANTASY MAGAZINE is produced 3 times per year. Membership is only \$5. The new Board of Directors of the Stellar Fantasy Society consists of Dr. Wilfred Beaver ... Andy Andruschak. Art Director/Editor of STELLAR FANTASY MAGAZINE: Michael Roden. Editor of STELLAR FANTASY MESSENGER: Ben Fulves.

((And he sent a batch more info about which you can contact him. It is interesting to note this becomes the umpteenth group to start and run parallel to N3F. This one, tho, seems to cooperate. All others died. In general they appear to be after a much "higher quality" but N3F on the other hand is broader spectrum and will take almost anything from anyone and doesn't just operate via the mail anymore. Also it is 12zines for \$6 in N3F vs 7/\$5 in SFS. My experience is that "the more, the merrier" in fandom--with ANY cooperation paying off.))

-oOo-





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Reply To: LYNNE HOLDOM
PO BOX 5
POMPTON LAKES NJ 07442



FIRST CLASS

TO: