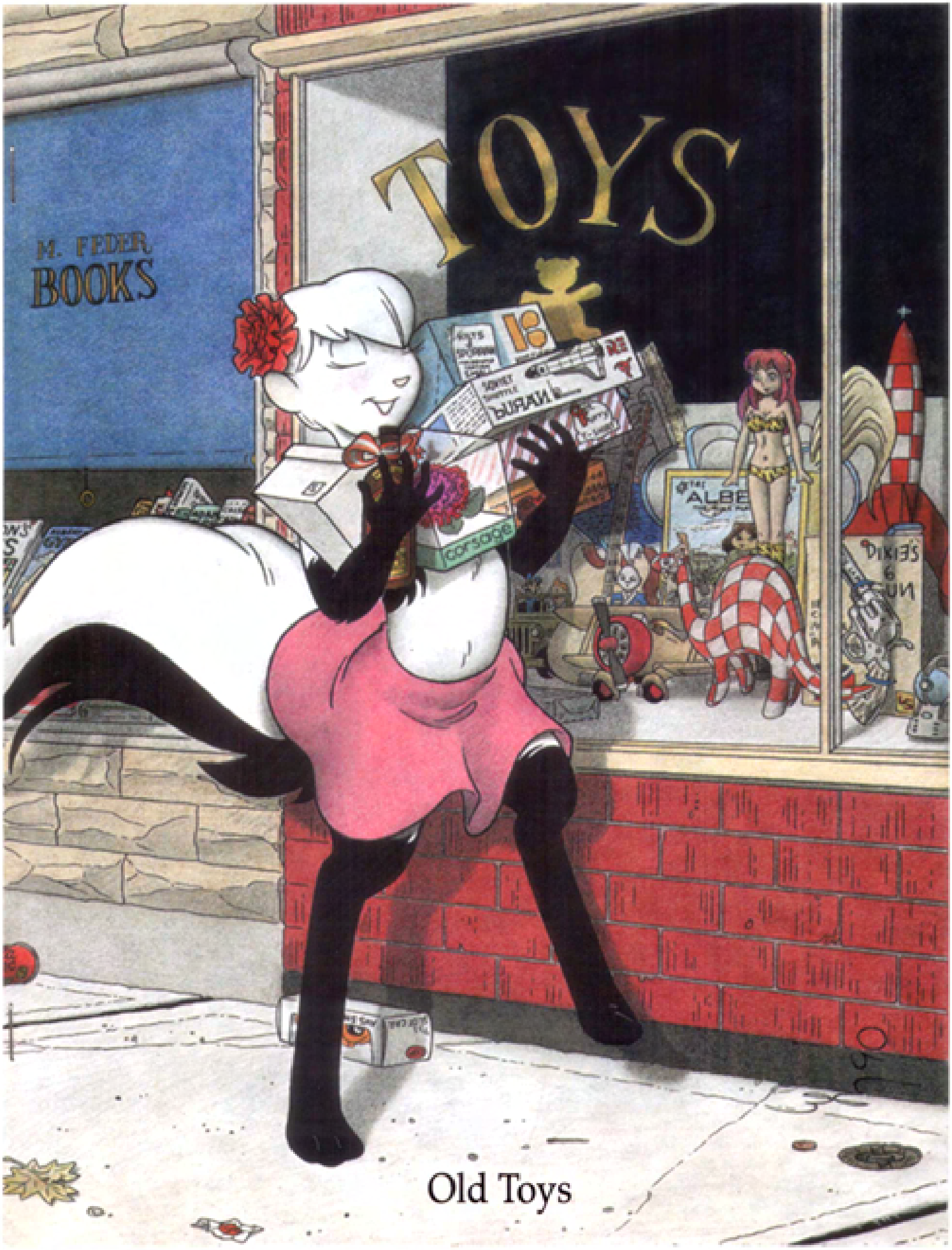

Old Toys

Old Toys: A Taralable Collection

Published for the members of Ditto 15 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, October 18-20, 2002

Covers and all interior art by Taral

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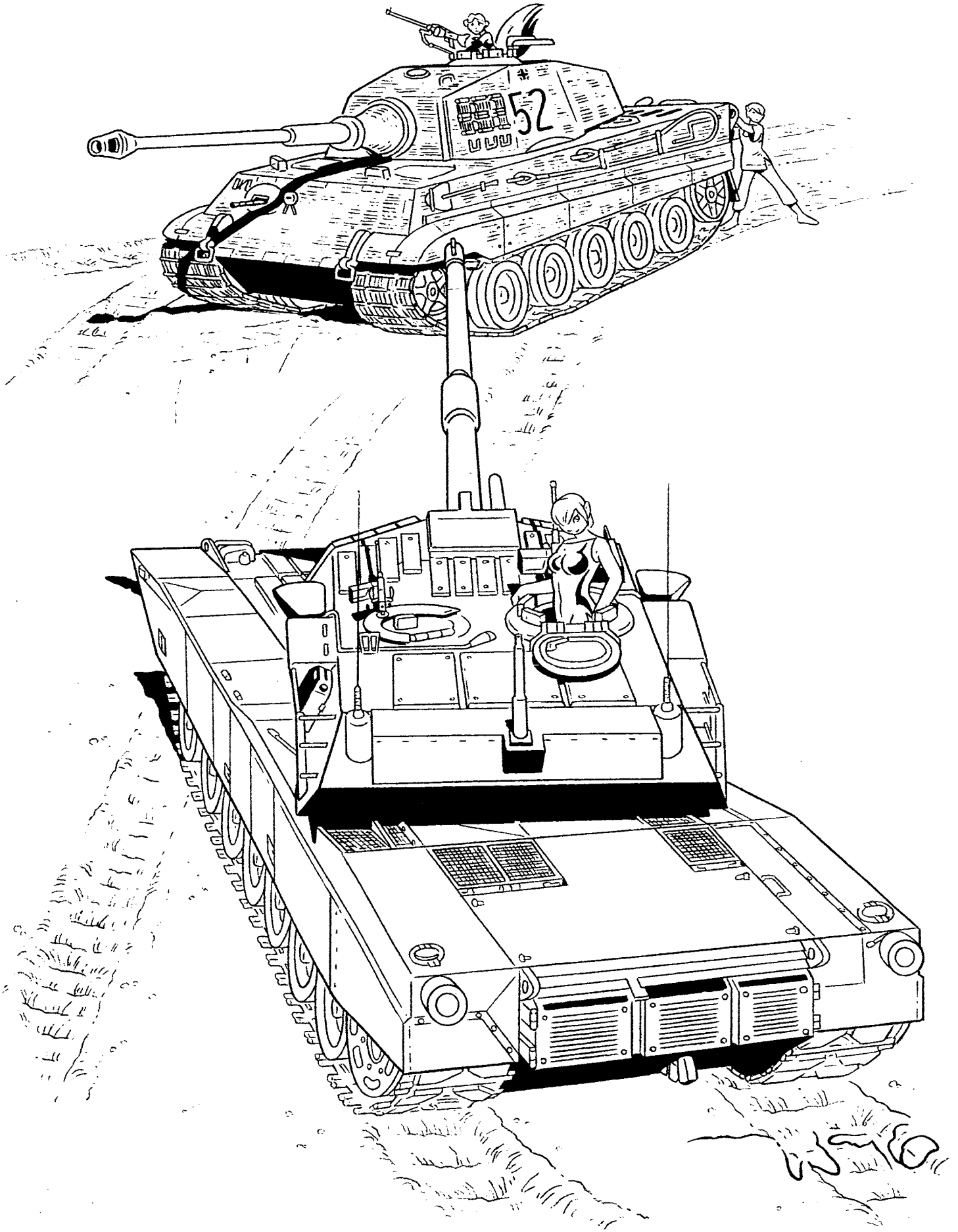
Erratum

Regarding "nothing like the sense of wonder" (p.9): BSFan #17 was edited by *Elaine* Stiles. Steve was the art director.

Credits

Editing by Murray Moore. Mimeography by Catherine Crockett and Colin Hinz. Gestetner rebuilding by Colin Hinz. Thanks to Sam Andreyev for donating the Gestetner 360; it really saved the day.

To inquire about the availability of extra copies of **Old Toys**, contact Murray Moore at 1065 Henley Road, Mississauga Ontario L4Y 1C8 Canada, or e-mail Murray at mmoore@pathcom.com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Introductions

By Mike Glicksohn

A long time ago, in a fanzine fandom far, far away, there were Les Croutch and Beak Taylor. Later no star shone brighter than Boyd Raeburn. For a while Susan Wood and Mike Glicksohn took centre stage. And then it was the time of Wayne MacDonald, who morphed into Taral, and Victoria Vayne.

One might have thought that our shared passion for fanzines and fanzine fandom and fanhistory would have made me and Taral instant friends but the truth is for some time we didn't get along at all well. I thought he was strange and socially less than ept and lived an unfocused existence and wore weird clothes at conventions. For all I know he thought I was an aging hippy, an over-the-hill drunk who was overpaid and used to wear weird clothes at conventions. We co-existed in our world of choice but we weren't friends.

And yet my reaction to Taral the person never prevented me from acknowledging that he was a prodigious talent, a fan who enriched the world of fanzines and deserved much greater recognition than he ever got. (That Taral never won a Hugo for his artwork while others with not a fraction of his ability have done so makes a travesty of the award.)

Initially, I considered him an artist. I may not always have enjoyed the subject matter of his many covers and illustrations but there was no denying the amazing artistic talent he brought to all his work, his painstaking incredible attention to detail.

Then he established himself as an excellent editor and publisher and I became aware of his writing ability, firstly as a reporter of local fannish news and then as the creator of some excellent pieces of major fan writing which, at least to my eyes, were reminiscent of the superior work of such famed Irish fanwriters as John Berry and James White.

My appreciation of this multi-talented fan just continued to rise with each new addition to his fannish canon. (And, I'm pleased to say, we overcame our initial mutual reactions and became if not friends at least friendly associates.)

Ditto 15 has put together an anthology of a half dozen of Taral's significant pieces of fanwriting. If you think of Taral primarily as an artist I believe you'll be astounded at what a fine writer he is and I envy you the pleasure enjoying these works for the first time will bring. If, like me, you've read most of these articles before give yourself a real treat and read them again. And remind yourself what really excellent fanwriting is like.

By Moshe Feder

Taral is one of the most significant figures in the entire history of Canadian fandom and I applaud the Ditto committee for acknowledging that and giving him the recognition he so richly deserves by producing this anthology. Now stop wasting time, turn the page and get into the really GOOD writing!

Fandom is full of creative people. Some of us can write, some can draw, and a special talented few can do both -- darn them. If need be, they really can be self sufficient when it comes to filling the pages of a fanzine, always handy in an age when Real Soon Now is more than ever the fannish credo.

Life not being fair, even in fandom, talent is not equitably distributed. Have you ever noticed how few of fandom's many good writers can draw, but how many of it's few good artists can write? Think of Jay Kinney, Steve Stiles, Grant Canfield, Dan Steffan, Stu Shiffman, D West and, of course, Rotsler, just for starters. Taral's an excellent example of that rare tribe, and if his writing were as prolific and widely seen as his art, he'd be losing Hugos in the fanwriter category too -- and equally unjustly!

Taral brings the same qualities to his fanwriting that distinguish his art: he's a keen and insightful observer; he has complete command of his tools -- using words as precisely as he does pen or pencil (do you know that many of Taral's finely-shaded pieces are done not with pencil but with ballpoint pen?); he knows how to build an imaginary scene or recreate a real one with the artful assemblage of rich and relevant detail; and he has a sound grasp of structure or design. His historical or critical pieces are thoroughly researched, cogently argued models of clarity. His fannish narratives are vivid and convincing because, above all, he has fully immersed himself in them, in the same way that one feels he has, in his imagination, lived in the fantastic scenes that he draws. Some of Taral's best pieces have real satirical bite, but what may surprise you, in some of the others, is the bittersweet, even poignant quality he evokes.

It's very appropriate that the members of Toronto's second Ditto should be treated to a collection of Taral's writing. No one did more than Taral to create fanzine fandom's image of Toronto fandom in the late 70s and 80s, achieving the unlikely feat of making it as appealing all over again as it had been a few years earlier when Energumen was flourishing. The people he knew and the things they did in the real world also lived inside his head and, in the best fannish myth-making tradition, enabled him to transmit the vibrant and appealing essence of a fannish community from there to the rest of us.

I was quite charmed to discover that I'm living there too, like a prototype of a Sims character long before the game was thought of. Taral invented an imaginary town, a sort of fannish utopia, and populated it with his friends. I run a bookstore there, and Taral has shown me what my house looks like. I've often wished I could trade places with that version of myself, at least for occasional vacations. It would be great to lock up the shop and tramp together through the quiet, leafy streets in the small hours of the night, talking endlessly about everything.

Turn the page, and welcome to Taral's world.

White Badge of Courage | December 1989 | Sticky Quarters 19, Brian Earl Brown editor

When I was twelve, I was given a white feather.

I don't suppose many who were of an age for Viet Nam, or younger, remember what that was all about. The practice of giving white feathers goes back to the Great War, the War to End All Wars, World War One. Mothers with bloody hands wept in public, and secretly gloated over the sacrifices of their children. Those young men who were too selfish to die in this spiritual cleansing were publicly humiliated as cowards and traitors. Through some arcane symbolism never clear to me, the white feather was the badge of their shame. It was forced into the hands of anyone on the street who was obviously suitable for sacrifice, and who'd no business being alive when other people's boys were gloriously dead.

The white feather, however, lied.

Today, of course, we know who the cowards and traitors were. King Edward VII for starts. Powerful vested interests. The career officer. Your boss. Your grandmother. The Hun might have been the enemy, but the traitors were those who sent their own flesh and blood to the trenches. There, in altars dug inside-out in the mud, the young were slaughtered in sacred defense of principles that were lies of self-interest, racism, and crusading frenzy. We, today, are too enlightened for that.

Aren't we?

I wish it were true, but the facts are not reassuring.

When I was a kid I was saturated in the atmosphere of World War II. I sought out movies with titles like Bataan or The Flying Leathernecks on TV, and watched regular shows such as Twelve O' Clock High, Combat, McHale's Navy. Along with the funnies I read comics like Our Army At War. (Though I was rather critical about the ones that specialized In Pacific islands with giant Pterodactyls.) I knew how to speak knowingly of fresh looies, and that you opened up on a meatball coming out of the sun. I could speak a handful of German words like a Kraut. I knew the whereabouts of obscure places like Port Moresby and El'Alamein. In a tight spot I'd try to turn inside a Messerschmitt with a Spitfire, but wouldn't follow it in a right hand dive because the carburetor would conk out.

Although science fiction was nominally the realm of the imagination, in most media it seemed unimaginable that space exploration could be carried out in any other way than as a branch of the armed forces. Of the models I built, if it didn't lay rubber, it was something procured under a defense contract. I believed that every sit-com husband had been in the army before he was married. After all, Dick Van Dyke had. Ward Cleaver had. Even Herman Munster had. In fact, I was rather afraid that I'd be drafted into the U.S. Army when I was old enough, Canadian though I was.

Oddly enough, it never occurred to me that I hardly knew any real people who'd been soldiers. This is how effective propaganda can be.

Although going into the army was a frightening and repellent idea, war was by nature an endlessly fascinating drama, whose stage props never exhausted my interest. It was fun to play. I had lots of toy guns, and spent as much time selecting the right one for play as a fashion model took with her clothes before a photo session. Which should I pick today? The die-cast Luger that was so realistic? The machine pistol was also nice, but it was only a squirt gun in cheezy green plastic. The Daisy air rifle, on the other hand, made a loud bang like a real one. Or perhaps the civil war musket that actually cocked?

Playing soldier had several demoralizing realities. You felt like a fool trying to make the sounds of gunfire and explosions. You were reluctant to hit the dirt too hard, or anywhere where there were rocks or nails or dog shit. Who was there to shoot at? People stared at you. One solution was to promote yourself from the lines, and take to the field again with an army in miniature. The toys in your command came as infantry, artillery, armour, vehicles, and unclassifiable support groups. Mostly you wanted soldiers, because you lost them faster than you lost mechanized forces. Mostly too they were awful. But if you were on a constant look-out for better soldiers there were some that were quite convincing in their detail and pose.

By far the worst, however, were the plastic soldiers made by the Marx company for their line of cheap polythene trucks, missile carriers, and amphibious whachamacallits. The theory behind them must have been that the perfect toy • soldier was like the real one. You could dress him in whatever battle gear suited the field, and put In his hands whatever weapons he needed. In practise this meant one universal soldier in a non-specific pose, who had holes in his hands, and a bunch of stiff ill-fitting belts and helmets, and bent rifles that got lost.

What was most prized about toy soldiers was their life-like quality. Not only did attention to detail count, but so did the variety of poses. No matter how well made, it wouldn't fool anyone to have fifty soldiers that were all alike. Common practise for the people who made toy soldiers was to repeat a few poses several times. The more poses, and the less often they were repeated, the better. Also, shooting men were more valued than idiots who marched around the battlefield as though it were a parade ground. Marchers had to be written off as reinforcements. You kept them aside. When one of your favourite prone shooters or machine-gunners got killed, you put him back in action and scratched off the marcher instead. (This had to be agreed upon prior to the commencement of hostilities, of course. Rather like the Geneva Convention I suppose.)

Every kid had his own preferences in men. I knew at least one perverse soul who liked having radio operators and mine-detectors, even though we always had too many of the former, and never had mines for the latter to detect. My own priorities ran something like this: sub-machine gunners, prone riflemen, sitting or kneeling riflemen, standing riflemen, hand-grenaders, flamethrowers, officers, radiomen, bayonetters, running men, mine detectors, stretcher bearers,.and marching men. Most prized of all were enemy soldiers, when you could get 'em. For all that you might collect an army of hundreds, even a single enemy was hard to come by.

The genesis of my eventual large and motley army of toy soldiers was a Marx set that I got for Christmas in 1957, I can hardly forget the year, since I was living in a small town outside of Toronto at the time, and that year I saw Sputnik one summer's night.

The box the set came in seemed about the size of a mattress. Inside, it was separated into different compartments, each one with one or more pink or blue or pastel green paper bags stapled shut. The contents were labeled. I remember the one that said "accessories" particularly well, since I had to ask what "accessories" were. Each bag, torn open, lay bare a new surprise, military gear I could never have imagined playing with. A realistic .50 cal. machine gun mount with a spring that shot plastic pellets. An even more realistic Howitzer that shot larger plastic pellets. Sandbag emplacements. A pill-box with scars from direct hits by cannon shells. Tents. Crates of ammunition and medical supplies. Rafts. Land mines! And markers for the mine-detector guys to show where you'd buried them. A pontoon bridge. Trees — two in leaf, two with bare branches — and stumps. Fallen logs. Tangled barb-wire. A jeep and towable anti-tank gun. A recoilless rifle. A half-track troop carrier. A Pershing tank. Some of these last, unfortunately, were a little out of scale, but accurate enough in.detail to win my uncritical acceptance.

The ordinance and accessories, wonderful enough, were not the end of surprises. The contents of the paper bags marked "soldiers" held just as many. Not the least delightful of them was that the men came in two colours. This was the set that broke the colour barrier, and provided the enemy necessary for any good fight. It was only a timid step, really, since all that had been done was to duplicate the same men in olive and mustard.

More novel was the attention paid to the individual soldiers. Not only were they detailed, with clean clear molding, there were never more than two alike! My memory is more than a little vague on this point, but there must have been fifteen different kinds, making thirty men to a side. Not a large force, even by the standards of a typical street-gang. (Counting both sides it was under platoon strength.) But when I was six it seemed like formidable showing. There were men shooting while standing, shooting while kneeling, and shooting while lying on their stomachs, two of the usual useless marchers, a flame-thrower, some wildman beckoning on his men so they wouldn't live forever, a squad of seated men for the half-track, and others that I remember less clearly. But one soldier deserves special mention. At first I didn't have a clue what he was. In the fullness of time, however, I realized he was changing the clip on his rifle. Wow!

In the years following, there were many incarnations of that set. I bought one or two of them. Even at ages fifteen and eighteen I was the victim of nostalgia. The basics of the set remained the same, but it was smaller each time. The trees went. The machine gun went. A helicopter was added, but it wasn't nearly up to scratch. The yellow soldiers were replaced by genuine Krauts, in field grey. The crates of ammo and the land mines disappeared, but there was a nifty camouflage net to replace then. The trend was clearly toward a smaller and cheaper set, though. Evolution might have led to final extinction anyway, but the Sixties hap-

pened first. War became a nasty habit to teach children, so guns and war sets vanished from the Christmas scene for many years.

Tanks were always the hardest item to supply an army. It seemed as though there were no decent tanks to be had, for love or money. Whenever I came across a rare exception, I whined and wheedled my Mom until I got it. Before I gave up toy soldiers I had perhaps three, maybe four decent pieces of armour. By that time there were more toy tanks than formerly, but most of them were unworthy of the great Panzer tradition. By far the best tank wasn't a regular toy. It was a Dinky Toy, made in England of cast metal, and had moving rubber treads. I've seen Centurion tanks of this sort for sale as collectables in recent years, for upwards of twenty dollars. Many times I wished I still had mine, even if the barrel of the cannon was somewhat bent. (That would hardly be a problem with a good pair of pliers, after all.)

There was a transporter for the tank, naturally — a long flat-bed truck with ramps, and twenty-one rubber tires. Dinky Toys had quite a wide assortment of military vehicles. I wanted every one of them, and operated an armoured division without match in the neighborhood. Three dollars wasn't a small sum of money for a kid in 1963, however. My military build-up went slow and sanely. Christmases helped. Piece by piece I acquired a British twenty-five pounder gun carriage, ammunition limber, and tractor. Then a break-down truck (as the catalog put it). A heavy lorry followed. Then an ammunition carrier. Two light guns of forgotten calibre. And an eight inch Howitzer. They were metal and indestructible, which gave them staying power. The real olive green paint and rubber wheels were a source of pride. Best of all, the sheer weight gave Dinky Toys a feel of verisimilitude that rubber and plastic never had.

Added to the basic ingredients of the Marx set and the Dinky Toys were a forgotten number of bags of twenty-five or fifty anonymous soldiers. I'd recognize them if I saw them — the molds that made them changed hands, year after year, and I see their, descendents in K-Marts and 7-11's today — but if they had names then I've forgotten. There must have been a couple of hundred, all told, and it made me the military superpower of the neighborhood. If only real armed forces fit in a medium-size cardboard box, like mine did, we'd pay fewer taxes.

At the peak of my arms build-up, however, most of the kids I knew were moving on to cars and clothes. I became adept at building model funny-cars and dragsters in self-defense, but never did develop a liking for fashion. Mod boots, paisley shirts, and pipe-stem pants didn't stay in style long in any case. My army languished. Eventually it was de-mobbed, and the precious Dinky Toys lost. But not until after many joyous battles, and until after one confrontation that cast a shadow over my life that grew longer as I grew older.

I had a friend when I was young. I met him during my brief career as a whizz-kid, in accelerated classes. Everyone else had been in this program since kindergarten, but if you moved around enough as a kid it was possible that the Stanford-Binet tests wouldn't catch you as early as they should. They didn't catch up to me until I was twelve. Suddenly I was in an advanced version of grade seven, and expected to speak flaw-

less French. I had to jump from long division to introductory algebra overnight. After several years of never doing homework, and rarely having to pay attention in class, I had to work to catch up. Where the advantage in this was, I never could figure out. I eventually landed back in easy school with the rest of the common herd, much to the disappointment of the professional educators who thought work was its own reward.

Smart kid's school wasn't entirely for suckers. Surprisingly, I found that smart kids showed no more sign of growing up than I did at twelve. They still liked to make-believe, and played with toys long after other kids started styling their hair in front of mirrors. We had diverse games. For a season we drew up railroad timetables, competing with one another for the coverage of every village and hamlet in Southern Ontario that was larger than a general store. We invented board-games based on haunted houses, lost cities, and jungles with man-eating plants. There was only one common object, to lose as many of the men following us as we could, in bloody and ingenious ways, without endangering our own hides. If you got killed, you lost. We built thriving little communities for our cars and trucks out of sand. We were the Bosses. Whoever was new to the game suffered unrelenting restraint of trade. Monsters though we were, power politics didn't enter into all of our games. When it came to throwing dice to race our Dinky Toy Formula 1 cars. we were sportsmen. The rich and powerful always are when there's nothing at stake.

But when Horner's father tore up the entire back yard that summer, we played the best game of all. War. The yard had always had an interesting topology—- random lumps and an overall trend to sink toward one corner. Grass was the problem. Grass had been as much of a hindrance to three inch high soldiers in the Horner backyard as it was anywhere else. Denuded of its grass, however, the open dirt, mounds of diggings, unbroken clods of earth, and the freedom to do whatever we wanted without hurting anyone's precious damn grass, were ideally suited for small-scale military campaigns on a large scale.

Actually, fighting the battle was more anti-climatic than not. Much more fun was setting-up. It wasn't enough, with so much opportunity for concealment, to stand your men on the ground, rifles pointed in the general direction of the enemy. A trench was the least requirement. At. best, we took advantage of the lay of the land to disguise our defense-works, worming the trenches through natural defiles and behind lines of cover, making strong-points of larger features, roofing over fire-pits with twigs and sand, and avoiding exposure of our positions from any line of sight. After all, there was such a thing as artillery. Invisibility was the only defense. Roads connected the front lines to the rear, so that ammunition and rations could be brought up from dumps safely out of range of shelling. Any material at hand went into construction. My proudest achievement, I think, was an oasis made out of a broken sheet of glass. Its edges buried in the sand, glass looks almost exactly like still water. I needed only a few plastic camels to make the effect complete. I hadn't any camels, but made do with quarter-inch jerry-cans.

Then it was time to wreck everything. We actually regretted the necessity, we'd put so much time and effort into the preliminary stage. But what's the point of trenches and fields of fire, if not their final destruction? So

we'd have at it, sometimes rather half-heartedly, until one side or the other, or both, were thoroughly pulverized. Then it was time to pick up the pieces, and count our losses. Literally so, for it was easy to hide your men and equipment so well that you didn't always find it again. The real attrition of one's forces always took place at the end of a battle.

Horner and I, and his friends, played the game of kings on many a happy Saturday afternoon. We never had to shake hands after a battle-royal because we knew it was between friends. Yet the peace didn't last. We had a war that in fact ended all wars.

Most of our battles in the Horner backyard were fought in North Africa. This time we fought for possession of a South Pacific Island. Neither of us could leave the field of battle until the other's forces were entirely exterminated. Perhaps we should have realized at the outset that these terms were rather grim for twelve-year-olds, and that friendship mightn't stand the test.

The war went smoothly at first. Soldiers gave their plastic lives for the week's cause. Expendable hardware was used up at a gratifying rate. Territory exchanged hands as the tide of battle washed back and forth. But at last I ground Horner down to a handful of men and no equipment. I was in far better shape myself, and could see Horner didn't much like this state of affairs. Suddenly he said, "I've left booby traps all over the island."

At the time it seemed like an implausible move by a desperate general. By introducing a novel factor, Horner hoped to equal the odds again. It wasn't exactly against the rules, but neither had we agreed to anything like this before. It was too like cheating. It rankled. Although war simply went on, with my soldiers mysteriously blowing up whenever it suited the enemy, it was no longer a friendly game. By changing the rules Horner had also upped the ante.

Sniper fire and trip-wires took their toll. My victorious army was reduced to a demoralized rabble skulking through the jungle, shooting at everything that moved. I began to leave booby-traps myself. I slew an unlucky band of Horner's men with a machine-gun rigged in a tree. He cried foul, but I stood on my rights. He after all had started cheating first.

For a moment let's stop. Somewhere in a dim recess of my mind there's a memory of Homer saying that's not how it happened at all. He says I started first, after he'd nearly wiped me out. I have a horrible feeling that he might be right, since it was a long time ago, and it would be convenient not to remember if I was in the wrong. In all fairness, I have to give Horner a chance to tell his side of the story. "It was never me who started booby-trapping the Island, after I'd lost it fair and square. It was you that cheated first." That's his story. You've heard mine.

It was certainly my machine-gun traps that massacred his last men, down to the general himself. In all the wars we'd waged as the best of enemies, this was unprecedented. If we were present in the field, it just wasn't done to kill each other. But I did it. I machine-gunned down my friend and fellow officer like I did any enlisted slob. Horner's army was wiped out. Horner

himself was dead, but I had myself and three men under my command. Victory! Then Horner snatched my victory from the jaws of his defeat.

"Maybe I don't have any men left," he said, exuding hatred. "But I have automatic machine-guns too." To prove it, he opened up with a burst, and cut down three of the four men I had left. According to the rules, of course, the remaining nan was me by definition. But sooner or later Horner'd announce another trap, and if he didn't win the war at least he'd have revenge, and I wouldn't win either.

The rule book underwent another revision.

"I've just got into a raft," I said, "and left the island."

His face turned a furious shade of red. "You can't do that!"

If I'd answered him "Why can't I," the question would become whether I could change the rules or not, an issue I didn't want brought up. I don't think he did either, being as culpable as I in that error. So I said instead, "Why shouldn't I?" That put logic at issue rather than the rules.

"I've won. There's nobody left to fight. Why should I stay and get killed for no reason?"

"Because it's cowardly!" he screamed.

"It is not! I'd fight, but I've already won. Staying to get killed by a booby-trap is just suicide. It's stupid."

"You're a dirty coward! That's all."

"I am not!" I was just as mad as him now. The game forgotten, I took it personal that he believed I should die for no good reason.

"You are too. You left just because you don't want to get killed, even though I got killed. I wasn't a shitty little coward like you."

I couldn't figure him out. He didn't seem to see the point, that it was illogical to die if you didn't have to. Horner insisted that if he was dead, it was only fair if I get killed too.

"Look, what if I were your father," I began. "He's in the war, and the Japanese have wiped his side out. He can't do any good, just get himself killed. He has a raft and can get away though. You'd want him to get away, so you'd still have a father, wouldn't you? Even if some people thought he was yellow? Or would you want him to stay and fight until he got killed? No one could call him a coward, but you wouldn't have a father either."

I was proud of my reasoning, saw no way it could be argued. Plastic soldiers were one thing, after all. Their value is nil, and in the heat of argument they can be sacrificed without a thought. Soldiers on television or out of the pages of conic books, were only stereotypes, and almost as expendable as toys. But a father? Horner loved his father all of his life. A son

draws comfort from his father's hand, feels pride in his know-how, trusts him with his secrets, and learns at his knee. Against a father, what did the rules of a game matter?

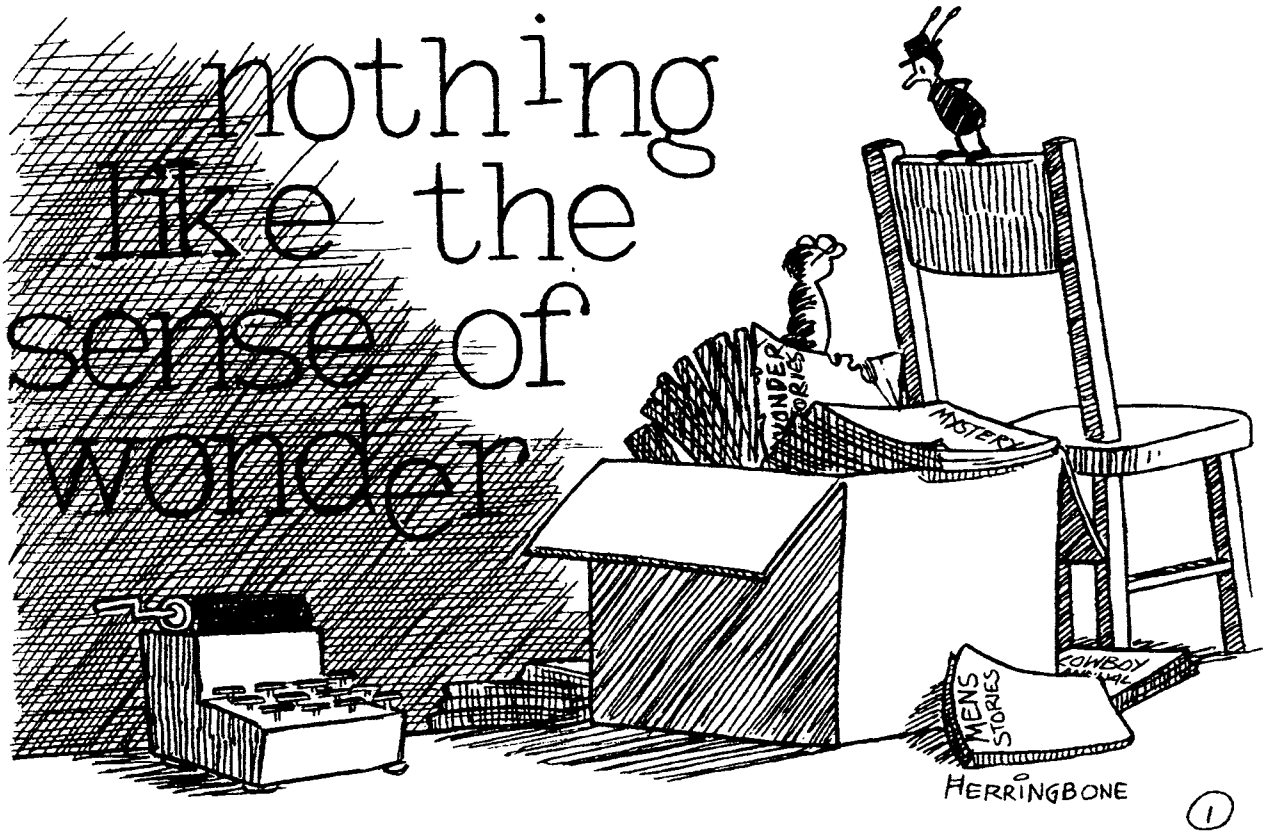
If I live to learn everything there is to know about human evil, I don't think that I'll ever hear anything that will shock or frighten me again as much as how I was answered by a childhood friend when I was twelve.

"My father's no coward. I'd want him to die!"

While we did see each other on many more Saturdays, in spirit we were already sundered along lines that in looking back seem profound and irrevocable. I didn't like to look questions of right and wrong in the face, but-no matter where I looked right and wrong seemed to stare back. It took years to see that the question was simply inescapable, in as much as all human affairs touch upon it. Whether this has had effect on the way I chose to live, I'm unsure. I became an artist, and would be a writer. After I stopped bicycling to my friend's neighborhood on Saturdays, I know nothing at all about Horner. He may have become a criminal court judge, or a pipe-fitter, or a real estate agent, or a minister... Perhaps even a private in the army. But of one thing I'm sure, right and wrong would never enter into his walk of life.

When I look back on this, I picture two kids, acting out a script written in blood. One catches the other failing his lines, and thrusts something out in accusation. It's a token of some sort, but when I was twelve I didn't see it very clearly for what it was. It was a white feather. Not knowing this I didn't take it. In his belief that it's an emblem of shame, the other kid pins the feather to my shirt. I see now that I should have taken it. I should have taken it away from him, crushed the ineffectual nettles hidden in the down, and held it clenched in a fist. The white feather is a badge of courage, of honour. No coward can wear it, and only a mob of cowards will award it.

nothing like the sense of wonder



HERRINGBONE ①

W⊕M

② HUGO

I WASN'T JUST NOMINATED FOR HUGOS – **II WON!**

UNDER THE BEDCOVERS WITH CAPT'N **S.P. MEEK**

③ GOSH WOW **II** SAID!

88

well boss

i was checking out that load of old magazines

you saved from the trash compactor

imagine my surprise when i met a bookworm

the weather had been horrid this last little while

the magazine i found him in was swollen with damp rot

and smelled of unclean memories

disinterred too soon from the grave

the worm had been many years between those pages

and he was much the worst for it

yet he found it a home that he was plainly loathe to leave

pal

i said

would you object to a spot of friendly advice

not at all he replied

there is a fine dry magazine there in your box

next to the soggy mess you call home

why not move in

that magazine he said

i know that magazine

it does not interest me.

but it is dry i replied

yes it is isn t it

he chuckled so that it was plain he enjoyed the pun

more than i certainly
for i didn t get it at first
then i realized what home was to other people
wasn t necessarily what it was to me
you see boss
this book worm lived in a science fiction magazine
and the one next to him
however warm and dry
was not
and provided no comfort
even to a worn as miserable as this one

there was no talking him out of it
take that to mean what you will
instead i decided to satisfy my curiosity
and asked him just why
a sensible
and intelligent
looking worm
ever took up lodgings in so garish an appointed home

the answer to that he said
would be the story of my life
but if you care to hear it
i would happily tell you of things
that not even your wildest imagination could prepare you for
i was a pulp writer in the previous life
he paused

for effect i suppose
but if the worm expected a reaction
he was surely disappointed
since i gave none
i have been a writer myself

and have known others
good ones too
not just vers libre poets
and had forgotten to be impressed
it was bad manners and i have no defense
but you yourself know how tedious it can be
to show astonishment
at a thing taken much for granted
whenever it is mentioned by you

a moment ago i was inattentive
i said
if you will forgive me i would be most interested in your story

as far back as i can remember
he began
i was an.avid reader of scientific romances
particularly those by the immortal h g wells and jules veme
in 1926 the word
scientifiction
formed on the lips of millions
because hugo gernsback so decreed
and i was one of those millions who spoke it under the bedcovers
strange bedfellows with otis adelbert kline
and captain s p meek
ı dreamed of
worlds beyond counting
times too old for names
girls in atoms
lost cities and sunken continents
future men with braincases the size of beachballs
and incandescent rays
ın all hues of the rainbow
flashing across blackest space

to demolish whole planets of the blackest villains
i wanted to write stories of wonder like those

and did you
i inquired politely

oh
that i did
but not before years of struggle
i had hoped to go on to college
and become an astronomer
or even a radio repairman
as commanded in amazing
but father died and i had to run the candy store myself
most evenings i was too busy for night class
but in 1934 I answered an ad
and joined a club of fellow scientifictioneers in brooklyn
there was no time and no carfare for frivolity
the meeting of minds with my fellow fan
occurred in the back pages of magazine letter columns
it was my only recreation
when i could afford time from my other writing
even then i knew my priorities and practised long into the night
shaping words into dreams

in 1941 i was drafted
sensing my talents the examiners recommended me for advancement
i was sent to fort baxter kansas
and spent the next few years aiding the war effort
behind the typewriter of the camp newspaper
it was a dirty job
but somebody had to do it

i had not forgotten my ambition though

at night
when the other soldiers flocked to dens of sin and vice in nearby roseville
i remained in barracks
with my trusty remington
and worked its bolt back and forth
all through the black night to reveille
the others would stagger in at all hours
stinking of cheap gin and cheaper girls
drunk
exhausted
exhilarated
they flopped on their bunks and fell asleep
the fire in their olive green skivvies extinguished for the night
they were too stupid for words
and i
every night i would have three thousand more words under my belt

well boss
there was light in those eyes
and yet a minute ago i thought i saw private hell
go on i told him
this is getting interesting.

i got my first check
and my discharge in the sane mail
it was back to new york city but not to the familiar candy shop
my baby brother had grown up
and looked after the family business now
so 1 left behind the mundane life
and moved in with a fellow I knew
a science fiction leaguer from the old days
there were never fewer than five of us in two rooms
but it was cheap
and we all wanted to write science fiction

we taught ourselves the ropes

proof read

collaborated

traded ideas

and promoted each other shamelessly In the fan press

not all of us took our profession seriously

the wayward ones stayed out nights in disreputable clubs

instead of john w campbell they talked about jazz and someone named kerouac

and brought home funny cigarettes

that smelled too sweetly for tobacco

worse

one got married

and. moved to California to draw mice

one by one they vanished from the apartment

to be replaced by other faces

who also said they wrote science fiction

the ones who worked hard made it

as i did

and made their dreams come true

my stories appeared in all the popular magazines

and my name rose in the polls

a quarter cent a word is the best teacher

of professional skills

i wrote a hundred thousand words in the first year after the war

a hundred and twenty thousand the year after

i learned all the little tricks of the writers trade

never submit two manuscripts to.the same editor

because he may buy one and reject the other

always include something for the editor to change

never rewrite

send your story six months later and let him think its fixed

introduce a new plot complication every three pages

and never forget

that you compete for the reader s beer money

i wasn t just any science fiction writer either

i wrote the first story with true artificial gravity

in 1942

all others derive from mine

it is often pointed out that cavorite dates to 1901

but that is anti gravity and not at all the same thing

no of course it isn t I said

any fool can see that

but perhaps you can explain the importance

of the distinction later

do go on

of course

in 1954 1 was one of the first to have a hard cover book

a collection of stories long out of print

and published in handsome cardboard covers.

collectors are known to pay up to thirty five dollars.

for a mint copy with dust jacket

i was living by myself in the lower east end at the time

and was selling eight stories a month

but no one I shared digs with

ever had their share of the rent

so i moved

when 1 had my own bathroom and didn t have to wait my turn

i could write nine stories

so it was well worth it

i said to him that i sympathized

cockroaches have big families you know

perhaps you are related to some of my former editors

said he

but i suppose they wouldn t be born cockroaches again
would they
not that i ever had much trouble with editors
a hugo nomination or two
calms the salvage beast
and i rarely saw a year go by after middle age
when my name wasn t there in black and white on the ballot
i could do no wrong said my agent
so take the money and run
on the twentieth anniversary of my first story sold
1 wrote one hundred and forty seven thousand words
some writers, have never that much published in their lives
millions read my books
remembered my name
could spell it on ballots
until i wasn t just nominated for hugos
i won
it was more than i had ever hoped for

at the worldcon the fans and the writers celebrated
and toasted the best of the year
i had expected to be present
the first year i was up for best novel
i won
but i was pushing a deadline
and stayed home to write
next year i was up again
but my sequel to last years winner was a week overdue
the year after i was struck by sudden inspiration
and was up all the weekend working it but
but i got it on paper.
which is the main thing
the years went by and were all much the same
writing is a harsh mistress

the year I wrote one hundred and sixty one thousand words
i signed a six figure contract
and rose several tax brackets
and my titles passed the century mark
how the little boy under the bedcovers would have envied me
all my ambitions fulfilled
and wonders to behold at my fingertips

just around that time
some of the younger writers had begun to fuss
the times they were a changing they said
time to break down the ghetto walls
and cultivate social relevance

of course i said
that is our profession as writers
to glimpse the future
didn t we predict atomic submarines
volcanoes on. mars
t v dinners
who is this lennon fellow anyway
knowing what end i came to
i sometimes wonder if that also wasn t prophecy of a sort
people were smoking musty cigarettes again too
honestly
i wondered at the waste of enthusiasm when it had all been done before

in 1972 i appeared on television
and saw myself in living colour for the first time
it was unexpected but hot a total surprise
i had foreseen it in 1948
it was the year too that nasa asked me to attend the launch
of the last manned flight to the moon in this century
it wasn t just that i was busy with my autobiography

i had predicted it twenty five years before
why need i see the denouement
in 1984 the world no longer denied the foresight of science fiction writers
our vindication was a source of pride
such was the triumph of the imaginative faculty

i did not expect the worm to stop here
but he did
he looked suddenly tired and very old
and the fire banked in his eyes

hoping to bring those pits of despair to life again i said
indeed
that is a wonderful story
how splendid to have lived through such exciting times
now that you were rich and famous
and could open doors wherever you went
what then

oh
he said
i was too busy most of the time to be rich
very likely there was a great deal of money in my account
i lived well in my manhattan apartment
what of it
my checks were all paid directly to my account
and the bills were all paid by the bank
i rarely troubled myself to oversee the actual transactions
time was too short
there were always books to be delivered
chapters and outlines to sell new books
meetings with agent and editor
not to mention signings
introductions

and those little quotes on the back cover to help your fellow struggling artist
sometimes i wished there was more i could have done for young dreamers
such as i had been
with all my money there must have been something
but time was too short
the future history was unfinished
and i had had a triple coronary bypass

i finished it too
and died
falling face forward on my life long companion
to bury my nose between her keys

after my death
i learned that my fellow writers sought to honour my memory
with a commemorative stamp
father flanagan and william calley to either side of me on the sheet
in my last coherent moments i wondered
what would i have thought then
beneath the bedcovers where all the universe was ablaze with the sense of
wonder
if i could have seen myself now
my life s work worth 22 cents

boss
i could only feel downright sorry for the bugger
if you 11 excuse an ethnic slur
it was hard to say what he really meant
by anything he said
whether he sorrowed to fall from the summit of his career
or saw lost opportunities at every turn
and regretted them too late
for certain he saw no irony in the telling

1 asked him what meaning he thought his life had had
if any

don t think i haven t thought about it
he said
but the matter is too deep for me
i was first and foremost a rationalist
a creature of scientific method
not a poet or song maker
and the meaning of life falls outside of paradigms
i have wondered though
why
god or karma should reincarnate me in such a prison as this
a helpless worm
my form is armless and legless
and to even the most discerning folk
nearly the same from front to back
i
who once strode galaxies in my imagination
can only live day to day
and look to the creature comforts
for what purpose have i been given so little

that was a stumper
it was
but as i looked at him
choking down the stale pulp he lived on
1 knew what boon had been granted him

infinite mercy of the universe

and this worm was too blind to see
perhaps
i began

gently

fate is not so cruel

and wishes you the chance to enjoy a life for once

• A DELL COMIC •
DELL
• A DELL COMIC •
10¢

WALT DISNEY'S UNCLE $CROOGE

The Ghost on my Bed | February 1986 | New Toy 1, Taral Wayne editor

Most ghost stories are ghastly affairs about fearsome apparitions, shambling corpses reeking of grave mold, or unnatural manifestations. We love such stories. Far from frightening us, vengeance from beyond the grave reassures us that whatever happens in the story, WE are safe. The victim stays the night in an abandoned house whose banging shutters and draped furniture is a plain warning to clear off. But we are cozy in our beds, pillows plumped up behind our heads, and smug in the knowledge that we'd have stayed with the car. Having found no immediate danger in the parlor, the victim searches the house room by room, brushing cobwebs aside to make sure he or she hasn't missed something in the dark. Naturally, one of the rooms is locked. At home in bed, we know better than to force the issue, and merely reach for our warm milk while the victim rattles the doorknob. The door gives way eventually, and a cold draft blows out the candle. As if that wasn't a sign that whatever was in there might want privacy, the victim goes in. We shudder with joy in our beds, and close up the book for the night.

Then, when we turn out the lights, the real fun begins.

At first it's merely dark, and warm, as you pull the covers up over your head. The dark seems to hide things from you that you know aren't there when the light's on. What if the light won't go on again? But that's silly, you think to yourself, and resist the temptation to try for minutes that seem like hours. Eventually you give in to your paranoia, but discover that you're AFRAID to reach for the switch. If there's anything out there, movement might draw its attention. So you sweat under your covers for another few minutes until, unable to stand the suspense any longer, you risk everything by lunging for the light-switch. Somewhat to your annoyance, there really isn't anything there. The light goes out, and again, as often as it takes before sleep finally overcomes your wariness and you drift into the waiting nightmare...

All of this happens to me, as I'm sure it happens to you. Some nightmares are pretty good ones too; that put The Haunting of Hill House or The Shining to shame. I have quite vivid memories of things I won't go into just now. Let's lighten up with a question then. What if during the night you woke because you felt something lying on the end of your bed while you were asleep? Does it make a chill run down your spine? Do you scoff at the idea? Do you prop up your pillows and settle down to a good ghost story?

This one isn't very much like other ghost stories. I told one last year about a battle-ground of the War of 1812 near Niagara Falls. A friend of mine felt bad vibrations whenever he went by as a kid. For the most part I didn't believe him, and had to be shown the place one night. I performed a common rite of ghost-busting over the spot, with consequences reported in the previous story. And this ghost story isn't much like that one, in as much as it's word for word true.

It begins with something we hear all too much about from pet fanciers: a cat. This cat didn't talk in pussy-language, watch Morris on television, or wake me in the morning asking for lasagna. "Scratch" was a real down-

to-earth, animal cat, who brought dead moles to the door, and had to be wormed whenever he started dropping hints around the house. I stress these unromantic flaws in his character to make it clear that people who think cats are just "fur-persons" simply don't understand their cats. They anthropomorphize them into cuddly abstracts that overlook certain facts of nature that rule the cat kingdom no less than the human. Scratch was never a Borg abstraction.

