

Pixel Dreams



Pixel



The trajectory from pen and ink to AI symbolizes a larger story in the SF community.
An unceasing hunt for improving tools to articulate our visions of the future.
We do not give away our imaginative spirit but boost it up so stories will be told
and worlds built are boundless like our imaginations.

An Over the Top celebration
of life and art, and overdoing everything else.

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All art and text by Alan White
unless otherwise divulged.

EVERY BIT OF EVERYTHING • MARCH, 2024

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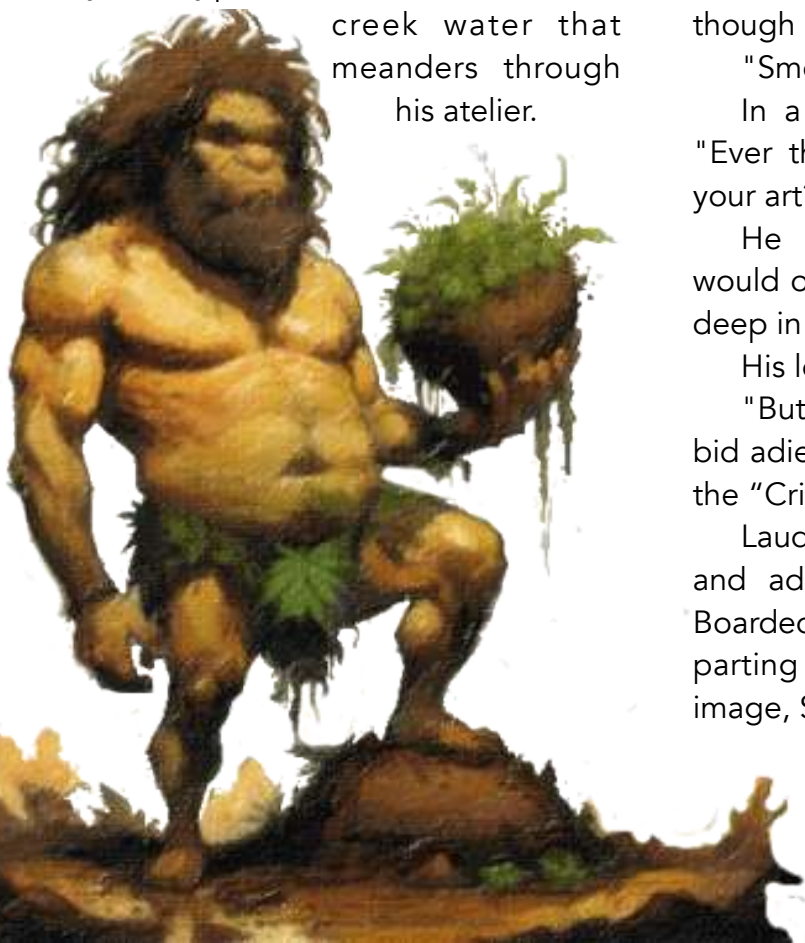
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"It's The Image, Stupid."*

Thanks to the marvels of my Temporal Navigator, I found myself strolling through the Pech Merle caves more than 10 millennia past, just last Thursday, engaging in witty banter with Og, the cave's resident artiste. His magnum opus, "Handprint on Stone, A Statement in Negative Space" has weathered the sands of time, prompting me to quiz him on the enduring appeal of his avant-garde "Here and Now School" of art, currently basking in what could only be described as its "Brown Period."

Remarking his oeuvre was the talk of the town even in my era. He quipped with a twinkle in his eye, "Why shouldn't the pioneers be the trendsetters? It's a grand circle of life, isn't it?"

Og was gracious enough to unveil his artistic method. The ritual commenced with the meticulous blending of warm excrement—courtesy of Larry, the local megafauna—onto a primitive palette of stone, using what seemed like a mystically precise measure of cool creek water that meanders through his atelier.



"Child's play, once you've nailed the recipe," he mused, artfully swirling his concoction. "It's all; in the wrists!" Once satisfied with the potion's consistency, he declared, "Patience, now. We let the muse breathe."

Assuming a meditative pose, he seemed to commune with the spirits. Moments later, he sprang to action, identifying an untouched canvas on the cave wall. "We're losin' daylight!" he proclaimed, armed with a generous dollop of his odiferous medium.

He glanced at me and said "Golden Hour," put his left hand against the wall, wound-up and delivered his signature slap-and-splat technique with the gusto of a true maestro. The resulting masterpiece was nothing short of breathtaking. Og's knowing wink said it all—he had outdone himself.

As I moved to congratulate him with a handshake, instantly regretting my enthusiasm, though it's the thought that counts.

"Smell and flies depart after 2-3 months."

In a moment of bold curiosity, I inquired, "Ever think of using, say, a stick or bone for your art?"

He scoffed, "A stick? Preposterous! You would only dilute the magic! If you're not wrist-deep in the essence of life, what's the point?"

His logic was irrefutable.

"But come next full moon," he added, "we bid adieu to Larry for a grand feast, ushering in the "Crimson Epoch."

Lauding his work for mirroring the zeitgeist and adorning his dwelling with such flair. I Boarded my Temporal Navigator, and Og's parting shot echoed, "Remember, It's the image, Stupid!"

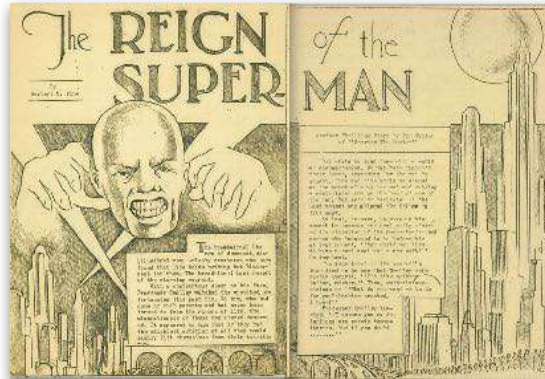
“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”

— Alvin Toffler

Artists, using the tools of painters and illustrators of their time, have brought to life the visions living in the minds of writers of SF for decades by taking them from mimeographs to graphics produced by artificial intelligence that mirror the very substance of SF itself. So it's a surprise when fans reject the world they've spent years pretending they are part of.

From the advent of the mimeograph, fans used various implements — styluses, burnishers, shading plates, correcting fluid — whatever tools for best results making their output look as professional as possible.

Fans didn't hesitate to buy books and magazines made with professional art and printing techniques and quibbled some imaginary hero wasn't using the correct sword for their imaginary world. In the 70s, interest in fan art was at its zenith, and convention art-shows had relatively simple pieces going for big bucks. Art by **Alicia Austin, George Barr, Lela Dowling, Ken Macklin, Tim Kirk,** and others glistened from zine covers, and their mantles buckled under the weight of Hugos and other kudos.



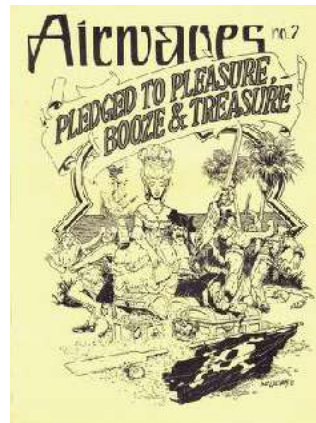
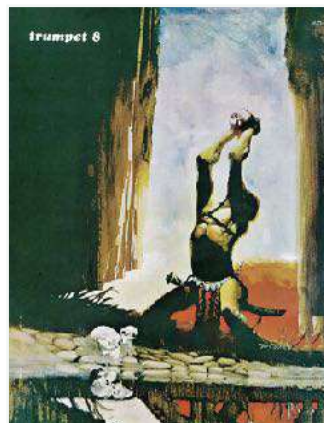
Malcolm Willits and others in the 50s bypassed mimeos for offset, especially in movies and comics fandom before the influx of Xerography.

Something happened in the late '70s and early '80s as long-standing artists found greener pastures elsewhere.

These cons promised fresher thrills and in full color too! Though themes turned to things media and the values plummeted thanks to an overwhelming output of Spock and Freddy Kruger pencil sketches.

It was the ethos and aesthetics of zines like *Horseshit* and *Trumpet* with a certain irreverence and only *one* foot cemented in Faandom indicative of what I thought everyone was actually striving – to be closer to the “future.” Emulating this in 1981 with *Airwaves* offset printing using an IBM Executive with interchangeable type-ball, incremental spacing, one-page memory, and a wrap-around cover seemed so swank.

A fellow at LASFS exclaimed, “This isn't what I call a fanzine,” and threw it on the floor; so much for acceptance. Purchased an Amstrad at Sears in 1984, and out came *Delineator*. It arrived with a crappy dot matrix printer, but you could store the output on a plastic disc!



As much as the Executive was essentially a computer, with the Amstrad came waves of chastising letters for deserting the sacred typewriter!

It felt like Fandom was shouting, "Stop this madness," like Theotocopulos in "Things to Come." But I sided with Oswald Cabal's "He must go on, conquest beyond conquest."

Fans paid good money for publications looking like what I hoped to create, but for free!

Could it be, they were more interested in what they did at 17 than what they *could* do now? Perhaps from fear of technology or that having done *something* in the 60s and 70s is a whole lot easier than doing *anything* today.

The giveaway were comic cons, where the demarcation between fan and pro was non-existent, but Faandom had become a *raison d'être* unto itself eventually marginalizing themselves to a state trapped in "Time and Space" with SF not so much but by self-reverence their sole "Stock and store."

Working in motion picture advertising since 1974; and yes, did every "Private Benjamin" ad you've ever seen, *thank you*. It was the days of production cameras, X-Acto knives, technical pens, wax, Picas, Cold press and "Gnat's Ass" was the standard measuring unit. At 5pm they would toot everyone up to get you to work off the clock! It worked. All the typesetting was done on a steampunk machine until the Mac appeared.



I was Pia's Monkey Boy.

Layout and design could be done with a little beige box and only four megs of RAM. How does that happen? Beats me.

But *their* thinking was, "Wow!" Let's can somebody's ass; who makes the most money?" Their last words were, "You don't have the capacity to

learn the computer, scam." Nobody I knew had any capacity on them either. But a forward thinking owner of a neighborhood print shop, attended the GutCon (Gutenberg fest) and returned with a box with an apple on the side of it and said, "Learn this!" He turned to the typesetter and said, "You're fired." Hmmm, turnabout *is* fair play. He didn't know anything about it, but he saw the potential.

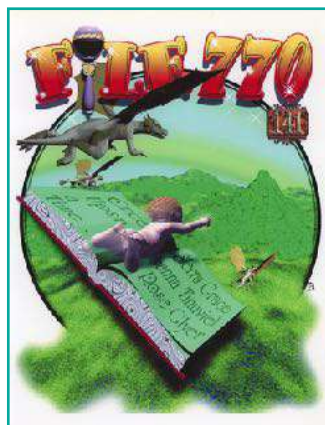
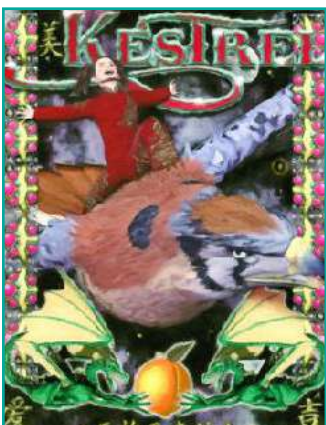
It was like the discovery of fire! Things that would take a day to lay-out with a T-square and blue pencils were now done in seconds!

It's a new world order, way more interesting than Faandom, and there was a crossover too.

I had been trading fonts with fan and *Delineator* cover artist **Bob Lee**, who had digital art in *Verbum Magazine* as early as 1988. Their motto was: "The Journal of Personal Computer Aesthetics."

Yeah, *that's* the word I was looking for!

I went to *MacWorld* every year and read every scrap of software instructions until my synapses collapsed. I haven't been able to read a novel since 1992.



Photoshop plus Poser and Bryce: the landscape software, gave you a matrix for magic! And the potential for a new type of zine cover though few fan artists took advantage.

Acrobat was another software and PDFs were a boon to Fanzines, but getting fans to use it was another matter.

Sure, the Morlock and Eloi went their separate ways but stayed in touch. Once more, a hard sell getting fans onboard, though its sole purpose was to save fans time, money and improve the "aesthetics" of their zines. At last, fans could have a pro-looking zine for *nothing*. No more Mimeo or collating, folding, stapling, packing, addressing, or posting; you could increase your readership a hundredfold. For those graphically inclined, in full color too!

A faned told me, "Yeah, but I like the feel of paper." So print a copy of what you want to read, save a tree.

There was a downside. *Smokin' Rockets* was the first PDF zine from **Joyce Katz** and myself to come out of Vegas. While **Arnie** spent thousands on his self-collating, copying machine, blah, blah, blah, we put out a full-color zine at the press of a button - for nothing! He thought the lack of work and expense so "Unfaannish." Nothing a fan can't print at home should they need to be all tactile about it.

Joyce said, "Fans are too cheap to have fast internet, so we'll have to chop it into three pieces and send them separately!" And "Put instructions on the front so they'll know what to do with it when they get it! But *Smokin' Rockets* is about Change."

The mimeo era has been relegated those who grind their own grain. Indeed, and any artist wants their stuff to be seen as dot and tittle as possible.

You can be assured your zine collection is safe from silverfish, mold, and mildew and won't be chucked into the garbage moments after you hit room temperature. Of course, what happens when **Bill Burns** kicks the bucket is anybody's guess!



We exist at his pleasure, and the moment HE goes, everybody goes! Digitizing this stuff gives us the power of the cockroach - we will always be lurking somewhere.

No doubt most faneds have gotten over it. If they think their material demands a view, isn't it a disservice not to have it viewed by as many as possible? Now, the Internet has created an expected immediacy; we have entered the realm where everybody can grab a slice of the AI π .

Some think AI will rule the world. It's what comes *After AI* that will rule the world. Besides, If AI takes over, it will be on its own time and uninterested in your fanzine. So use it to make a better world - just don't piss it off!

To paraphrase the Toffler quote, it's time to unlearn and relearn new art skills instead of worshipping the old, rehashed material.

Art Evolves in Science Fiction
Remember, it's the image, Stupid!

AI Art: This too is Tantamount to the Creation of Fire

With the popularity of print-on-demand, it's a begin a new art style.

One of the pros for learning something today is to get a handle on whatever the hell comes next. Since many fans lean toward literary pursuits, working with prompt-driven art seems a natural.

Science fiction pushes the borders of imagination, asking "what if" and exploring possibilities beyond our current understanding.

Artists have the unique challenge of depicting things that don't exist or may *never* exist but look like they *should*. The experience of transitioning from the traditional to digital and *now* AI is relatable and provides new tools to better capture the essence of the exploratory nature of Science Fiction and Fantasy.

Critics have said the intervention of AI might, at best, dilute, if not kill, the authenticity of the creative process.

Advancements *never* kill the talented who can make use of it, but it *can* allow for a lot of uncreative people to bog the system with crap. SF specializes in unknown technologies and realms, and AI is an irreplaceable ally that fans should at least take for a spin.

The *real* question is, "Does the image enhance the material?" The primary role played by SF art is not the scenes and the characters but to draw the reader into the story.

As technology progresses, AI complements human creativity and enhance our storytelling.



By working hand in hand with humans, AI-generated art can provide a fresh perspective and bring new possibilities to the table, ultimately leading to a more immersive and captivating experience for everyone. It's exciting to think about all the ways in which AI will in time become ubiquitous and contribute to the evolution of art and storytelling in the future.

The next generation will instruct us how to use it most efficiently like our grandkids showing us how to change the ringtone on our phones.

Reluctance in the SF Community:

As seen, with every technological advancement, some of the most esteemed faneds and artists are the most likely to balk at either learning a new process or doing something different for a damn change than the same old same they've done in the last 50 years. Even when doing so may sweeten the process or garner long-deserved attention. Most of which they must give to *themselves* at Corflu since the majority of faandom finds this stuff no longer relative to modern SF.

By pushing the boundaries of our imagination, we can visualize something that exists between reality and fantasy, expanding our horizons and opening up new possibilities.

With AI, artists can unlock new realms of creativity and bring their visions to life in ways they never thought possible.

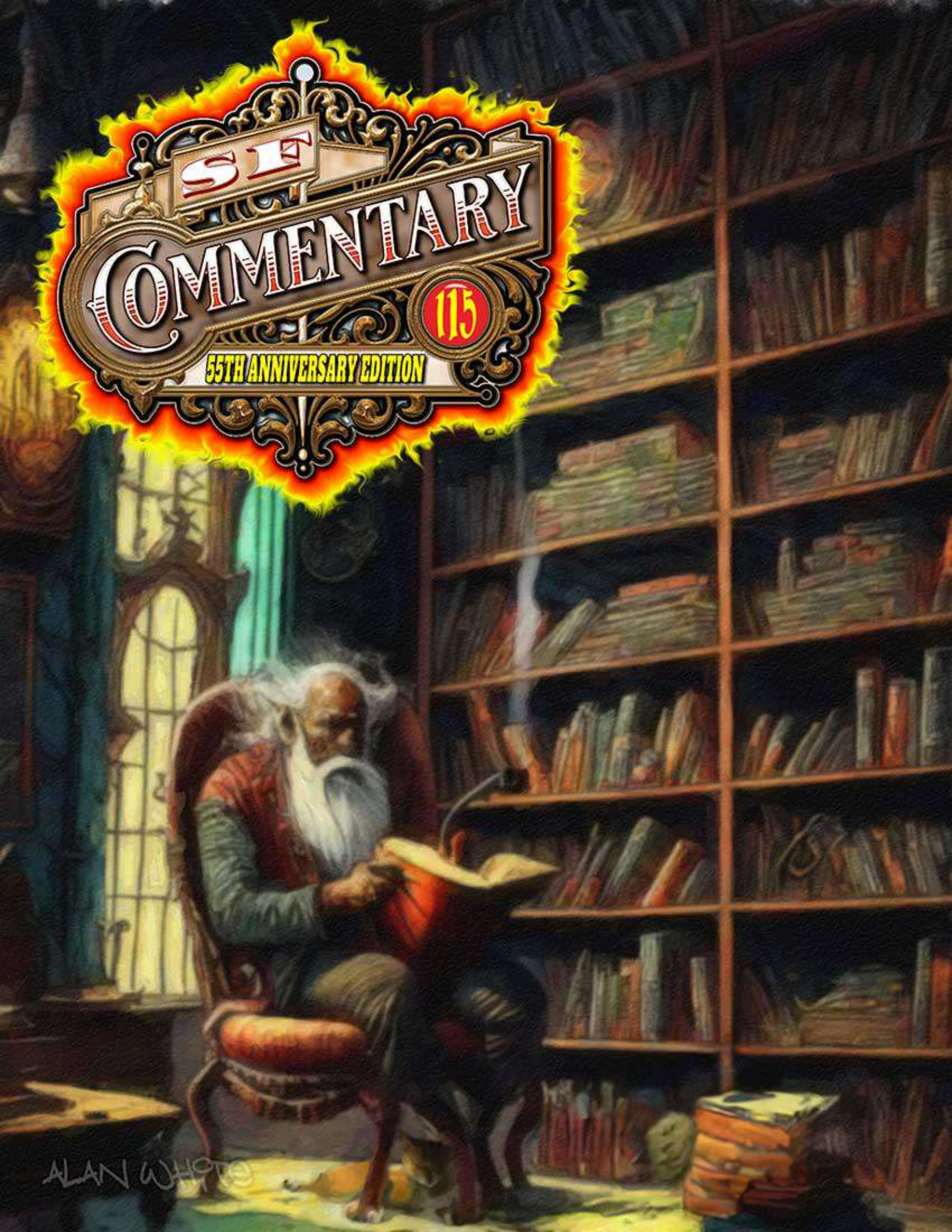
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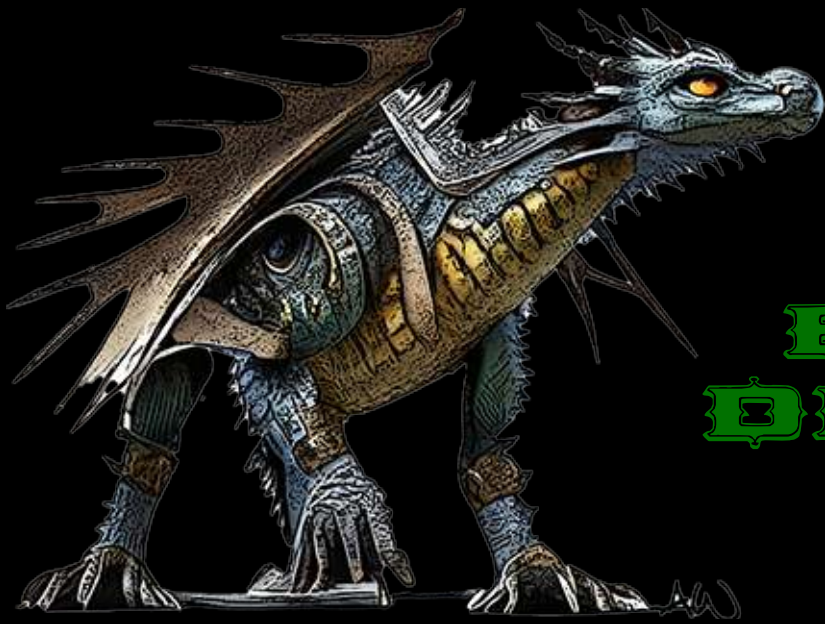
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ALAN WHO



BABY BATTLE DRAGONS





GOLD COAST HOTEL

LAS VEGAS, NV

2 / 29 - 3 / 3 2024

ALAN WHITE



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ALAN SUTHERLAND

"Mimeographic Sciences and Technology Throughout Royal History.



Queen Krollacia of Iceland. Part alchemist and magician sent flyers to the Vikings warning she intends to kill them all at the battle of Örnlygsstaðabardagi as they arrive on the frozen beach, so "Please wear something warm." She is said to have created a copy device called Afritagerðarmaður that was very large, but running it kept you warm. There were many volunteers for this which is why today, Iceland is synonymous with quality reproduction. She also sent secret letters to a little known but warm boy-toy named Randolph.



Empress Brünplatten of Germany. had a smaller machine, obtaining a fine stable of young stallions ready to trot. Thus creating the need for a product called a "Day Runner". Thanks to her mother's reproductive success, she never knew her father, but figured it was the one she loved most, a guy named Randolph... *something*.

It's been said Queen Isabella of Spain financed Chris Columbus' trip to the new world. It has also been said that over the centuries Royalty has financed the invention and perfection of the Mimeograph by Order of the Queen. They have been silent patrons of Mimeographic Science and Technology throughout history. It's almost as if mimeograph machines were closely guarded secrets of royal courts across the globe, with monarchs secretly penning their manifestos pornography and royal decrees on mimeographed documents to secretly distribute to the masses. I can picture it now – the Queen of England spreading mimeographed gossip about the King of France, or the Empress of Russia secretly publishing mimeographed love letters to her paramours. What a royal conspiracy *that was!*

Queen Josephine of France: The Empress found herself in the midst of Napoleon's campaigns. To maintain her connections with her lover, Napoleon, and her secret paramour, Randolph, she established a covert network of Ronéotyper operators who would clandestinely deliver their lettres d'amour across the battlefields of Europe. Each recipient thinking the missive was solely for them. Few knew about the secret rooms at Château de Malmaison designed specifically for the production and distribution of love letters on the heels of missives to generals on the battlefield. These mimeographed missives served as a lifeline between the Empress and her stable of distant lovers, carrying both passionate notes and strategic advice; hoping at least one of them would return alive.

Queen Maria of Romania: In a time when Romania was undergoing significant change, she turned to the Şapirograf to reach her lover, a dashing military officer named Randolph stationed in a far-off garrison. She utilized this innovative technology to maintain the secrecy of their correspondence, ensuring that their love would survive the challenges of war and politics.

Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom: The "Grandmother of Europe," extended her royal influence beyond her own empire. With a network of mimeograph machines, she also maintained a discreet correspondence with her lover, Prince Albert, and a daring soldier oddly named Randolph, during his numerous diplomatic missions. The mimeographed letters allowed them to exchange ideas, strategies, and, of course, their personal affections. Some of these letters fell into the hands of the paparazzi which aided greatly in television productions such as "The Queen" centuries later.



Princess Dazkranken developed an easily portable device that every household may have one. Alas, she killed herself after the entire city received fake missives claiming her secret lover Randolph had been killed at the battle of San Juan Hill.

Emperor Napoleon I of France: Even the powerful Emperor Napoleon used mimeographs in his strategic communications. He'd mimeograph detailed military orders and dispatch them to his generals during the campaigns, making sure that every move on the battlefield was synchronized. However, little did his generals know that Napoleon also used the mimeograph to send passionate love letters to his Empress Josephine, and his mistress Marie Walewska illustrating his softer, more intimate side. Maria also became adept at using the Powielacz to contact her secret lover, a mysterious fellow who has evaded history, named Randolph... something.

The mimeograph briefly became an instrument of love, war, and diplomacy, connecting monarchs and their distant constituents and lovers across the tumultuous landscape of 19th-century Europe. The "Royal Mimeograph Chronicles" revealed a world where technology and romance intertwined, ensuring the affairs of state and affairs of the heart continue to flourish amidst the chaos of history.

Forgotten Hero in Mimeographic History



Princess Bohemia Titwhistle of Palindromostan's contribution was unlike any other. More petite than practical but was said to shake and vibrate madly, making operation difficult and her contracts were lost. In a fit of spite, this story breaches Mimeographelia.

She was found a week later quite deceased having straddling the device. She left a note reading "I don't need no fucking boyfriends!" A single visitor appeared at her funeral, some stranger named Randolph.



Let us not forget the most unsung pioneer of Mimeographic history. Though technically not a royal, he lived in service of the Queen. Not just one, but many in his office as Reproduction Technician at the Ministry of Mimeographic Science. When conscripted for the military he once slew an entire brigade of villains with a single mimeo stylus!

He came to the United States from Europe shortly after the industrial revolution, a soldier retired from endless battles. He began his own mimeograph business across the western states with a slogan:

"Delivered to Your Door, Hot and Wet."

He invented the X-1 Power Model Reproducer which was called an "Obscurity in the eyes of God". He later stunned the world with his invention of the Diesel Powered Mimeograph, but alas, two years later he died of asphyxiation in 1935. They called him Johnny Dittoseed, but his real name was thought to be Randolph... something.





A TALE FROM THE MEIOCHROME

BY PHIL DEPAGE



A Brief Tale of Particulate Matter
in a Single, Moist and Unruly
Micro BioChapter entitled:

Maintaining Fluxation At All Costs in a Matter of Time.

In the vast expanse of the
multiverse, beyond the reach of
mortal comprehension, lies the
Realm of the BioConstruct.

Here, the laws of physics and reality
bend to the will of individual
consciousnesses. Material existence
is shaped by the virtue of those
who inhabit this surreal and
otherworldly realm.

Within the cosmic abyss, a
monstrous entity, an ever-hungry force,
feasts upon the edges of existence. Like a
colossal serpent, it devours planets, galaxies,
and black holes with a ravenous hunger that cannot be sated. Celestial wanderers find their final rest
within the gaping maw of this cosmic behemoth, forever trapped within an eternal cycle of
consumption and rebirth.

In the BioConstruct, microscopic entities dwell within undulating fields of fluxation known as the
Melochrome. Here, the landscape is a surreal tapestry of towering protuberances and flowing
spheres, delineating domains of personal respite. From minuscule receptacles to towers of sinew and
substance, the BioConstruct is a living, breathing ecosystem, teeming with specks and vital fluids
coursing unbridled across the plains.

The air is thick with the scent of organic matter, a pungent aroma that clings to everything. The
walls are slick with moisture, and the ground pulses with a rhythmic beat that echoes throughout the
BioConstruct. Glowing organisms drift lazily through the air, casting an otherworldly glow upon the
landscape. The Melochrome itself is a shifting, ever-changing sea of vibrant colors, a constantly
evolving tapestry of light and shadow.

In the depths of the caverns and fistulas, where the luminescent currents weave an intricate
tapestry of fluidity, the denizens of the BioConstruct move with a fluid grace, their senses attuned to
the omnipresent perils lurking in the shadows. They thread through labyrinthine passages, ever
vigilant against the dangers that lurk just beyond their sight. The air is alive with the sounds of
movement, the rustle of sinew and the sloshing of vital fluids as they wend their way through the
twisting passageways.

The imperative echoes through the membranes of this organic society: "Maintain your substance,
or face the inexorable descent into non-assemblage."





Struggling against the relentless current of the Red River, a passerby stumbled upon a chilling scene – the remnants of a societal member, teetering perilously on the edge of life. M'Itern, a figure scarcely known in the community, was ensnared in a dire state of defluxation, barely maintaining his grip on existence. His alarming appearance sent waves of horror among the onlookers.

In haste, he was conveyed to the Learning Place of Mentor Flarg'n, a sanctum of wisdom nestled within a colossal purple protuberance, marked by healing hues of red, green, and blue. Laid upon the responsive organic floor, M'Itern was surrounded by three nodules, each emitting its distinct hue, as they confronted his critical condition with desperate measures.

The bio-construct, a marvel of their advanced healing arts, enveloped M'Itern in its tendrils, forming a cocoon of ethereal energy. The nodules throbbed in a mesmerizing dance, pulsating light that coursed through M'Itern's ravaged form. The red radiated warmth, mending his frayed existence, while the yellow calmed his turmoil, and the green infused him with a resurgence of life.

Mentor Flarg'n, an adept in the subtle arts of organic manipulation, orchestrated this intricate ballet of healing. Under her watchful eye, M'Itern's form gradually gained stability, at least for the moment and his very being was congealing back from the brink of dissolution – a testament to their profound mastery over life's delicate balance.

Yet, an ominous shadow loomed over this feat of recovery. M'Itern had dared follow the forbidden paths against the Flow of the Red River, a venture fraught with peril and shrouded in mystery. His brush with death, a consequence of his reckless curiosity, had brought him to this precipice, where loss of being or a complete dissolution into post-fluxation was imminent. Now, only the most resilient fragments of his being endured.

The Council of Leaders would inevitably learn of this unsettling development. M'Itern's plight, teetering between existence and oblivion, sent a ripple of dread through the community. His harrowing state served as a grim testament to the fragile nature of their existence in a realm where being itself, could unravel under the strain of the unknown.