Frankly, I don't even know why I called him that. He came to me one day while I was out tobogganing one night with one of the neighborhood kids. The hill we used was a long slope into Mimico Creek near the CPR trestle. The trestle was a convenient bridge over the creek for kids living on the other side from the high school, and once in a long while someone would get killed. I never knew anyone who was, so I used the trestle like everyone else I knew did. At one end of it there was a flat place a couple of hundred feet wide before you got to the bank of the creek. There was a manhole cover set in a little mound right in the middle of the flat place, but this only made for sport. It was an accomplishment to get that far, and if you could slide part way up it, then down the other side, you'd done something to brag about. Usually, however, you slid to a stop, turned over, or fell off well short of the manhole mound. In any case, the little jumps kids sometimes made of snow were more of a hazard, and even then I never heard of an injury.

That particular night was a cold one, with a clear sky of stars. People tend not to realize how much the night sky has changed in the last twenty years. When I was fifteen and sixteen you could still see the Milky Way in residential Toronto if you got away from the main streets. Not only were there a lot of stars out, the snow was powdery and sparkled like stars underfoot. It snowed more in the city in the sixties, too. I can show you photographs taken around the place where I lived on Bloor Street, a major thoroughfare, that look like rural Maine. Under the new snow was a layer glazed by the sun. Under that was wet snow, then a bottom of packed snow. It made walking anywhere off the sidewalks a slow, exhausting affair that left little energy for tobogganing once you were there. That night we got in a dozen or so runs, enough to wet our gloves and get snow down our galoshes before we called it off. I looked back up the hill and noticed a black dot against the white at the top.

It grew into a cat, about half way down the hill, and it wasn't going just anywhere, it was purposefully coming our way. We waited a minute or two until a large, grey cat with white paws and a damaged tail confronted us. Think how strange this was. A cat who notices two kids a considerable distance away, who tags after them. It didn't veer around us and keep going, as it would have if chance took it our way en route to somewhere else. He came to a stop at our feet, and didn't take another step unless we did. In fact, he followed me half a mile home through deep snow he plainly had difficulty walking through. I tried pulling him on the toboggan, then carrying him, but though he'd allow himself to be picked up, he obviously preferred doing for himself.

I was living in a flat over an animal hospital where my father worked. This was good luck for the cat, whose tail turned out to be frostbitten and gangrened. My dad docked it so that Scratch had only half a tail the rest of his life. He also had a dislocated

leg whose X-Rays I still have. Although Dad did his best to manipulate the leg back into the hip socket, it just wouldn't stay, and the cat purred through the whole thing as if even this torture were better than dying out in the cold. And that was how I got Scratch.

While I lived over the animal hospital, Scratch used to go out at night through my window. He'd do a balancing act on the porch rail three stories up, jump down to the rim of a wire dog-run below, tip-toe ten feet to the side, and drop into the alley below. He'd do this in reverse to get back in, winter or summer, whatever the weather, what's more, he'd even do it if called. Most of the summer he ran half wild in the brush by the creek, coming in only when he felt like it that night. Most times Scratch could wake me up when he wanted in by pawing at the back door to my room, (which led to the porch), making a bumping sound. In the warm weather, though, I'd leave the window partly open, so he came and went as he wanted by leaping from the porch to the sill. The best time to see Scratch was in the afternoon when he was in the alley or by the creek, and you could call him to you. Since I spent a lot of summer vacation in the same places, it was a matter of interpretation who was coming to see who. It was a particularly good morning, though, when I woke and found Scratch asleep at the foot of the bed.

Of course, the other side of the coin was giving him a clout on the head for climbing up on the shelves and knocking the models down, or for trotting through an attack of toy soldiers I'd carefully set up.

Luck began to run out for Scratch after a few years of summer idyll and warm winters indoors Family troubles led to our moving away from the animal hospital in the year Aldrin and Armstrong walked on the moon. One move led to another, each altering the relationship between Scratch and I for the worse. Finally we were in an apartment, and Scratch was compelled after many misfortunes to become an indoor cat. It wasn't natural to him, but he suffered the necessity.

Something in him clearly went away with the will to get outdoors, and it made him a completely different and sadder cat. When my present friends first saw Scratch, he wasn't the whip-smart active cat he had been. He was by then twelve, fat, and his injured hip suffering from arthritis. What they saw was rather more like a fuzzy cushion than a cat, who liked to sleep quietly, inviting ribald jests indifferently as long as he was left to his dreams of hay-grown creek far away and long ago. He didn't have very much longer to live, nor was the present important any more.

That was when I first started as a fan, and club newsletters were being printed at my place on Bob Wilson's and Phil Paine's "Fifty Cent Monster", an old model 66 Gestetner that they picked up in a barn auction. Those first two years or so of fandom seemed to compress more events into them than the subsequent decade, so that even now they make a separate epoch in my memory.

About all this mattered to Scratch, though, was that I met Barry Kent MacKay. Fans from the seventies remember Barry as the source of an unending supply of cutesy cartoons with an unusual attention to details of fur and feather. This was because he was a professional nature artist (albeit a lit-

tle unfamiliar with the species H. Sapiens), and a specialist in birds. It was Barry's ornithological bent that interested Scratch. After a visit to Barry's place, then in Toronto, I brought home a beautiful pair of blue-jay wings, mounted with wire, and preserved with some chemical relative of formaldehyde. Seeing the spray of feathers on my dresser woke something in the old cat. Several times I caught Scratch trying to stalk them as though he saw what they'd once been, and finally they disappeared altogether. All that was left were a few bedraggled blue feathers under the dresser-drawers.

A few feathers and a sick cat. He got better, but thereafter Scratch had increasing problems with his health, mainly paralysis in his rear legs and difficulty holding his bladder. He had to drag himself to and from the box forty times a day. There's no proof he'd poisoned himself fatally in the long run, but I've always suspected that Scratch's last vision of the old life had cost him what life he had left.

In the mid-Seventies I was taking part in the well-known lemming-like migrations of the Toronto Derelicts to conventions far and wide. One time I returned and Scratch wasn't at home. My mother'd exercised her humanitarian principles and had the cat put to sleep while I was away, releasing him from bondage to the cat box, and in theory sparing me the trauma of his death. Of course, it was far worse to come home and find the old cat gone than to share his final moments. And you can't bury a mother's mistakes either. As far as I know, Scratch was incinerated, a nameless weight stiffening in a garbage bag, his ashes raked out with the traces of other vanished pets, and thrown out with the trash.

No fire is so hot it bums away love, though.

After his death, there were busy years of travel, publishing, growing pains, friends, betrayals, writing, drawing, reading, and not too much time to think about the past. A club was fought over and lost. Conventions were run in pursuit of futile theories. I worked briefly at every trufan's dream, a job at Gestetner. The Derelicts preened themselves by out-publishing every other city in the world in a short-lived spurt of madness, then disintegrated. I climbed up and down, over, and around the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and the Dakota Badlands, got turned on to new wave music, ran for TAFF, and had kidney stones. Zines left after-images in my mind -- Delta Psi, Simulacrum, Synapse, Thangorodrim, Calcium Light Nights, Orca, Pantekhnikon, Sootli, apazines for Azapa, Oasis, Apa-50, Mishap, The Woman's Apa, FAPA, Vootie, and finally the newsletter DNQ. Life in the fast lane! So it seemed at the time, when the first $20 membership at a worldcon sent ripples of protest across the globe, and when it seemed no enemy should be more resolutely opposed than a male chauvinist fan. But by the start of the eighties, when I began grinding out a lot of complaining, pessimistic fanac in response to what looked like dead-ends in fandom, things were slowing down, not mattering anymore. It was time to look at myself, and compare where I was with the kid drawing hot rod cartoons in 1968. Although there was a lot of distance between us, it seemed as though a lot of miles had been clocked going around in circles. It was as though the way ahead went over a rise, past which I'd lose sight of the last fifteen years, and I don't know if I was afraid to go on, if I'd become lost, or if I was being held back. That was when the past caught up with me.

I thought more and more about the animal hospital a couple of years ago, the creek next to it, and the summers spent up and down its course. For all practical purposes my basement has no windows, and I began to miss the sunshine and trees I no longer saw daily. It drove me out of doors, but there was no way to satiate my appetite for the physical pleasure of it. Most people I knew were too busy, or employed, to beat around in the ravines or walk the waterfront with me day after day. It was no way to keep up with my self-imposed quotas of art and fanac either. The more I tried to satisfy the wanderlust, the more my sense of accomplishment sank. When I did force myself to the drawing, instead of wearily shading with a ball point pen I'd give in to the temptation to sketch maps of the creek, and how I'd remodel the old animal hospital to live in again. I day-dreamed that I met Saara there as children. At night I dreamt of going past the animal hospital. It'd be altered beyond recognition, yet I'd search for some overlooked corner that was unchanged, or try to force it back into familiarity, all the while knowing I dreamed.

I'd be on Bloor street again, out in front of the hospital. The bridge that crosses the creek there is four lanes, but no more than fifteen feet high, yet in the dream the creek's a ribbon of blue a hundred feet below. I'd fall into it safely, like a sky-diver, then look up at a soaring steel span big enough to bridge a Niagara Gorge, and huge chunks of concrete and asphalt fall in slow motion as it disintegrates. I duck under the water because someone is wading downstream, but the creek's now only a foot deep, little more than a foot wide, as if it were actually as small as seen from above, so I have to lay flat under the surface. Someone looks down at me. but I will that he doesn't see me, and he goes by. I emerge from the water and see that the whole creek is hardly a trickle of water running slowly between dry clumps of field grass. The wide shallow bed is gone, so are the rocks next to the storm drain where I used to float models of the Bismarck and the Hood. There are banks and bends where there shouldn't be, springs gush from grottoes I never knew, the adjacent fields cave in unexpectedly, washed out by underground floods.

I walk to the animal hospital, or to where I thought it was. It's been torn down, however, and built over with some newer structure. Around the side where the ground slopes away to show the basement, I discover the original foundations are still there, and I can sneak in through one of the doorless openings that used to be runs. But the dark cinder-block basement isn't the same one I remember. This one has laundry sinks and a window near the ceiling, but it's otherwise bare, and small. A hidden stair there didn't used to be takes me up past the ground floor to the apartment over the hospital. Somehow, all the back of the old building has been incorporated in the new one, and the balcony out back of my room is still there. It is the same balcony. Standing on it I can see the same sprung plywood floor that was nailed over the bubbled tar roofing, layers of grey and pink paint peeling from the ashen wood. The same two-by-four railing is covered with chicken wire to keep the family dogs from jumping over. The same row of poplars rises up from the alley below, while across the way backyards crowd the edge of a wooded bank. But where there should be an alley is a stagnant channel of water. How would Scratch climb to my window at night with a moat around the place?

Then I'm not in the animal hospital at all. I'm in the dark, in bed, and there's a heavy weight on the end of the bed pressing against my leg. I tentatively change position, sending a tremor through the mattress. The weight moves too. Sending the tremor back. I'm awake! More and more with these dreams, something was reaching across the years to curl up at my feet. But when I sit up and look, the cat whose ghost sometimes still sleeps with me is gone. It's always a better morning, though, for his having been there.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Yiannis "Gerakon" '85

Milford Zunk was the superman. He stood five-foot seven inches, a hundred and thirty-one pounds in front of the mirror, pondering his own species superiority. No ungainly meat on his aesthetic frame. Musculature was for the labouring lower order. The high forehead and thinning hair reflected in the mirror betokened an expanded cranium to house his expanded I.Q. Last week he'd taken the Mensa test again; after two weeks of grueling mental exercises, and scored two whole points over his previous best quotient. By such mental leaps and bounds, Milford Zunk was ushering in the new age of scientific man.

Satisfied with his outward appearance, Zunk stretched open his mouth in a grimace of agony, the better to examine his back molars. Yes, he was certain they were receding into his jaw. Gradually, over the years, he'd watched them retreat into obsolescence like evolutionary glaciers. The weak chin that he was born with had been his first clue, when he was twelve, that Zunk wasn't constituted like the ape-jawed, brawny, boisterous other children of Brooklyn P.S. 38's seventh grade. They stayed at school and tossed inflated bladders to each other, as if such activity were meaningful. Milford, however, went home as fast as he possibly could to immerse himself in revelation after revelation about the very woof and warp of the Sevagram.

The first revelation had come while he waited to have his hair barbered by the odious man with the animal body odour. (His mother had said that THOSE people couldn't help it.) There were magazines for the waiting customers that included the usual women's journals and sports magazines, but also one digest sized pulp with a painting of a rocket ship raying a space station. It had the unlikely title of "Amazing Stories", and was well-thumbed. No wonder. Here were the secrets of science; pearls cast before swine in a barber shop. Milford's eyes were opened, and within a week he'd found a dozen more issues. Each one advanced his education at a rate possible only to such as he.

He quickly learned that space was four-dimensional, and time was the invisible dimension. At school he secretly revelled in knowledge denied to the kids around him. Milford rapidly became acquainted with force fields, lost civilizations beneath the ice caps, elder gods, and alien intelligences to which we were as ants to us. There were concepts so fantastic, so arcane, that Milford had to make an effort not to be skeptical. One issue of the magazine In particular had been especially important. It changed Milford's life, and the history of the world, by Introducing the lad to Homo Superior.

Man had evolved out of the Neanderthal brute, as would Homo Superior one day evolve from ordinary Man. Superman would be smarter than Homo Sap. Milford was smarter than ANYone he knew. Superman had a smaller body, only four toes, had lost his vermiform appendix, and could communicate by mental telepathy. Anxiously, Milford prodded his lower left abdomen, but couldn't tell if he had an anachronistic vermiform appendix or not. He didn't even need to remove his shoes to know that his feet had five toes apiece. Con-

centrated thought directed downstairs at his parents was so much wasted effort. They simply weren't receiving. But that might be explained easily, if Homo Superior could only communicate telepathically with his own kind.

So was he, or wasn't he? His mouth felt dry as he weighed himself in the balance, and found his case weak. Milford bit his tongue in his anxiety. In a flash, he realized that he'd found the proof he sought. Yes, the text had said that primitive features atrophied. That Milford Zunk had only twenty-eight of the normal thirty-two teeth was a fact verified by a certified dentist. They'd grow out, said the dentist to Milford's folks last year. Now, Milford knew why they hadn't. The remaining four teeth of normal dentation had atrophied!

The more Milford read over the next few years, the more it became a habit to run his tongue over his back teeth, subconsciously counting and measuring. The more he read, the smarter he knew he was too. Eschewing exercise, his body grew unnaturally lean as he got older, adding inches to his height but none to his chest or arms. It was plain that jealous classmates in high school envied his spare form. They called him "runt", and the physical instructor added his opinion that Milford Zunk was dangerously emaciated to every report card. Milford's eyes were becoming highly evolved as well, so that at the age of nineteen he was hopelessly myopic. The optician that fitted him for his first pair of bottle-end glasses blamed his reading, and Milford smugly agreed.

Now he was a young man on his own in the world. It was risky, he learned, to fraternize with the common man. Particularly young women, whose instincts unconsciously bristled when they met a rival in the struggle of the species for supremacy. In the past, Zunk had naively hoped to pass un-noticed. Invariably the young lady had reacted to his advances like a bleating lamb confused by an amorous shepherd. On one fey date he thought he'd found a sympathetic ear. He allowed himself to confess how lonely it was to be a Milford Orin Zunk, ahead of his time. When the stunned woman misunderstood everything, she treated his candor with scorn.

Since that day he kept to himself, returning to an anonymous boarding house room every day after work. Until morning he locked himself in among his papers and magazines. There was also a tarnished brass microscope that he'd rescued from the trash at the Bureau of Weights and Standards where he worked, (and had nearly repaired), a few library books that were already overdue when he'd made each of his last three moves, a model of a tesseract he'd built out of piano wire but which refused to collapse into the fourth dimension however he twisted or pulled it, a box of discarded vitamin bottles from his attempt last spring to substitute them for his bulk diet, a week's accumulation of empty Ni-Hi bottles and soiled laundry, a picture of Albert Einstein cut out of a newspaper, and a roach trap. Of all his possessions, only the roach trap reminded him of the unpleasant facts of life.