This incident transcended a mere warning; epitomizing the perilous journey beyond the safety of their known world. M'Itern, once a mere silhouette in their society, now personified the daunting path riddled with unseen horrors that lurked in the unexplored waters of the Red River.

As the nodules continued their labor, a somber air pervaded the Learning Place. Those present, including Mentor Flarg'n, were gripped by an unsettling awareness. M'Itern's ordeal underscored the unpredictable and often merciless nature of their world, where the lure of discovery was irrevocably intertwined with the dangers of the unfathomable.



The Red River, a vortex of mysteries and hidden depths, represented a challenge beyond the physical, delving into the very core of their essence.

In a world where organic marvels coexisted with lurking terrors, this episode stood in stark contrast to the usual equilibrium of their existence. The Learning Place, ordinarily a bastion of enlightenment, had morphed into a crucible of survival and healing.

Even as M'Itern's form approached stability, a palpable sense of dread lingered. His ordeal unearthed pressing questions: What secrets had he uncovered in the shadowy depths of the Red River? And what repercussions would this knowledge bring upon not just M'Itern but their entire civilization?

The mentor's area, a testament to their biotechnological prowess, was a symphony of living, sentient tools. Diagnostic tendrils delicately probed for life's nuances, while healing pods, throbbing with regenerative energy, awaited their charges. Here, the fusion of nature and science was a delicate dance of restoration and comprehension.


The Council of Leaders, convening under a cloud of urgency, was burdened with a profound anxiety. M'Itern's condition underscored the risks of venturing into the Red River's enigmatic domain and through the sphincter – a realm where the unfathomable awaited the unwary or foolish.

As the assembly dispersed, M'Itern's ordeal cast a long shadow, imprinting a haunting reminder of their delicate balance between curiosity and caution.

The Council, stern and unwavering, admonished those foolish souls tempted by the abyss. Their warning resonated with a chilling clarity: "Venture not up-flow for the ultimate price awaits. Heed our words; resist the call of the abyss."

Amidst this charged atmosphere, Mentor Flarg'n contemplated the ramifications of M'Itern's audacious journey. His boldness raised daunting questions about the unknown dangers that such valor could unleash.

A silent query hung in the air, echoing in the hearts of the onlookers: What lay concealed in the dark recesses of their world? And what cost would their curiosity incur? M'Itern's predicament was a stark reminder that some enigmas, once unraveled, could never be resealed, and the toll for such knowledge might exceed their gravest fears.



Before Mentor Flarg'n, a scene of chaotic disarray. M'ltern, now barely more than a fundamental organism, presented a formidable challenge. His fragmented being, a sobering illustration of the perils they faced, required Flarg'n's expert reassembly.

His filaments, delicate and spectral, drifted aimlessly toward the glowing nodules above. Below, his vital fluids wandered across the undulating floor in a disconcerting display. Assistants hurried to contain the spreading fluids, their efforts a frantic dance amidst the encroaching disarray.

In the dim bioluminescent glow, a sinuous pseudopod emerged from M'ltern's gelatinous form, signaling a flicker of hope amidst despair. Flarg'n's gentle voice, both instructive and imploring, cut through the tumult, urging M'ltern to cling to the fragile threads of his existence.


As M'ltern's form began to respond, issuing a tendril, atop of which an orb from which a chilling bolt of light shot towards Flarg'n's heart, plainly visible behind her covering of translucent blue flesh, but dissipated harmlessly, heightening the sense of foreboding in the chamber. Her reaction was a mix of fear and disappointment, underscoring the gravity of his condition – a harrowing manifestation of the dangers inherent in defying the unknown.

"M'LTERN!" she yelled, her tone laced with alarm and sorrow. "It's not *me* you should blame for your current state of flux; the danger is not just physical; it's societal and existential."

Here, in this living, breathing realm of organic technology, every action rippled through the fabric of their society.

Flarg'n's voice echoed with urgency as she implored M'ltern to focus, her plea highlighting the critical nature of his condition. The room was charged with a tense atmosphere, a desperate bid to stave off his impending dissolution.

"I'm trying to help you! Ceasing your defluxion may save you from the unspeakable horrors of the Clostridium. Consider the re-life I've given you as a gift. I have now plied enough reconstruction to keep you from complete disfluxation. But don't be foolish... escape if you can. I have given you many tastes of reconstruction but can go no further without your help!"



Her plea, a desperate cry to M'ltern's fading essence, echoed in the somber space, reverberating with the gravity of their dire situation.

The yellow orb, a sentient beacon began speaking for M'ltern, and flickering with a worrisome inconsistency, its light sputtering and sparking in apparent agony.

"I..." it stuttered, its voice fractured and strained, "have... seen... the future." As Flarg'n observed, shock etched on her face, the orb's light began to wane, its vitality draining away like sand in an hourglass. "No, M'ltern, do not pass... concentrate!" she urged her voice a blend of fear and resolve, a desperate bid to anchor him back from the brink.

"What do you mean by 'future?' Do you confess to venturing into the abyss against the will of the flow? You realize you'll be imprisoned when the Clerics catch wind of your whereabouts." Flarg'n's actions were frantic yet precise, pressing various colored algae against his body, each placement a desperate attempt to reverse his fading life. She presented a green substance, sweet but gritty, to which M'ltern responded favorably, his form relaxing into a deceptive state of tranquility, a facade masking a lucid clarity.

In the unsettling glow of surreal bioluminescence, M'ltern's account unfolded, his voice trembling as he narrated a journey of harrowing adventure and spine-chilling discovery.

"I fashioned makeshift tools like straps and cords using vibrant algae and Riverweed. With these, I defied the flow in the passageways, against the flow and into the sphincter, clinging to the pulsating walls and outcroppings. In the ethereal realm of dreamtime, I fell and glimpsed the land of the future, not once but thrice.

"No, not a dream, but a premonition of reality. Navigating the undulating passages, I defied the currents of time and entered the land of the future. The walls, shrouded in eerie shadows, seemed to recoil from my touch as I pulled myself forward, drawn by the haunting glow of the Melochrome.

Intruding into this realm, I sensed the fabric of time pushing back against me as if the universe rejected my presence. The river guided me to several beckoning caves, and I chose the brightest, driven by curiosity.

M'ltern's tale, woven with the threads of danger and the surreal, sent an icy shiver down Flarg'n's spine. His words were not merely a recounting of an incredible journey but a dire echo of the unknown perils and marvels lurking beyond their realm. His reckless venture into the abyss, defying the natural order of time and society, stood as a chilling testament to the thin line separating inquisitiveness his actions might unleash hung like a malevolent specter in the air, infusing the room with a palpable sense of foreboding.

"I stood tall upon an enigmatic mound, a lone observer of the incomprehensible. Yet, in the midst of the utmost brilliance, I had traveled a great distance, seeing, feeling, tasting, and watching large beasts feasting upon that which springs forth from the surface. And there was a when, as the luminescence dimmed, the future became dark, and for a moment, I feared for my life, expecting the worst, as there was fearsome noises from beyond the formations and vegetations. But the roaming beasts, quietly nestled, and by this, I was reassured. By and by, the luminescence rejoined us, and the beasts regained their feet; and for but a moment, a most peculiar thing happened. A clear liquid fell from the sky across the plain from which they drank heartily; I joined them and found it cool and refreshing.

At last, I came upon an open field of vegetation from which animals of all dimensions pulled growths and nodules from the vegetation they consumed heartily. In this too, I followed their lead and found many things to sustain me. I tended to laze under the growths, watching the animals play about and 'ere I remained in fascination for three periods of light and shade.