At this time every evening, Zunk finished with his meal and performed his mental exercises. These usually began with re-reading certain passages in books that he'd underlined with a carpenter's pencil he kept for the purpose. Among those he returned to regularly were the brilliant works of J.B.S. Haldane, particularly "The Ine-

quality of Man", and "The Causes of Evolution". From the point of view of beneficial mental exertion, though, Bale's "Beyond the Milky Way" and Eddington's "The Nature of the Physical World" were more of a challenge. Zunk especially liked to pit his wits against the greatest mind of his day, John W. Campbell, who not only had better ideas than most scientists, he published Zunk's corrections and criticisms of his ideas in the letter column of "Astounding." It was this way, in fact, that Zunk began corresponding with other readers, who he hoped might be members of his own super-race.

Following a half-hour of reading, Zunk did lightning sums and multiplications in his head. It took fierce concentration to add three four-digit numbers without using pen and paper, or fingers, and Zunk was nearly always right. He'd clamp his eyes shut and sweat for five minutes sometimes, then grab pencil and pad to jot the answer. Whenever there was a mistake, it was only that he'd mis-remembered a figure in the column he'd just added. The sum was never wrong. Rather than waste time on the way to and from work, Zunk practised adding the numbers on subway cars, dollar bills, street signs, and even advertising. T 01108395 A =27. Or "suit and two pants: $7.99. jackets $4.99, shirts $1.19 each. free alterations" = $14.17. The trick wasn't to add up the figures one by one, but all at once, without thinking.

Next Zunk played the game of "what if... " He thought of a pivotal point in history, such as the battle of Waterloo, then supposed that Napoleon had won. Would we speak French today? Would there be such a thing as a Crookes Tube? Would Nabisco shred wheat for Zunk's breakfast cereal?

His last exercise was to develop his extra-sensory powers. For five minutes each day Zunk thought palpable waves of mental energy at a small device he'd made from instructions in a magazine. Once he thought he'd made the tiny paper vanes on a straight-pin, stuck loosely through a bit of cardboard, slowly turn. Then, as if getting the knack of it, they whirled round and round. But it was only a draft from under the door. He'd been so delighted at the seeming success that when he stepped in front of the draft, felt the cold air, and saw the vanes slow to a halt, hope nearly died forever. He rubbed his tongue raw that night feeling for his disappearing wisdom teeth. The disappointment was short-lived, however. Zunk returned to his telepathic exercises the very next day, more confident than ever.

You see, he made a fantastic breakthrough that day that overshadowed the trivial failure to levitate a bit of scrap paper. He contacted Martians.

It was just after the early dark of New York winter. Zunk hesitated to begin his exercises, still smarting from the day before. Instead, he prolonged examining himself in the mirror, consciously holding his tongue still while he studied his forehead for some sign of development. He found no reassurance. The mirror was a cheap floor model that tilted from the middle, and stood near his over-night table. Zunk couldn't concentrate. He was distracted. His tongue was sore. So his eyes wandered from one reflected piece of furniture to another. There was only a shabby chest of drawers in the place, that held three clean shirts, one not-so-clean shirt, and the years 1929 to mid-1938 of his magazines. There was a typewriter missing the "d" key on an

orange-crate next to a four-poster bed whose brass was rubbing off the posts. He'd seen it all before. But he'd never actually STUDIED his room in the mirror, and it was suddenly unsettling, alien, to see it in reverse. Suppose it wasn't the same. room at all? Directly behind him was a window, the panes permanently nailed shut by the landlady or a past tenant. (Perhaps the one who'd labeled a snaking crack in the ceiling's plaster with all the villages along the River Niger. Or the one who'd claimed to be the rightful heir to the Hohenzollern throne. He was nevertheless evicted when his rent was in three weeks arrears, and the only excuse he had for it was the war reparations.) At this time of night the window usually formed a dark frame around Zunk's head. That night, however, it was bright.

Zunk turned, but the window was the familiar domino of darkness. Seen in the mirror it was bright. Turn around -- dark. In the mirror -- bright. He tilted the mirror up and looked behind it, finding nothing but the yellow cardboard box that he'd put there last month. Zunk kicked it aside so that it tumbled, and spilled tiny corpses of insects, then lowered the mirror again. The window behind him still showed daylight. Then he saw someone green step behind him.

Zunk whirled at least three times before he was convinced that he was alone in his room. Only in the other room in the mirror was he receiving a visitor. Green the man was, alright, with a flowing olive beard and robes of emerald metal scales. He had an enormous expanse of cranium between his olive brows and bald pate. Where he should have had ears there were two stiff looking antennae with shiny ball-like ends. Human though he seemed at first sight, the more Zunk looked, the more he tallied discrepancies. The green man stood slightly taller than Zunk's five seven, but a lot of his height was the huge green brain-case. His body was smaller than normal for a human being of that height, and his legs shorter. He wore sandals. Sure enough, Zunk counted four toes on each foot. Whoever he was, the green man was highly evolved, and might have even fewer teeth than Zunk! Then, one by one, five other green men stepped into sight behind the first one, and stood in a formal row.

The leader -- he was clearly the leader of the other five -- held his hand up, palm facing out. "Greetings, man of Earth," he said. Then the rest was garbled, dream-like.

Over the next several weeks, Zunk learned the trick of concentration that brought the Martians to his mirror, and how to listen so that their words were clear. His mirror wasn't an ordinary one, he was told. With great expenditure of mental energy, the beings of Mars had switched the second-hand relic Zunk was accustomed to for a cunning replica. The old mirror had only reflected light. The replica reflected positrons, said the Director for the Guidance of Solar Intelligences. Positrons travelled backward in time, and therefore faster than light, establishing instantaneous communication between Mars and Earth. A beam was aimed through Zunk's room, and carried its image to Mars where it was projected in three dimensions. To communicate with Earth, the Martians entered the force-stiffened projection as they would walk into a normal room. Then their image was beamed back to Earth to appear in the reflection in Zunk's mirror.

Zunk was mesmerized by his sense of wonder whenever he watched the stately green Martians move in the non-existent room. All the more so when every now and then one of them would perhaps lean on the night-table, or bump into the typewriter. At first there was no contact. Then the leaning Martian would begin to encounter solidity in the phantom table, sunk an inch or two below the indistinct surface. Or the typewriter would be jolted a moment after the encounter. Once, one of the Martians threw a bundle of inscribed gold-foil tablets on the bed, and they were gone when he looked for them again. Zunk knew where they were. He'd watched them sink slowly through the insubstantial mattress like a hot nail through ice. The tablets were plainly visible as they sank.

Why Martians should single Milford Zunk out from all the people in the world was no surprise to Milford Zunk. They'd patiently watched Earth for millennia, waiting for its people to cross a threshold, and Zunk was the first Earthling who was evolved enough, intelligent enough, to receive their teachings. It was a new era, now. Soon, Zunk would know secrets of wisdom thousands of years ahead of Earth science. Then he could use his powers to reform the corrupt politics of the crowned heads of Europe, re-organize the economy scientifically, feed the starving millions, and usher in an age of unparalleled technical achievement. It might be necessary at first to make a show of power -- perhaps demolish London or Paris. That would make world leaders listen to him, and in the long run justify itself in the eyes of history by preventing greater bloodshed. Zunk could hardly wait.

Other workers at the Bureau of Weights and Standards noticed the change in the young man who tested scales. Usually Zunk arrived in the morning as untalkative as ever, took his place at the work-bench, and examined one scale after the other from the shelves. If the instrument tested out heavy, he'd tag it with a red ticket, and put it back on the shelf with a work order. If it tested out light, he'd tag it yellow, and put it back on the shelf as well. But if it tested out just right, he wouldn't tag it at all. That was the job of his superior, who had the sole authority to issue a statement of compliance with the requirements of the Bureau of Weights and Standards. In that case, it was Zunk's duty to carry the unoffending instrument to another department. In a day it was routine to carry out measurements like this on well over a hundred scales, after which Zunk and his co-workers on the bench left for home. Zunk would hardly speak to any of them, and only seemed to find his tongue when addressing his superior. Even then, he hardly knew what to say but "yes sir, no sir", and made up for his lack of fluency by saying it too often.

Lately, however, Zunk talked like a convert to anyone who'd listen. No one was too sure what he had to say, since no-one liked the man well enough to stop and listen to him even as a novelty. All the more so since Zunk sounded vaguely threatening. He dropped hints about a day of reckoning, a better order, or the survival of the fittest. Then whoever he'd button-holed by the water cooler excused himself -- he'd like to stay and listen, but he had work to do...

At home, Zunk and the Martians discussed the problems of the world and made plans. The Martians, for all their super science and vaunted intelligence, sometimes seemed a little dumb to Zunk. They suggested courses of action that Zunk could plainly see wouldn't work,

such as disseminating knowledge through hypnotic rays, or making the world's deserts bloom by diverting underground aquifers. Other times, Zunk stood in awe of scientific principles he never dreamed of, but that the Martians had known since primer school.

The universe isn't running down they said. As space expands, matter falls into holes in the continuum, and pop up through the surface of space-time everywhere, beginning the cycle over again. They said that beams of energy were easily projected from a container of dye in water, as long as the energy was allowed to build up between mirrors first. And they said you could make electricity flow one way through a material that had snail impurities of rare earths, but not the other way.

Once, Zunk tried an experiment after talking with the Martians. He bought a large glass jug from the hardware store, and filled it with cleaning fluid. In the dark, Zunk taped photographic paper around it, then wrapped several layers of butcher's paper around that, protecting it from exposure to light. Then Zunk left the jug in his closet for several weeks. At the end of that time he found several dim pin-points in the developed photo-paper. The wrapping had been a little worse for wear when disinterred from under the curry comb, Bunsen burner striker, old shoes, paper-clip chains, lengths of pipette glass, jackets with snarled zippers, rolled window screen, and bent curtain rods that Zunk had variously thrown in the closet over the last few weeks. But the Martians assured him that nevertheless the spots on the film could have been the proof that unknown cosmic rays had passed through his apparatus.

Wise in the ways of science as the Martians might be, they were naive about human affairs, in Zunk's opinion. Their discussions of the best way to improve humanity's lot came to a turning point one night a year after the Martians first appeared in his boarding-house mirror. Action must follow soon, they argued as the world situation appeared volatile to say the least. Zunk agreed in principle, but insisted that they mustn't let haste force their hand. So far the Martians had proposed many courses of action which Zunk thought unwise. In deference to his native expertise they had withdrawn plans which they themselves thought excellent. What should they do, they begged of Zunk? It came to that. Rather than delay any longer, Martian science was at Zunk's complete disposal to do anything he saw fit.

As much as superman had waited for this moment, he was caught unprepared, and hadn't an immediate answer. He said that he'd outline his ideas to them in a week's time. They had little choice except to nod their sage heads in resignation, and they bade him farewell until then.

It wasn't that Zunk hadn't any ideas. The exact opposite was the case -- he had too many ideas. Choosing a practical number of them was the difficulty. He listed them on a piece of foolscap, and ran out of space after filling both sides and some of the margin as well. There was more foolscap, but one sheet was already more than enough to think about.

Six days passed in which his co-workers noticed that Zunk had changed once more. Now he was untalkative again, but pre-occupied with a far look in his eyes, as if there were the weariness

of the world's pain behind them, and weighty Issues to be resolved. There were, of course, and much weightier than they could have imagined. The very fate of the Earth isn't a responsibility anyone would have guessed was in the hands of an employee of the Bureau of Weights and Standards. A blue-collar employee at that.

The list was gradually winnowed down to a more manageable number of options over those six days. Zunk considered:

A) Introduce a new, free source of power that could be beamed to anywhere in the world from a central power station that he would control, and turn off at will to enforce the law against war, trusts, police states, shoddy merchandise, etc.

B) Destroy all the world's guns, cannon, bombers, battleships, and so on, except for an arsenal of futuristic weapons to be used by Zunk against aggressor-nations that refuse to comply.

C) Create a world government in which all the scientists would chose the most intelligent man in the world to rule over Earth as perpetual president, and serve as his administrative council. Until the new government could be formed, Zunk would see it as his duty to provide interim leadership. And when surely nominated he would serve as first world president as well.

D) Cure human evil with a drug or ray that made people only have decent, altruistic thoughts. The cure would be administered to everyone on earth except those, such as himself, who had proven they could be trusted with freedom of thought.

E) If that wasn't possible, then eliminate crime at least, by implanting a device in.everyone's head that reported what they were doing to the World Police. Tens of thousands of monitors would evaluate the criminal actions reported to them, and dispatch officers to make the arrests. The monitors would in turn be supervised by administrators who would determine what was a crime and what wasn't. To be certain that their laws were just, Zunk would be Police Chief.

F) Supermen such as himself would be bred or raised, in vats. Every last member of Homo Sapiens would be allowed to live out his or her life in a retirement reservation, while humanity was replaced by Homo Superior. Until other supermen were available, management of world affairs would have to be placed temporarily in Zunk's hands.

There was more, but fortunately Zunk saw the common thread running through them, and was able to reduce his plans to one.

When the week was done, the Martians appeared in the mirror on schedule. They were more than ever dignified and pontifical in their robes and green beards. Zunk would have sworn they wore built-up shoulders and elevator sandals for the occasion, but he believed that they were beyond vanity or other frivolous vices. The costumes must be ceremonial. Zunk rubbed his teeth with his tongue. Would they accept whatever plan he presented, as promised? If they didn't, there wasn't much he could do about it, and he agonized over his power-

lessness. Only let them do as he asked, he vowed, and he'd never be in such a position of dependence again. Zunk's word would be law, justice, and progress in one. Even the Martians would have to abide by it.

"Greetings," the Director for the Guidance of Solar Intelligences intoned. "Have you reached a decision?"

"I have," said Zunk. His nerve threatened to break at the moment of truth. "Give me ultimate power to rule the Earth!"

"Power? Is that all of your plan?" said the Martian, obviously expecting more.

"The problems are too complicated to solve by any one change," argued Zunk. "But if I have broad powers to do whatever is necessary to ensure peace, prosperity, and progress, I think the Earth can be saved."

"But surely we can discuss whatever measures are called for in each case as it comes up," temporized the Martian. He fiddled with the end of his nose -- a rather large nose for a highly evolved race -- as if he were struck with uncertainty. The five Martians in the row behind him also seemed fidgety. Had Zunk's suggestion failed? He was suddenly horrified that it had. They'd abandon him and mine the oceans for dissolved minerals, or something silly like that.

"No, listen," he said. "You'd only be able to do what I advise you would work, wouldn't you? You wouldn't just do whatever you wanted? You don't know about Earthlings at all, and you might do more harm than good!" Zunk sweated like an old stick of dynamite, and actually bit his tongue twice in nervousness.

"No, we'll not make irresponsible decisions without your co-operation, we assure you. But we are reluctant to abdicate our involvement, as your suggestion just now would imply. We are ignorant of Earthmen's ways, that's true, but are you fully schooled in our technology? It's clear that we must work in concert if anything is to be done."

Zunk's heart sunk, and he nearly bit his tongue in two. He had failed. Then the Director wilted too. His had been the weaker will after all.

"Yet we are dangerously short of time," he admitted. "Your world is armed against itself, and already there are terrible mass crimes being committed by your nations. We must act fast! We've no time to wait until you prepare another course of action. If you have an alternative plan, we must hear it now, and accept it."

He didn't. Zunk was allowed a few minutes to decide how he'd spend the biggest blank check he'd ever be given, and thought harder than he'd ever thought in his life. Everything that came to mind, though, was a slight variation of something on his first list, which came down to the same plan he'd presented not five minutes ago.

"If you have no alternative at all," the Martian moaned, "then we may be forced to destroy the planet as an act of kindness."

"No!" The word was a badly controlled scream. "I have an idea." Zunk's eyes lighted on a yellow box, five inches long, surrounded by the dried husks of dead cockroaches. He detested the vile things. Icky, crawly, lower forms of life! The box read "Roach Motel". It was the best he could think of on the spur of the moment.

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It would have surprised any lesser intellect than Zunk's that the Martians agreed to the plan. But they were desperate after all, to prevent even more horrible things happening to the green planet than their misgivings led them to expect from Milford Zunk. It should be kept in mind, too, that they knew very little about human beings. Mostly they had taken Zunk's word for what Earthlings were like. They'd committed themselves unwittingly, and only awaited Zunk's signal to begin.

Winter was beginning to wear thin on people's patience, but wore anything but thin on the ground, where soot crusted snow still clung to the sidewalks and stoops like an industrial scab. The winter was a cruelly cold one, especially for the unemployed, who found inadequate relief from the soup kitchens and missions. Almost every morning Zunk read in the newspapers that some destitute bag lady or tramp had been found frozen to death, lying on a park bench or huddled in a doorway. In such a winter, such people weren't equipped to take care of themselves, he pondered; Even at the best of tines the poor were ill fit to survive. Zunk pitied them, but in the long run knew that there was only one solution to their plight. That night he communicated with the Martians, and they promised to take the appropriate action in a few days.

On the way to work Zunk passed a store-front that had been closed for alterations for several weeks. Or months. (Who remembers the slow changes of the street?) On that day, however, the boarded-up windows were down. Behind new plate glass were printed pamphlets, a few notices pinned to a bulletin board, and photographs of hard-working labourers in bib pants and smocks, earning their livings by the honest sweat of their brows. Taped to the inside of the window was an emblem of an eagle printed on cardboard. It read W.P.A. Sure enough, the lines outside the soup kitchens in the neighborhood were now lining up outside this office. They stood patiently in line, filing in slowly for jobs. Only Zunk knew the truth. They never came out. They were being painless gassed, one by one, and their bodies vaporized. The numbers of hungry and helpless people on the streets were sharply reduced, and by winter's end no-one was frozen either. The lure had worked wonders.

Similar operations would begin all over the world, the Martians promised. But it wasn't enough, insisted Zunk. Eliminating poverty was only a skirmish in the attack on the broader front of stupidity. Eliminating the poor only made the human race wealthier. It was the nobler aim to make Man smarter that they were concerned with. Not all fools were poor. The Martians took note of this, and stepped up their campaign.

Zunk noticed their new operations almost immediately. In fact, he began to use his spare time by walking the streets to spot them. A block away from a building Mark Twain once lived in, a small school opened in a bankrupt poultry shop. It offered courses in the new science of "Lawsonomy". Zunk read the testimonials in the window with real curiosity. He had no intention of going in, of course. Not even when a rather attractive young woman came out, and said she'd noticed his interest, would he like to see some literature inside? He preferred to remain outside, thank you, he said. He did enter a bit of casual conversation, however. No woman had ever talked to him so nicely before, proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that his instinct had been right. This was the Martian's next step.

Nevertheless, the woman's attention was a pleasant novelty, and "Lawsonomy" was a brilliant lure. It fascinated even him. Before the next bus. came, he learned that the Martians had imbued the lure with a university in Des Moines, Iowa. Its purported founder, one Alfred Lawson, had simplified the laws of nature into three complementary forces: zig, zag, and swirl. What non-sense! The universe was made of mass, energy, and the aether. But suppose the Martians had carelessly told more than they should, and zig, zag, and swirl were something they'd hitherto kept secret from him? Maybe he should look into this more closely... But his bus came, and Zunk was saved from the trap of his own making.

He realized later how close a call he'd had. Rubbing the back of his teeth he vowed never again to get so close to a lure: they were obviously hypnotic and undiscriminating. Perhaps he should even speak to the Martians about it. Gassing good genetic material with the bad wasn't very efficient. Furthermore, how many supermen like himself could the Earth spare? If he were the only one, then none!

There was nothing that could be done about it, confessed the Martians when they appeared in Zunk's mirror again. The attraction was strongest the more one took the bait, but Zunk was perfectly safe as long as he kept his distance. Only those whose minds were susceptible to the lure approached closely enough to feel its attraction. This didn't wholly satisfy Zunk, who wanted less passive protection. Wasn't there a signal, or a force-field, he could wear that would give him immunity, or warn the operators in the death traps?

"No, Zunk. The elimination centers are not in fact there at all, and have no operators. They are merely reverse projections such as the one we've made of your room here on Mars. The operators are likewise illusions."

"How do the people who go in get disintegrated, then?"

"They enter a region of space-time which has been partially destructured by a cusp-point in the positron beam before it is focused into the image of the center. This separates them into their constituent parts. We now have $125,637 and a few cents worth of calcium, phosphorus, and nitrides stored in an interstitial space until you want it. May I remind you that you still haven't explained why we are saving the chemicals for you, or why you ask to know its value in your local currency whenever we talk. Would this be a good moment -- "

"Another time," said Zunk, changing a sensitive subject. "Can't you do SOMETHING about my safety?" He couldn't stand the sense of powerlessness the situation gave him, however far he stayed from "Lawsonomy" schools like the last one.

"Nothing material," answered the Martian. He sounded almost peevish as he continued. "Haven't we been clear about our limitations? It nearly broke the budget of the Institute for the Guidance of Solar Intelligences to teleport the mirrors."

Zunk groaned. Wrung his hands. Felt his teeth. Stared piteously at the mirror.

"Oh, very well," said the Martian, after conferring with his kin. "When we begin our next fiscal year --in fourteen of your months -- we can send you a warning device which will light up whenever you come near a cusp point. In the meantime we can only offer this moral assistance. Whatever most appeals to you is most suspect. If you come upon something that seems impossibly good fortune, it is. Remember that and you will be infallibly safe."

With that, the Martians filed out in solemn procession, leaving Zunk's reflection alone in the reflected room.

Zunk saw no more "Lawsonomy" schools. Even the one he'd found was gone when he went by a week later. For good measure, the Martians had changed the lure again, to be certain of his safety. (He thought wistfully of the young lady, then snapped out of it with a shudder.) But now, here and there, Zunk began noticing small signs next to doors that led to dingy second floor offices, or into even dingier stores. "Esperanto taught easily. First lesson free. Speak the scientific language of the future," Zunk read from the other side of the street. He never crossed to get closer. Language of the future, he thought. Ha! He wouldn't be caught that easily, but afterward it might be a good idea to make the world speak a single, scientifically based language at that.

Meanwhile, Zunk noticed a gullible looking subject on the other side of the street stop and read the sign. He was thin, with thick glasses, and weak chin, and took a full minute to make up his mind. Then he tried the door twice before he discovered that it opened inward. Although Zunk watched for'an hour, the dope never came out. Zunk came back the next day, and watched from dinner time to dark, seeing people go in and not come out. He made it a game to guess which of the passers-by would stop and go in, and rarely made a wrong guess. When occasionally someone left, it puzzled Zunk. Then he realized that they were "operators" leaving to allay suspicion. Next morning, Zunk read with satisfaction an item in the classified ads. "Esperanto" schools were operating in several places in the city now; cleanly, efficiently improving human racial stock.

All the while, the Martians reported that Zunk's fortune in chemical assets grew.

After "Esperanto" came "Dianetics". A Dianetics center opened in Brooklyn, near the bridge where Al Capone was born. In short order there were more of then, each digesting a dally meal of the unfit to survive. At work, Zunk discovered his supervisor with a printed hand-bill. It touted a pseudosclence that rid pupils of the mental blocks that prevented them from getting

ahead, and Zunk smiled. Blocks were a sure sign of mental feebleness. The sufferer who took up Dianetics sought his richly deserved elimination. Zunk rather liked his superior at times, but the man had no-one to blame but himself for taking the bait. If he was unfit, the common good demanded-his removal. Besides, there was always a bright side. Maybe it was his superior all along that kept Zunk from getting ahead.

In quick succession, Theosophy, Astrology, Homeopathy, Spiritualism and ocular exercises appeared In the streets. Zunk was handed a flyer for palm reading, and ran away as fast as he could. There were more fortune-telling parlors than he remembered. Even the number of book-ies in the neighborhood seemed suspicious. A modern art studio opened on Zunk's street, though 14th. and 7th. Avenue was too run-down for anything of the sort. He believed Modern Art was pretty stupid, and never understood what the supposed intelligentsia saw in it. The new gallery was fool-killer to the smart set, he supposed. It was good to see how his plan was expanding to take in the stupid from all walks of life. Any day now, Zunk expected to see offers of free money, free education, free health care, even ó he sighed free girls.

Waiting for the final solution to mankind's problems was hard on Zunk's nerves. Every day he poured over the papers, clipping out stories, classifieds, and oblique references that shed light on how well things were going. Judging by the news, they were going very well indeed. Zunk could take just pride in himself. Yet somehow he was tense. It made him nervous to miss even a single one of the lures laid out by the Martians. So far, at least, he'd discovered them all. When the Martians described to him their latest traps, he'd had pre-knowledge of every one. Still, it was telling on his system, and he was rapidly approaching a state of nervous exhaustion. His tongue refused to heal.

Tell me in advance, he demanded. We cannot, they replied. The illusion of the lure wasn't shaped by them, but by the mind-set of the first victim, who saw what he most desired and set the trap in that form. The most the Martians did was to interpret his vague thoughts as a concrete image. When an unformed lure was projected, there was no telling what shape it would take in advance. Nor could the positron beam be aimed in reverse as accurately as the bean to his mirror. This ruled out giving Zunk the location either. The Martians could, however, inform Zunk how many 'new lures they intended to place in his vicinity every week.

"How many?" He wanted to know.

"Seven hundred and ninety-four, starting Monday. Only counting those you reasonably be expected to fall into. Worldwide we have one hundred and eighteen thousand, six hundred and forty elimination centers operating at this moment, increasing to three hundred and thirty-seven thousand nine hundred and one starting Monday. By the way, Zunk, your stock-pile of chemicals has reached a value of one hundred and ninety-two million dollars, more or less. The mass Is beginning to form a cyst in space-time, and we'll soon have to either move it to a deeper Interstice, or distribute it more widely where it is. Either way is awkward and puts a strain on our budget, but it's dangerous if nothing is done. If the moment is convenient for you, night you tell us NOW how you want these residues delivered?"

"Soon."

Right then Zunk had more important worries than mere numbers and abstractions about time-space he couldn't make sense of. Why hadn't they told him how unpredictable their lures were before he gave the go-ahead? As it was, half the streets in mid-town were off-limits to Zunk. The streets he could travel safely were nevertheless a maze of crossings, from one side to the other, that ended at random intersections. He was often forced to take circuitous routes up one block, down another, even back the way he came, to go even short distances. The simplest safe route was three times as long as the direct way. Going to and from work had become a drunkard's walk that grew by ten minutes extra travel every few days, as new lures appeared in his path.

And what was going to happen when the sudden drop in population became obvious? At his-suggestion, the Martians projected fake Images of people to replace the ones they eliminated. But how long could it go on? To Zunk at least, the fakes were obvious automatons. Like the room in his mirror, these positron people were less than completely solid. So far, no-one seemed to notice, but there were already four fakes at the Bureau of Weights and Standards. Several others -- such as the nice girl from the cleaning department, (who kissed the dirty old janitor Mr. Schirmeister in the lunch room Tuesday) -- spent so much time with the ghostly fakes they became suspect as well. Sooner or later the deception must be discovered. Then there might welt be a panic. Detectives might notice Zunk's odd behaviour. Scientists might somehow detect his communications with the Red Planet. Then they'd look at his teeth and know everything! What were the Martians going to do about protecting Earth's benefactor if it came to that?

All the pompous green ancients would say was that there was nothing to worry about for the present. They'd take care of difficulties as they arose. It made Zunk furious to think how much they treated him like his boss at work.

Who was, by the way, as much an obstacle to Zunk's career as a projected illusion as he had been in real life. The Martians only seemed to shrug at this, then filed away for the week. One of these days, Zunk grumbled to himself, he'd smash their damned mirror, and not save the human race. Maybe then he'd get a little more respect. If not, then he'd have the peace of mind of knowing he could walk down any street again in perfect safety. How could he have ever thought those myopic, pint-sized, pickle-pusses were a superior race?

He drew his foot back, experimentally. But Zunk didn't actually dare follow through. When it came right down to it, he wasn't willing to give up his.role as the harbinger of the future age of supermen.

He lowered the threatening foot. Then he noticed something he COULD kick. There was an insect crawling on the yellow box in the corner where he'd kicked it, months ago. It wasn't poisoning the little buggers anymore, was it? He'd show it, and gave the trap a kick instead. It wasn't very late, so if he cared to put on a hat he could still pick up a new roach motel from the five-and-dime.

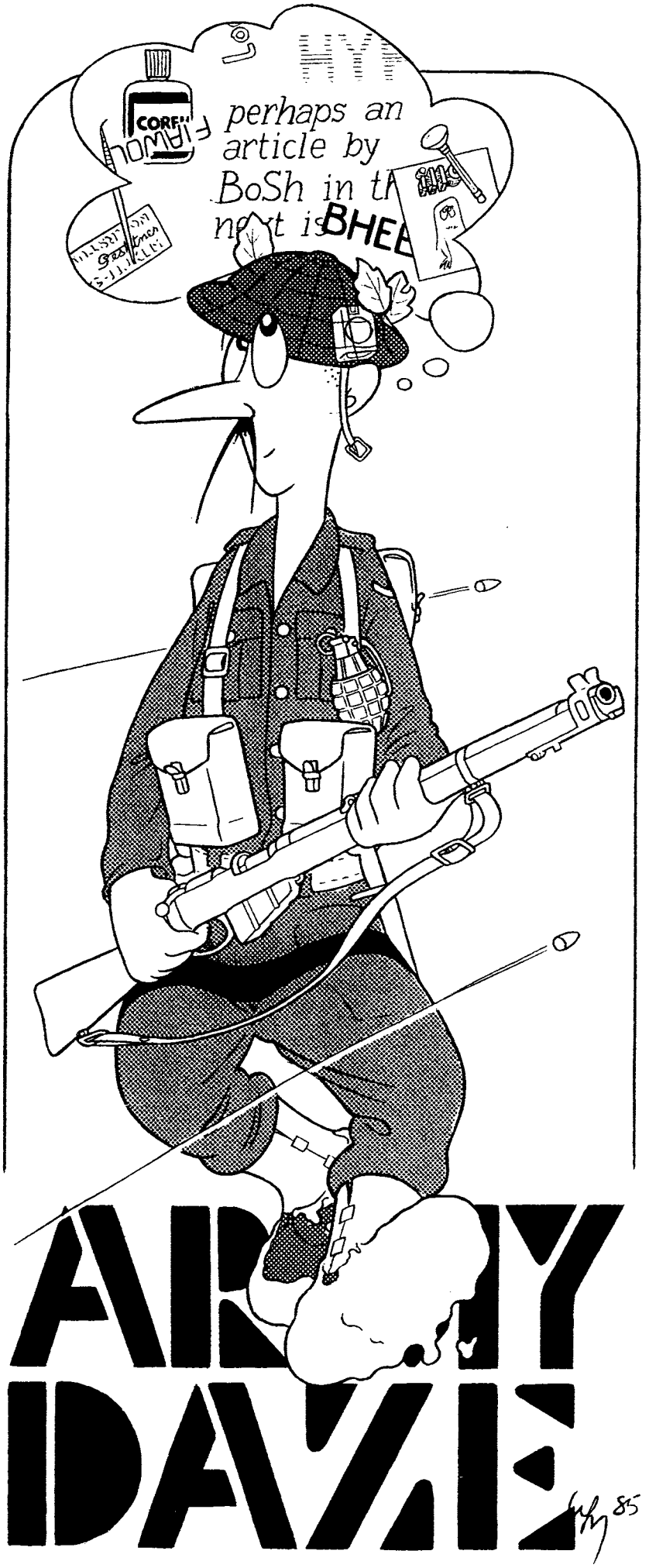
Shopping wasn't as easy as it had sounded back in his room. The number of lures had proliferated even while Zunk talked to the Martians. He had to go far out of his way, over to Park Avenue, then north almost as far as Central Park. He doubled back along 59th. Street. By that time he was tired and hungry, and had given up any idea of finding another roach motel for the night. Instead, he went in to an automat that was still open, fishing in his pockets for change to work the vending machines. Between mouthfuls of a ham and lettuce sandwich that still tasted of the wax paper it was wrapped in, Zunk noticed the place was busier than normal for this time of night.