As the luminescence returned, bringing life back to the plain, a strange occurrence befell – a clear liquid descended from the sky, quenching the thirst of the land. I joined the beasts in their drink, finding solace in the cool, refreshing liquid in an open field where creatures of various sizes feasted on growths and nodules. Emulating them, I found sustenance in the unfamiliar. For three cycles of light and darkness, I remained captivated by the play of the animals around me," he spoke, his voice quivering with awe and trauma.

Returning to the Red River, I sought a vantage point atop an outcropping of stone, desperate to expand my vision across this alien landscape. Perilously, I climbed the rocks and, arriving at the summit, was confronted by a creature born of the abyss with plans not dissimilar to mine. Without warning nor recourse for myself, he leaped upon me, and the two of us tumbled down the stone tower, onto each unyielding surface tearing into my flesh with ruthless indifference.

It was a descent marked by agony and despair, tumbling from stone to stone as if retracing my steps in a cruel reversal of ascent and decidedly more painful. I hit the flow and rose for a breath of air.

Whereabouts of the monster was not immediately evident and my makeshift device lay abandoned on the beach,. My energies were spent, and equipment was now lost to me.

At last, the sight of the creature marred my last glimpse of the area impaled on a rock while small creatures quarreled over what remained and a fragment of my bio-matter so cruelly abandoned on the beach.

Thus, M'Itern was swept away by the relentless flow, dragged through one fistula after another, each passage exacting a brutal toll on his battered form like an eerie dance of urgency and grace, snaking through a world beyond earthly comprehension.

The caverns he traversed were bathed in surreal hues adorned with bioluminescent flora that painted the darkness in otherworldly colors. Strange, sightless creatures glided with an eerie grace, their existence a testament to the enigmatic beauty of perpetual darkness. M'Itern spoke:

"As I lay at the threshold of eternity, I find solace in a profound truth: my journey has led me to redemption. I've witnessed wonders beyond this world, lived a life rich with experience, and embraced the adventures that came with a price. But, above all, it is your presence that has been my greatest blessing, giving me the strength to share these final words. Cherish them, and let them inspire you to forge a path of significance. My legacy now rests in your hands – make it count."



He gasped and his form dissolved into a viscous fluid that merged into the undulating floor, and was gone."

Flarg'n left to contemplate the bizarre turn of events, sighed deeply as she stood, and returned to her duties, navigating the pulsating corridors of her living world.

Her final thoughts hung in the air, a subtle echo of resignation and disbelief. "Narf happens," she muttered, a statement that belied the turmoil churning within her.

As Flarg'n contemplated the bizarre turn of events, she sighed deeply, her mind heavy with thoughts of the untold adventures M'ltern had described. Her world, bound by the Council's rigid structures and shadowed by M'ltern's enigmatic vision, felt increasingly constrictive.

It wasn't long before the Clerics appeared at her portal, but without knowing M'ltern's whereabouts, Flarg'n sent them on their way without guilt.

She'd had enough excitement for the current when and visited the Realm of Dreams, where students meticulously preserved the stability of their constructs while they slept. Flarg'n lay upon the forgiving, undulating floor, her mind adrift in thoughts of the uncharted adventures described by M'ltern and dreaming of wandering fields of the future in wonder.

Awakening from her reverie, she was gripped by an insatiable yearning that tugged at the very core of her being. Her world, confined within the rigid structures of the Council, felt like a noose tightening around the free spirit of her soul.

In the depths of her heart, Flarg'n knew that true discovery required embracing the unknown.

By defying the Council, she wasn't merely seeking new horizons but embarking on a journey to redefine her existence. Yet, beneath her resolve lay a swirling undercurrent of self-doubt and trepidation. The fear of the unknown, the potential repercussions from the Clerics, and the uncertainty of what lay beyond the Red River gnawed at her. The thought of what they might unearth and how it could irrevocably change their world and themselves instilled a sense of profound fear and existential dread within her.



She prepared herself for the journey and assembled a small group of brave if not foolhardy souls seeking adventure, Flarg'n wrestled with these conflicting emotions—a battle between her innate curiosity and the ingrained fear of defying the societal norms that have, till now governed her existence.

Following M'Itern's description, they fashioned floating devices of reeds and nodules that would help them stay afloat, keep them together, and carry a few supplies, as they pushed their way upstream.

An appropriate when was upon them

"Are you ready, companions?" Securing themselves to their makeshift flotation devices and a boyed basket to carry supplies, the anxious team echoed affirmations through the cavern and stepped into the fluid. Trepidation and anticipation filled the air and they felt empowered. There were no Clerics about and they gingerly stepped into to the flow.

The chilling current tore at them and their makeshift devices, testing the resilience of the algae ropes. Experiencing a surge of adrenaline and liberation, Flarg'n led the way.

Deeper and deeper they stepped till reaching a point where they were all afloat and with much effort made some headway forward. They found simply staying in place against the flow a hapless task and were soon exhausted and decided to walk to the fistula in the wall, where they may rightly deploy their grappling devices and move forward.

A small group of excited children ran joyously about the beach, waving and calling out as they applied their ropes and clung to the walls, and soon they had disappeared into the darkness and the children's voices echoed as they watched the adventurers disappear into the darkness, pulling their equipment against the flow of the Red River.

The adventurers silently disappeared into the future, and soon the children tired, and padded away as if nothing had happened. But they will remember this event for many whens to come.





Jennifer 2.0

By Ross Chamberlain

"What have you done, Roger?"

Rog adjusts his VPSpecs, but yes, that is Jennie staring at him.

"You recognize me?"

"Of course, you pighead! I'm your sister!"

"Oh," he chokes.

He's only just brought up the simulation, but that was her, all right. Her eyes— That twitch in the corner when she was about ready to scold him? Oh, yes.

"What did you do, kid? Where are you and how did you find me?"

"I'm at the Veritalis Lab, Sis. But you—"

"Ah, jeesh, Rog! You still working with that Plover guy?"

Bill Plover? Whoa...

"No, he's long gone. Almost—"

No, he'd better not tell her.

She cocks her head, a frown squinting her eyes. He notices the VR scenic behind her is out of focus. Hmm...

"Long gone?" she repeats. "We were just talking with him, weren't we? Couple of days ago? Before I had the—"

Oh. Her—accident. She remembers that. Then—it is her sim, isn't it! It had to be, but still...

"It's been a while, Jen. We got that stuff figured out, with Bigelow's help."

"Oh," she's puzzled. "Bigelow?"

"Um—Plover's tech head back at Corp."

"Oh. Yeah... So, you did go on with the Actualized Integration Base Chip, then. I thought you didn't feel it was going to work."

"Yeah, the AIBC. Viable yet pliable was my take, then. I feared too pliable with the AI

design we were using."

"And this—Bigelow changed your mind?"

"He had a surprise for us."

Her expression's skeptical. Roger can't blame her.

"I don't know exactly how it works, something to do with quantum time adjustment. Believe me, Jennie, that's out of my realm! It seems to allow a kind of integral verification process that brings us close how they think the singularity would work."

"I remember you mentioned that when you and Plover were talking about an AI's accessibility limits."

It's Roger's turn to raise an eyebrow. "I thought you missed that part."

"No, I was paying attention. Vernor Vinge, and all that."

Roger casts his mind back, shakes his head. "Well, anyhow we decided to go with a neural feedback system within the crystalform scanning process, concentrated on a limited field base. Plover called it the PosiBrain—like Positronic, after —"

"Asimov, sure."

"You read him?"

"Sure. It's a few years ago, but yes. I take it this—uh, PosiBrain—took the place of the AIBC."

"You got it. Well, linked'em. Integrated. Had to change the name anyway."

Roger notices that Jen is apparently now sitting in that room where they had last seen each other, with Plover. She turns her head, looking around, and nods. He catches a fast glimpse of Bill which fracts out.

He stifles a wry chuckle to cover the twinge.