There were a half dozen young men at one table talking, smoking, and occasionally putting a nickel in a slot for a piece of pie whose meringue mostly came off with the cellophane. They seemed to be talking a form of English in which every third of fourth word was gibberish, and the rest sensible. Whatever they were talking about, something across the street plainly excited them. Then another young man burst through the door, dressed in absurd jodhpurs and a cape with cardboard shoulders. The bunch at the table noticed him, and laughed quietly, as over a private joke rather than an obvious lunatic. The caped man left and they dismissed him from conversation. Zunk thought he overheard the word "future" or "futuristic" several times. In the next half hour, several others came and went. Including -a young woman in scarlet tights! Zunk was captivated. He decided to follow the next one to leave, and see what was going on for himself.

His opportunity came when one of them, the smart-aleck with the bow-tie and glasses, left the table and went outside. Zunk followed him down the block, and across the street to a nondescript building, then up three flights of stairs to a rented hall. Whatever was going on had attracted a lot of attention. There were people standing around the door, and inside was packed. Zunk saw rows of chairs and sitting people, while someone conducted an auction from the head of the room. Around the walls hung -- no! But yes! Paintings that Zunk had seen, on the covers of his precious magazines. He grabbed the nearest person by the elbow and practically screamed into his face, "What is this? What's happening?"

He didn't even see the cape, so foolish a few minutes ago. All that mattered to Zunk was an answer. "Don't you know? How'd you get here then?" said the man. (He spoke kindly, though Zunk's bony hand hurt him fiercely. He could see desperation in the stranger's eyes, and remembered he felt this emotion once too.) "This is the Science Fiction Convention. The first one in the world held with the World's Fair! John W. Campbell is here, and Jack Williamson, and Frank R. Paul, and Willy Ley... Hey, would you like to join?"

Zunk's heart skipped a beat. A... Science Fiction... Convention? Like a cloud lifting and letting the sun into some fevered nightmare, he felt a surge of joy through his trembling frame. As he dove through the door he thought, "This is wonderful. It's... it's much too good to be true!"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Fan Loon's Lives | February 1986 | New Toy 1, Taral Wayne editor

FOREWORD: Some twelve years ago, an article I read in the news-print issue of Outworlds made a considerable impression on my freshly minted fannish psyche. Susan Wood, whose pen or typer was an all too early extinguished fount of some of fandom's finest writing, had a favourite book when she was a little girl. It was a series of biographies collected by an author who was once popular, who's now faded into obscurity. He was Dutch, born in the same small town of Veere as the late medieval writer Desiderius Erasmus. Hendrik Willem Van Loon left his country in 1902, and when the Nazis occupied Holland he became a spiritual refugee. The Nazi invasion intruded into the author's many books as well as into his homeland. INVASION imagines the Nazis attacking America itself, and taking special pains to hunt down the outspoken Dutch expatriate. The book is not a little self-serving. In fact, the author is rather the Isaac Asimov of his day.

Today, you can fill a shelf with modestly priced first editions of VAN LOON'S GEOGRAPHY, VAN LOON'S AMERICA, THE STORY OF MANKIND, THE STORY OF THE ARTS, OUR BATTLE, MY SCHOOL BOOKS, and many others whose very titles give the flavour of the man. His view of history and human society was idiosyncratic to a fault. There are hints of the old world order in his viewpoints. He has relatively little insight into human nature and its works, so that his books have somewhat the character of bedtime stories to thrill and frighten children of all ages. This is Van Loon's chief appeal. An ungenerous critic would bring a harsh verdict against the Dutch writer, whose books are inaccurate, trivial, and frequently stodgy if their subtler charm isn't appreciated.

Without question, Van Loon's best work is the book beloved of the young Susan Wood: VAN LOON'S LIVES. The book begins in Veere, in the sitting room of a picturesque and no doubt idealized cottage belonging to the Van Loon family. With his American wife Jimmie and the likely imaginary Uncle Frits, Van Loon rhapsodizes over dinner. How marvelous it would be if only they could invite anyone they wanted to join with them in after-dinner conversation! ANYONE, however famous and long dead! And why not? they decided. The method of making invitations to dinner turns out to be simplicity itself -- so simple in fact that Van Loon passes over this knotty question of plausibility with a sleight of hand -- it is a secret. Secret or not, his invitations are accepted, and, beginning with Erasmus, Van Loon's dinner parties include Mozart, Washington, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Da Vinci, Napoleon, Plato, the Buddha, and the greatest inventor of all time, who in prehistoric times discovered how to make a sharp edge on a piece of flint. All in all. Van Loon entertains some fifty guests along with the reader.

It was a pity that Susan never mentioned Van Loon's own illustrations. Many are crude pen or brush drawings, but when the author touches them with colour they come alive. One or two are so effective that I rate them as very fine examples of the book illustrator's art. Van Loon's book on Geography has a particularly nice touch. The dust jacket -- Van Loon's own design -- opens out into a full colour map of the world as he saw it

The first appearance of "Fan Loon's Lives" below has its own title, as will others as they appear. But whether "Mything Persons" will be followed by further Lives or not is a matter of inclination on my part. I can make neither promises nor denials. As a title for the possible series as a whole, the transformation of Van Loon to "Fan Loon's Lives" is straightforward and not imaginative. But it does convey my meaning exactly, an underrated virtue.

MYTHING PERSONS

What is a convention for, if not to talk shop, so to speak? Science fiction can be quite conveniently discussed, analyzed, and evaluated at home with any number of people. Why drive five hundred miles to watch a movie? I prefer to play Talking Heads on my stereo more than I like to listen to unreconstructed hippies filk Terrapin Station on a cigar-box guitar. So maybe that's just me -- but we all have our own reasons for the essentially unreasonable behaviour that attending a convention is.

This brings me to the beginning of the story, which happens to start in a hotel room at a convention I see no point in naming. It was about three a.m. on Saturday, when the press of bodies relaxed, and Moshe Feder was less likely to be distracted away from conversation by the glimpse of someone seen over a sea of heads in a room or hall party. Moshe's room was, in fact, about empty. Stu Shiffman was in one corner nodding off, but looking rather well in spite of a taco dinner earlier that evening. For the moment Lise Eisenberg was nowhere to be seen. The sound of ice and water crunching into the bathroom sink made her presence nevertheless known to anyone who wondered. The room was a mess. Broken chips crunched underfoot as every step ground them further into the carpet. Coke, beer, and melted ice cream rings stained cheap veneers. The plates of carrot sticks, largely untouched, were about the only neat things visible.

Patrick drifted in with a cloud of choking smoke. He brushed aside the litter of empty pretzel bags on the bed to see if Teresa might be asleep where he meant to sit. She wasn't --she was under a heap of snap-shot albums on the other bed -- so he sat, and said, "Is this a private conversation, or don't I get to crash it?"

"C'mon, it's fine by me if you crash a private conversation of mine. Taral and I were just talking about fan history."

"Hey, what a fresh idea. I haven't talked about fan history since I left rich brown outside the door." Two periods, a comma, and several flourishes of his cigarette punctuated his remarks.

Over in his corner Stu stirred and drawled, "If you don't like it, we can talk about Topic A instead." Groans met his suggestion from all corners of the room, a particularly agonized one from under the photo albums.

"That's no difference," I added, showing how my fannish wit could sparkle. "Topic A is already fan history."

"At least it's not topical anymore," finished Patrick, taking the pot for that round. "What WERE you talking about?"

Well, of course, many things. But while Moshe and I might drift as far afield as NESFA on the one hand, and New Canadian Fandom on the other, we had essentially stuck to the mythic quality of fandom. It could be argued, said Moshe, that the freedom of invention in fandom gave rise to most of its shared mythos. I didn't wholly disagree, but had to point out a more cynical interpretation to stay in character. I thought that much of fandom's mythology arose merely from social humour. It seemed to me that myths that were based on real personalities were of an inferior order. Smoooothing, bush hats, and the odd odor that came from the shoes of British fans who'd just left the loo were the first that came to mind as examples of lesser myth. In my opinion, myth that was pure invention was the best. Perhaps because I was more Intrigued by the unique paper persona of fans than by the reality, but anyway I was honest about my prejudices.

"It sounds as if you don't like people," said the reviving Teresa, penetrating to the heart of my meaning.

"Present company excepted, naturally. Do you think I'm a misanthrope, just because Stu says I don't have any gemutlich? I don't even think there is such a word. He made it up."

"I did not," he retorted. "It's a perfectly good word, like 'sci-fi', that Forest Ackerman invented."

Ignoring this, Moshe spoke. "It's too bad you can't meet any myths person-to-person. That should prove once and for all, Taral, whether you like people. If you didn't like Jophan in the flesh, then you prefer make-believe fans to real ones." There was something askew about Moshe's logic, but I couldn't get a grip on elusive implications at 3:14 on a Sunday morning at a con. What if Jophan made a more interesting person than most fans:? Would I like Moshe MORE if I pressed him like a leaf between the pages of the WAsh? It would be an interesting experiment -- either of them.

"Well, why don't we meet some fannish myths then? Has anyone tried?"

"Moshe did," said someone to me.

"I did talk to Caesar Ramos by long distance telephone once, but I don't know if that really counts."

"It cost thirteen dollars and twenty cents, so it better count for something," Lise responded, with dripping numbed hands.

The next few minutes were pre-empted by Lise and Moshe fussing about the best way to drain ice-water down the sink without removing the half-empty cartons of orange juice. Patrick began to clean his teeth with nylon floss. Teresa was asleep or shamming sleep again. At least she never flinched under the hail of pretzel bits and dental plaque from Patrick's flossing. Meanwhile, Stu and I conferred as artists, and therefore near-denizens of the half-world of shadows and imagination.

We tried to diagram a way through the reality barrier. We tried to communicate with the unreal world directly, by drawing cartoons of ourselves and speaking through our word balloons to other cartoons. We

tried to draw four dimensions in an attempt to sneak around the corner as it were, but couldn't think where to put the last right-angle. An entire stack of blank-on-one-side flyers for File 770 were used up in our efforts. But we did at last find a simple and elegant way to break into the universe below the surface of the paper.

"That is simple," said Patrick, awe-struck with the implications. "We better keep this a secret, or fandom will be flooded with the materialized imaginings of every fringe fan in the world. Think of it! Homosexual Spocks and Kirks necking in the con suite. Litter boxes in every room for the hundreds of cuddly cat people. Stampedes of winged horses and unicorns through the halls. Elf warriors, Fuzzies, Daleks, Bamfas, and Simes galore! We'd be spared no fantasy, however twee or earnest. Even a 'merc' could work magic this easy, which means -- "

"SMURFS! Please, not smurfs too!" cried Teresa, waking suddenly from a dream. There didn't seem to be any explanation for the coincidence, but everyone agreed that smurfs were undesirable too.

For the good of fandom, then, the method Stu and I discovered to bring our favourite fictional characters to life must remain forever secret. We, of course, being responsible fans, took the liberty of using the secret to our own advantage. (Very much as things are run the world over.)

* * * * * *

February blew in like an icy blast of water from a British shower, bringing Corflu with it. Why, of all times, mid-winter was chosen to hold it on the east coast, when all highways leading to Arlington were blocked by snow piled higher than Ted White's coke stash, no one knew. But there it was -- you had to deal with the inclement weather as best as you could. I got a ride with Bob Webber and Hope, and crashed on the floor of their hotel room. The con was four days, but fortunately most of the fans left the hotel on Monday, before the advance of the Shenandoah Ice Cap scraped it off Virginia and into the sea.

The invitation to Friday night's private party had been sent out months ago. Until our guests turned up at the door to Moshe's room, though, we had no way of knowing whether or not they'd be coming. Of course, immediately after the discovery by Stu and I of our little secret, I'd found that small comer of the land of imagination that I'd peopled, and spoke to Saara Mar. She was our go-between. She'd said that she knew where the fan universe was, right enough, nor was there any problem with her getting there. Saara was delighted to deliver our invitations to a Corflu room party to anyone we wanted. Since I hadn't been diligent in adding to her existence lately, she was over-familiar with the faces there. A change would do her good. Who did we want her to ask?

That was not as easy a question to answer as it sounds. While there have been literally hundreds of created characters in fannish literature, not many of them are fully rounded personalities, and only a few are universally upheld in all fannish circles. Later, at other con parties, we might host lesser known figures such as Soggies, Beanie, or The Little Green Dragon. Now we wanted seminal creations, the foundation stones upon which fannish myth is built.

Jophan came first to mind, obviously. Who doesn't know Jophan's heroic odyssey through the wasteland of dangers and distractions on his way to trufandom? He had only the barest of personalities of his own, it was true. He was an archetype, whose character was made of the ideal fannish virtues. While there's no clue in The Enchanted Duplicator to Jophan's taste in reading, no indication whether he ran electric trains in his basement or cemented up his girl-friends, nor any evidence that Jophan could tell the difference between a cadenza and a condenser, we know that his head wasn't easily turned by flattery. We know that Jophan saw through bureaucratic tangles to their innermost futility, that he didn't discourage easily, and that he had a sense of humour. In fact, what Jophan should be is the perfect image of our imperfect selves. Since Walt Willis and Bob Shaw re-invented him in 1954, Jophan has made his journey in search of The Enchanted Duplicator no less than eight times (going on nine, including an incomplete comic strip). He was felt THAT Important to the fannish psyche. Who else could be our first guest?

Rather opposite of Jophan's ideal was a character who personified our fannish silliness. John Berry was responsible for this hard-nosed, thick-headed sleuth, known in Berry's Retribution as Goon Bleary. Although the Goon was a satire on Berry's own real life job as a police detective, he never solved a serious crime. When there's a real crime you phone the police, but when a copy of Space Rockets number one is found missing, Walt had only to call The Goon Defective Agency to wish he would never see that crudzine again. Who better than this bungler as our second guest?

Moshe Feder had then recommended Ron Ellik for our consideration. Since Ellik was a real person as well as a bushy-tailed cartoon character, deciding his suitability was too tough a nut to crack. Lise threw up her hands and said, "Well, do whatever you want, Moshe!" and he knew it was no good arguing.

Patrick put Q. Wertyuiop forward. I was skeptical: after all, the little Vaudevillian song and dance man only appeared a few times on the cover of Void, later on Quip, and had a perfunctory personality. His job was to introduce the issue while acting as straight-man to the Void boys. (Later the Quip Kids.) Yet Patrick argued convincingly that behind the emblematic straw hat and cane of the showman was a trufan. Q.'s sentimental excursions down the memory lane of Void's career, his occasional naivete, and his enthusiasm give shape to an otherwise formless outline of a character. Perhaps Q. Wertyuiop merely reflected the untarnished idealism of its authors -- Bhob Stewart, Ted White -- et al. Or perhaps Q. was a truly independent being. Wasn't all this speculation over a stick-figure utterly cosmic, Patrick went on, with considerable liberty with the facts. It made better drama. In any case, what better way to discover Q. Wertyuiop's true self than to summon him to our room party?

Patrick carried his case. By common consent we had limited ourselves to four guests at a time, and this left us with one more invitation to make. We didn't have to think hard. Stu immediately tossed us a drawing on a piece of hotel stationery. The cartoon's feet ran under the embossed letter-head, "Best Western", but was otherwise easy to identify. Stu had drawn him in an English gentle-

man's sports jacket and vest, with drooping Mandarin mustache, and coolie's straw hat. This was no Chinese: this was Hoy Ping Pong, expatriate of a Cathay no Chinese had ever seen.

Pong was one of a number of pseudonyms employed by Bob Tucker in his salad days, and probably the only one who developed a personality of his own. Although drawn by Tucker in mismatched Manchu costume and pigtail. Pong was no heathen Chinee. He spoke a difficult to identify British accent, suggesting an education at Eton spent mainly with the rowing team in local pubs. Perhaps he hadn't been born in China at all, and affected the half-learned customs of his ancestors. That he apparently had relative Pongs in all corners of the globe confused his nativity even more. Finally, one astute reader of Le Zombie pointed out that Pong hadn't even gotten his NAME right. In correct Chinese, either he was not a "Pong" or he should have been "Pong Hoy Ping". Insofar as Pong himself went, he seems to have been a bit of a smart-ass, whose wise-cracks went into Poor Pong's Almanac. On the other hand, in his interviews he never seemed quite on top of the situation, leaving the impression that like many fans Pong was at his best when he could second draft his cleverness. If there was a better choice for a final guest than this enigmatic potential charlatan, he'd have to wait until the next Corflu.