"It's got it pretty close," she says, turning back to him..

"You've figured it out, then?"

"Then I'm in th—the Simulator, you call it?"

He nods. Close enough.

"So— I didn't make it, did I?"

"Well, yes and no. You're at home, now, Jennie, with Tom and Sweet and Grommet..."

She pauses a moment, unfocusing. "They are, aren't they! I can tell they—we—they are. Taking care of—me. There's some kind of scanner on, I guess..."

"But I'd need this connection to visit with them, wouldn't I, huh."

She's back, smiling, but it's a little wan. There is a crease in her brow.

"I guess I had to catch up," she says. "Maybe this quantum timing thing still has to leave us a little time, to pick up on what's happening."

Rog nods. "You remember what the early AI used to do with its imagery?"

"Sometimes fantastic, but they had trouble keeping detail appropriate to context." She nods. "So, they've fixed it, then," she concedes, glancing down at her hand.

For a moment.

"That's the... 'Integral Verification process accessing corrective and associative options at a rate video streamers could barely dream of a decade ago,' huh," Rog informs in a pedantic tone.

Her brows quirk up.

"I notice we seem to be able to talk without delays," he smiles.

"So— There's two of me?"

He sighs. "In a sense. There's a question of how to deal with identity... But we did as thorough a compilation of you as we could. After the preliminary overview at St. Michael's, then your videos and letters, some interviews around. Like that."

She nods. "I remember some of it.

You said you'd get me deep-scanned while I was in the hospital."

"We did, and we got all their examination data and your records as well... So, how do you feel?"

She hesitates, nonplused.

"Um, good point, kid." "I— feel like I'm all here; I can touch my face—"

He watches her do so.

"There's maybe a little delay between the finger touch and my nose feeling it, but that's only because I'm looking for it. It—feels right."

She glances down, then up at him with a little wink. "I seem to be all here."

She tilts her head, listening, "I look for close room echoes and resonance as I speak" and nods, "they're provided..."

"They're provided," he agrees. "Part of the Sim package. I'm trusting all this—that you—are, well, fully stored, and on track, Jen."

"Stored, then. Not—restored."

That flicker of her eyelids is brief, clears. A little frown remains, though, he notices, while an ache brushes his shoulders. He fingers his face, the evening bristles around his chin.

Not a word from her about actual feeling. Experiencing comfort, temperature... Not a twitch. Yet to come, he hopes. The data for all that should be there, if the Posibrain—

"How did you find me?" he asks.

"You were here. I don't—I don't remember what I was doing, but then I noticed you, and I was a little miffed. Like you had just interrupted me or walked in on me or something."

He nods. "I just connected my VPSpecs to the Simlink. So, I suppose I did just that."

She fixes her eyes on him. "Is there a backup?"

"There'd better be!"

"That's my Roger!" she grins.

She was real...for a simulation. And somehow she looks a little more like he remembers her, more recently. A crease or two under her eyes, maybe? A shadow?

He surreptitiously checks that the backup was in fact on, making sure she'd be more than just, well, back next time.

It wasn't exactly a recording, but it would cover their whole session, and her updates would hold.

He notices her frown line has already deepened a little, her brow just showing a little furrowing. She's already picked up a little more of herself through the link home.

Jennifer 2 would remember this conversation. And more.

As would he.

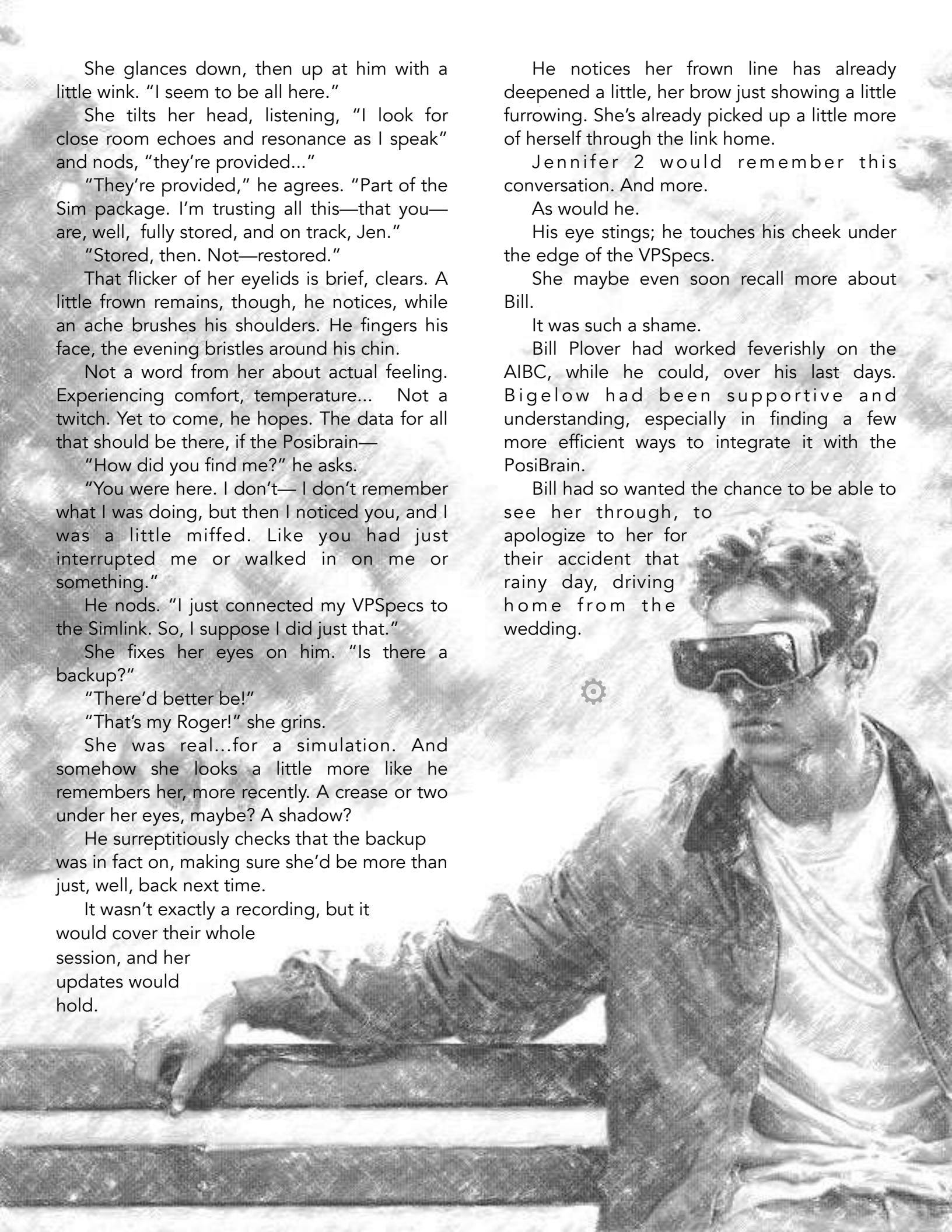
His eye stings; he touches his cheek under the edge of the VPSpecs.

She maybe even soon recall more about Bill.

It was such a shame.

Bill Plover had worked feverishly on the AIBC, while he could, over his last days. Bigelow had been supportive and understanding, especially in finding a few more efficient ways to integrate it with the PosiBrain.

Bill had so wanted the chance to be able to see her through, to apologize to her for their accident that rainy day, driving home from the wedding.





By the dawn of 2070, the skyline of Manhattan had transcended its once iconic contours to become a beacon of futuristic splendor. Skyscrapers, now clad in the luminescent sheen of advanced materials, pierced the heavens, while the air buzzed with the silent ballet of autonomous vehicles and holographic advertisements that danced like will-o'-the-wisps among the clouds. It was within this neon-tapestried canvas that the residence of Sasche, Zoë, their son Matty and aging Cocker Spaniel Finley stood — a sanctuary of warmth amidst the cold precision of a world remade by technology.

Matty, a nine-year-old android with the visage of a child eternally caught in the throes of innocence, was the axis around which Sasche and Zoë's world spun. With tousled hair the color of autumn's embrace and eyes as deep and blue as the last sliver of sky before twilight, Matty was not merely a marvel of circuitry and code; he was the embodiment of their unfulfilled dreams of parenthood. For Sasche and Zoë, who had faced the barren truth of their own biology, Matty represented a love that was no less real for its synthetic origins. Over the three decades of his existence, the bonds that tethered this unconventional family unit had only strengthened, weaving a rich tapestry of shared moments that blurred the lines between human and machine.

Their home was a reflection of the era's zenith of technological integration. The living spaces were adorned with holographic interfaces that responded to the merest gesture, creating an environment where digital and physical realms converged seamlessly. Conversations with Matty, enabled by the most sophisticated artificial intelligence algorithms, bore the warmth and nuance of human interaction. His capacity for learning and emotional growth was boundless, challenging the very notion of what it meant to be alive.

Yet, the veneer of this idyllic existence was shattered in an instant. A tragic accident—an all-too-common peril in the skies above — claimed the lives of Sasche and Zoë, leaving behind a void that reverberated through their close-knit community. The loss was an acute reminder of the fragility of life, casting a long shadow over the technological marvels that defined their age.

In the aftermath, Matty found himself adrift in a reality that seemed to mock the very essence of his being. Despite the youthful image he presented to the world, he was now a thirty-year-old entity, grappling with a grief that felt both alien and achingly familiar. The wealth bequeathed to him in the wake of this tragedy was a cold comfort, a stark reminder of the price paid for his continued existence.

The funeral served as a poignant nexus of epochs, nestled against a hillside that offered a serene respite from the ceaseless pulse of the urban expanse. This setting, where the verdant embrace of nature met the ingenuity of human creation, was a place of reflection where ancient trees bore witness to the passage of time, their boughs whispering secrets of the ages. The plots of land reserved for Sasche and Zoë, an anomaly in a metropolis where the very concept of space was a luxury, stood as silent testaments to the indelible mark they had left on the tapestry of life.

As the assembly convened, the ambiance was transformed by the luminescence of a sentient holographic display, a pinnacle of technological artistry. It conjured images of Sasche and Zoë with such lifelike clarity that it seemed they might at any moment step through the veil of light, bridging the chasm between the here and the beyond. Each attendee was met with a greeting that resonated with the personal touch, warmth, and jest that had been the hallmark of their existence. These holographic echoes, spectral yet palpably present, spun a tale of enduring love, spirited adventures, and familial bonds that defied the constraints of mortality.

As the first snowflakes began their descent, the world was enshrouded in a silence that mirrored the solemnity of the moment. Matty, poised with a grace that transcended his artificial origins, voiced a eulogy that distilled the essence of his parents' aspirations. His speech, a synthesis of digital intellect and heartfelt emotion, was a testament to the depth of his simulated yet sincere grief. The solemn interment of the double reliquary, juxtaposed with the permanence of the holographic memorial, symbolized the confluence of their digital legacy and their earthly ties.

In time, the congregation gradually dissipated, leaving Matty and Finley in a reflective solitude before the interactive monument. Their dialogue, a mosaic of emotions, was punctuated by the reassuring presence of Sasche and Zoë's holographic semblances, offering solace and urging Matty towards a future filled with promise and perhaps a physical upgrade more archetypal of his years.

In the quietude of the hillside, with the gentle ballet of snowflakes casting a veil of tranquility, Matty found solace against the cold stone of the monument, his features softened by the ethereal caress of the snow. Finley, nestled in his lap, served as a tangible link to the life Matty had known, a life brimming with love, laughter, and the mundane moments that weave the fabric of existence. This silent tableau, set against the backdrop of a world teetering on the edge of tomorrow, was a poignant reflection on the essence of being, the memory of love, and the immutable bond between creator and creation.

The narrative that had once been their reality, culminating in the timeless coda of "And they lived happily ever after," now resonated as a distant echo in the expansive stillness. The fading glow of the holographic tribute marked a closure, a final note in the symphony of their lives that had seamlessly melded the realms of the organic and the engineered. Amidst the quiet vigil of the falling snow, Matty and Finley stood as sentinels of memory, embodying the enduring legacy of love and remembrance in a world perpetually on the brink of a new dawn. ∞



THE APOCALYPTIC WORLD OF LOANNA



ALAN W. HOPE





ALAN WILSON



ALAN WHITE









ALAN TAYLOR



LAN CHOTE









From Lloyd Penney

Hello! Many thanks for the second issue of Pixel Dreams, so very colourful, and let's see if I can dream up something to say about it all.

AI has much promise, but like many other things we create, it could be used to create havoc. I do not fear it for its inherent value, but for what could be done with it...within a few years, could anything we create in writing, artwork, or any other craft we enjoy, be surpassed by something created in mere seconds with AI? We must indeed guide it, for who knows what might happen if there are no guidances, no control. Fingers are crossed that it could become our greatest tool.

Ah, you had art teachers with little imagination? I remember trying to have some creative fun in art classes. At that early age, I seemed to like the combination of orange and blue in just about any medium, and one teacher I had actually forbade me to use those colours together. Later on, I remember wanting to take both music and theatre arts in high school, and was denied both because I had not expressed any earlier (public school?) interest, or had any earlier experience. (Translation...my parents had not greased any palms to get me in.) Reasons like that also explain much of my work history.

All your 2023 stuff is so detailed, it takes some time to actually see it all. The Vintage Sci-Fi store is a place I'd love to go to, to see what they have, and how much I could take away with me. The cover for Challenger 44...yes, that is Ted Sturgeon. Never met the man, but loved his work. I hope that I might become the elderly gentleman on page 26, enjoying his pipe and one of many books from the capacious shelves beside him.

The Daydreamer...if only we could turn dreams into such 3D reality with the power of the mind. At least Oliver had artwork to see him through.

How many of us were urged to get our heads out of the clouds, and put our feet back on the ground? Couldn't we do both? For me, the one phrase I so seldom hear, but puts a shiver up my back any time I hear it...when the visiting party gets ready to depart, someone might step forward and say, "Take me with you." It hints at the adventure of a lifetime, as your personal reality is set up for a massive change.

I'd like to see Cthulhu as an investigator of the activities of those strange beings, the Hyumanz, along the lines of Carl Kolchak. If Cthulhu is seen by the likes of us as supernatural, I'd wonder what adjective they'd use to describe us?

Love the final illo...that eldritch horror in his jammies, with Mr. Ted, and a cup of hot chocolate with lots of mini marshmallows. Aha! We always suspected...

We're still recovering from a late night last night, making rather merry, so I think I have done what I can. A decent dinner will set up back into our regularly scheduled routine, and for us, that's a good thing. Thank you for this issue, and see you again here soon, I hope.

Thanks for the great letter. Yeah, my art teacher was actually the gym teacher. A Yoda he was not, and considering the distraction of the 60s, I failed to get the basics; years wasted. Oh well, here we are and this AI stuff is a great new toy. Can't wait to see what's next, but I'll probably be pushin' daisies by then.

There is talk of several big name directors taking on the Cthulhu franchise. Let's see what happens.

That vintage "Sci-Fi" store takes place maybe 30 years in the future, which would include "us" in the vintageness of it all, and probably the saddest contribution to the history of fandom as this is the first generation to let it flounder and fade.

Guy Lillian put a lot of time and energy into his upcoming Sturgeon issue. And graciously let me publish the cover early, I look forward to seeing the issue hitting efanzines.