At that point in the discussion, I. remembered something terribly important that I'd almost left until too late. In agitated terms I outlined a request by our spokeswoman in Never Land. She not only wanted to deliver our invitations, Saara wanted to bring them to our party herself.

"I know how you and Saara Mar are attached to each other," said Moshe, in innocent bluntness, "but do you really think it's appropriate? The others are important historical figures in fandom. You can't expect everyone to have your interest in someone you made up."

There was only one answer to this. I reached over for the piece of paper that had the secret method drawn on it, and took it between fingers and thumbs. "I have a copy of it at home," I lied, and made the teensiest, tiniest tear in the paper. Of course, I couldn't have torn it up. I was only bluffing. I must have looked Tarallshly mulish, though, as I said, "It's my show, or no go."

"On the other hand," Moshe squeaked, "we should have a guest with a more up-to-date point of view of fandom. Even Q. Wertyuiop is nearly twenty years behind the times."

"An outsider always has a different perspective too," added Patrick.

"And I can't remember what the secret was," said Stu, coming directly to the point.

Having reached a basic agreement in a fair and civilized way, we passed to the questions of how to supply the party, whether to allow anyone else in, and whether we should write about it in our fanzines afterwards. The answer to the latter question was a conditional no. We might write what we pleased, but we

had to let on that it was make-believe, a condition we have kept to this day. Just ask me, or Moshe, or Lise, or Stu, or Patrick, or Teresa if any of this has happened...

* * * * * *

There was a quiet knocking at the door. Lise answered, in case it was someone she wanted to chase away. It was.

"This is a PRIVATE party, in case you didn't notice the closed door and the signs saying 'scat', 'beat-it', and 'no-smoking'."

"Lise !" shouted Moshe, grabbing the door an instant before it slammed home and amputated his fingers. "It's Jophan."

Mistaking Jophan for any anonymous nerd was understandable. He'd been drawn by several generations of fanartists -- Bob Shaw, Eddie Jones, Ross Chamberlain, and Dan Steffan -- and his features had been worked over so many times that they had become something of a blur. There was no mistaking him at a second look though. Who else had such an expression of wide-eyed yet sober enthusiasm, such a balance of willingness to believe and sound judgement, such literalness and subtlety combined?

"Hi. Is this where the trufans hang out?" He also spoke agonizing, non-stop Fanspeak.

"Close enough," said Patrick, groaning. "Come in before we give you your death of a cold shoulder."

"How come you're by yourself?" asked Moshe. "Taral, I thought Saara was supposed to bring our guests here? Now Jophan is here and there's no sign of your girl friend. Did we put up with the extortion for nothing?"

"Oh," said Jophan to Moshe's question to me. "You mean the BEM with the shiny dress who brought me here? She stopped down the hall for something, and should be along in a minute."

She arrived that moment. Saara stepped into the room without bothering to open the door. Fortunately she hadn't smashed it down either, leaving Lise confused and wondering if she should also use the chain lock to keep people from wandering in uninvited.

"Lise, could you let in the other guests?" she said, then turned to the room. "I'd have been here a minute ago, but someone down the hall had me confused with something from an elf-quest, whatever that is. Was that supposed to be funny?"

"I thought that sort of fan wasn't supposed to be here," said Moshe. Stu only gave a shrug of his shoulders to indicate "why ask me?"

One by one, the other guests entered the party, Moshe hopping from foot to foot with excitement.

"Wow, oh wow!" he went. "It's Hoy Ping Pong. And the Goon. Oops. Sorry. Hope you aren't offended."

"No offense taken, but pretend you don't know me. I think I'm being tailed," he whispered loud enough to wake Teresa from a drowse between naps. She found a bundle of wool, and looking ever so much like Carroll's Sheep, began knitting with two huge needles.

Forgetting the detective completely, Moshe asked the last to enter, "Do I call you Q?"

"Call me what you like. If I answer, you've got it right. So... This. Is. The place! You must be the sparkling, the effervescent, the epithalamial Patrick Nielsen Hayden! Put'er here chum." The sprite extended his hand to Moshe for all of two seconds before doing a side-step to the bathroom for a beer.

"I think you got that wrong, somehow," said Moshe, introducing himself to the red and white striped back. Q. Wertyuiop was dressed at the height of fashion of 1910, and stood maybe five feet tall standing on a thick issue of Holier Than Thou. Meanwhile there was a seedy looking Oriental at the door, staring in. His tweeds had seen better days. So had he. His pigtail was held by a cheap elastic braid with a plastic smurf's head.

"I say, reminds me of Limehouse when I was working for my uncle's shipyard. I was one of the original Si Fans, you know."

"What does eh-pi-tha-LAY-mial mean, anyway?" Moshe was saying.

Teresa looked up from her knitting to say, "It's Greek, referring to bridal songs, according to Hazel in the last Ansible." Obligingly, Patrick struck up a galloping rendition of the Bridal March on his guitar. The key was an interesting variation.

One last look out the door revealed no one else, so Lise did her duty. All the guests were present, and seated around the room in characteristic mien. As usual when there are eleven people in a conversation, there's either silence or a babble of all eleven talking at once. Eventually a stable configuration emerges in which the more egotistical two or three do all the talking, and the others listen. For obvious reasons, there was no hope of that. Teresa might fall asleep, Stu might retreat to his sketch pad for a more articulate voice, but none of the rest of us would flinch from battle for the fore-front of conversation. Elementary physics teaches us that a nucleus with too many charged particles fissions. A conversation with too many charged up talkers breaks into handier groups of two or three, providing yet another example of the descriptive power of science. Which is to say, things sorted themselves out.

Saara early said that she was there on sufferance, and would try to be inconspicuous. This didn't suit the Goon at all, who thought she had something to hide. Peeling the silver film of her dress over her head scattered reflected light on the ceiling. The Goon made special note of this and several other points of interest around the room while he turned bright red. His judgement had been hasty, as a more honest pair of... well, more honest pair of eyes, he had never seen. The Goon scuttled over to the far end of the room. He sat in on a conversation between Stu, Q., and myself on fanzine graphics, his back turned to the Kjola.

Once we agreed on a few basic principles, the three -- four -- of us found little agreement. We concurred that a fanzine should be neat, and in no way impede the reader from reading. If possible, the fanzine should also be interesting in its own right. Beyond that, however, we had profound differences in philosophy.

"The image is everything!" cried Q. "The reader should know instantly that he holds not Tightbeam, nor Gemtones, but a font of fannish wit and fancy in his hot little hands. Image is the reader's guarantee. He pulls the staples and sees a familiar logo and format. His mind flashes back to the wonderful hours of reading, the intriguing personalities, and pregnant situations, creating the expectation of even greater fannish heights."

"Like Time Magazine?" I sneered. "Bor-ring!"

The little showman wasn't at all discouraged. "Goon m'boy, if you must smoke, at least turn your pipe around right side up, and light it."

"I can't." he said. "The stem is actually a secret stencil stylus. Don't tell anyone."

Q. turned back to me. "How can you call those wonderful old issues of yore boring? Poo. The days of law suits in FAPA, when no one could pay the rent at Towner Hall, when visiting fans arrived unexpectedly on your doorstep, and passed out drunk... those were the glory-days of fandom!"

"Sure, sure, but that's a different thing altogether from the way the zines looked. They were imitations of fashionable graphics THEN -- thirty years ago. How can something that's looked the same for thirty years still be interesting to look at? The eye sees nothing that isn't familiar, and tells the mind to expect nothing new."

"I think that's what Q. said," Stu observed. "But he doesn't mean it the same way. In my humble opinion, ahem, the purpose of fannish graphics is to be fannish. A fanzine's gotta look different from a newspaper or a best-seller or The Lady's Home Journal, or it isn't a fanzine. So the appearance does create different expectations, and it sets a friendly mood."

"Uh-huh," I said, "but there's no one way to do that. I feel that there's a fannish form, but it isn't tied to a specific graphic style such as 50's modern or 70's slick, or new wave for that matter. The fannishness has more to do with an informal air, and playfulness. When you get tied down to an IDEAL fanzine, though, it stifles the imagination. All the Original thought goes into the words, and none into the appearance, which is just another way of playing down the artist in fandom."

"Just one cotton picken' minute," said Q. in a rising tone of irritation. "I gave brilliant performances on the covers of Void, and my writers -- Ted, Bhob, and the others -- gave me first rate material for my act. Are you telling me that those unforgettable covers were un-original?"

"Of course they were original, but they weren't a hard act to follow. Need I mention Quip?"

"That's a low blow -- my agent loused up."

"The point I'm making is that fannishness you imitate turns out not fannish at all. You make your own fannishness."

"Be true to thine own self, where have I heard that before," said Stu. He made a gesture -- heh, heh -- of laughing at his joke. "I think I agree with the British, though. Fandom isn't just fans running around self-actualizing all over the place. It's a body of traditions too. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts," he said in a broadly faked English accent. "A house divided against itself cannot stand, and all that sort of nonsense, eh wot?"

Q. was still a bit querulous. "Nobody ever said you have to be like we were in the Good Old Days. How could anyone match those peerless night-long sessions in relay at the typer, the keys hammering out words such as never have been read since? You can't imitate such Days."

"At least there are New Days," Stu sighed, wistfully. He had a wax stencil he was doodling on with a stylus.

On the other bed the Goon suddenly snapped out of reverie. He'd been forgotten in the heat of debate, but when he took a puff of his pipe he realized that while he still had the bowl in his hand, the stem was missing. He looked around anxiously, then interrupted. "Has anyone seen a long thin bit of plastic with a wire loop at one end? It might have a few shreds of tobacco stuck to it."

No one had seen it, nor did the Goon notice Stu brushing tobacco from his stencil.

In another corner of the room, Jophan sat with Patrick, Moshe, and Hoy Ping Pong, Teresa kibitzed from the bed, but was plainly absorbed by her knitting. I was told later that they'd argued fandom as a way of life, mainly. Jophan had sent the conversation in that direction when he said in effect how glad he was to be there, and why. His single-minded fannishness had quickly worn on the others' patience.

"Ever since I came through the Canyon of Criticism and discovered trufandom wasn't at the top of the tower, but at the end of my own fingertips, I've been having a great time. I pub my ish regularly," said Jophan, looking pleased with himself, "and I get all the locs I want. Of course I only publish the best ones. It would be a mistake to publish them all, since many letters of comment are written by fans who have little way with words. Yet it would be a mistake to be too critical, and leave out interesting remarks for the lack of good writing. Trufans such as ourselves know instinctively just the right balance. We've good taste in fanzines just as we have in bheer of course!" The "h" in bheer was inaudible, but no one doubted it was there. "I don't know why everyone isn't a fan, except not everyone CAN be one -- "

There might have been several pages more of this remarkable soliloquy in store, but Patrick cut Jophan off. "Didn't you ever wonder if there was ANOTHER way out of Mundania? Fandom mightn't be the only way of life, you know."

"Well, no, the fairy who came to me didn't mention any other way. When she touched my brow I saw a vision of Fandom, and knew that I wanted to be a fan more than I'd ever wanted anything. Are you saying trufandom is just another place, like The Glades of Gafia, or Prosaic?"

"Er, no, not exactly -- " but before Patrick could explain, HE was Interrupted.

"I say! I know precisely what you mean," said Pong. "You can't blame old Jophan for being a bit, oh, dense, what? He's only an allegory, and tends to be rather on the idealistic side. He forgets what fandom is all about."

"So what is fandom all about, professor?" Patrick said to Pong.

"Why science fiction of course! The crackling of the aether as energy beams splash their trillions of electron volts across space, generators screaming to supply power to force fields that flare pink and purple and collapse in milliseconds under the hellish barrage, and planets crumbling like soggy chocolate chip cookies... Great literature like that is the heart of fandom!"

"Ug." Patrick had heard enough.

"Yuch," said Moshe.

"Blech." Teresa made a grimace of distaste, but she was looking at the knitting in her lap.

"Fwa," Jophan added.

"Pardon me: 'Fanzine Writers of America'?" said Teresa.

"What Fanzine Writers of America? I was agreeing that old space opera stuff was fwa, fooey, blah."

"Oh." But Teresa was more interested in her unfinished sweater. It DID have three shoulders, dammit!

It was a timely pause, though, since it let Moshe add his two cents worth. Despite my instinctive reaction a moment ago, I have to agree with Pong. Science fiction IS at the heart of fandom. Wasn't it science fiction the reading that put the -- let's see," Moshe tried to quote from memory, "'the strange longings that perplexed your mind?"

"Near enough that you can't be sued for plagiarism," added Patrick. "I agree that science fiction appeals to the nature of people who become fans."

"Most people who become fans, dear, not all!" corrected Teresa as she unravelled 60X nylon, 40% wool.

"I stand corrected."

"What are you doing now," she said. Patrick performed a grotesque pantomime with his hanky that bore some resemblance to the Astral Pole initiation.

"I'm wiping off the excess corflu."

Pong, who seemed stung, by the ridicule of space opera, made an elaborate display of spreading cream cheese on a Dorito, and eating it with elegant indifference. "Well, perhaps," he said, "the scientific-tion of my youth is a bit out of date. But I know of no one who was too Big a Name Fan to collect. I myself have a remarkable nearly-complete collection of covers of nekkid ladies in brass brassieres painted by Margaret Brundage, pant, pant... "

"Lech each to his own," I put in. Since my conversation had broken up, I'd wandered over to fresh action. I glanced over to Teresa to see if she'd collapsed with laughter, but no. It wasn't that funny. Or funny at all, more likely.

Jophan, however, WAS near a state of collapse. He was white as a sheet and staring at us. "You... you have... a Kolektinbug on your back? YOU have to get it off, or it'll suck all the blood from your body. Old magazines and books are nice to read, but they're a trap to keep you from ever getting to trufandom. The club members in The City of Serious Constructlvism had a club library, and used to talk about science fiction too. They made it sound impressive and important, so that people would think fandom was something to take seriously."

"Hold on a minute!" said Teresa, shifting along the edge of the bed until she was next to the conversation. "That sounds like a contradiction. I didn't join a debating team in university to let lapses in logic go by without a challenge. I thought you believed fandom was a way of life?" she said, sweet and deadly. "Or don't you take your life very seriously?"

"Oh horrors, no! That would be a tragic mistake. A trufan never takes himself -- or herself -- seriously," replied the archetype of all fandom. "Next you'd tell me to get involved in destructive, vicious feuds with other fans, because you take them seriously."

Everyone around blushed deeply, profoundly, even Pong though he never took his feuds very seriously at all.

"Touche," he said for all. "Now let's change the subject, what?"

Meanwhile the Goon was searching the closet and all the drawers. Finding nothing worth suspicion made him more suspicious. He began to empty the few bags of junk food onto a desk-top, and searched through the stale chips until the rising fumes of salt and vinegar made him sneeze.

"Will you stop sneezing on the food! Even on that food!" demanded Lise from the near bed.

"Don't give me that, sweetheart," the Goon snarled in his best Irish imitation of Sam Spade. "Just tell me where you've stashed my stylus. If you come clean, I'll go soft with you."

"The only soft thing in this room is your head. Now pick those crumbs up off the floor. And stop looking through my underwear while you're at it. I don't even let Moshe paw through my underwear."

"I know," someone sighed from the other side of the room.

Choosing to ignore Moshe's hopeful innuendoes, Lise turned back to talking with Saara. While the others had been deep in the mysteries of fandom, the Ķjola and the vegetarian had spent their time discussing conceptual frames as a determinant of natural law.

"So what they showed was possible was that there might be an infinite number of descriptive schemes that each perfectly accounted for all the phenomena in the universe, but none of which was the same. Nor might they be transformed into any of the others by mathematics. In one it would be impossible to do things possible in another," finished Saara.

"That isn't logical. CAN the universe contradict itself?" asked Lise, frowning.

"If it feels like it. Logical consistency is a conceptual frame. You can as easily choose to treat the universe as inconsistent when you want to use that aspect of it."

There was a lot more of the same, and lots on the personalities of natural laws, all of which was beyond the scope of this report. Stu was seated on the floor nearby, his eyes at about a level with Lise and Saara's crossed legs. but he was looking down rather than at their knees, and doodling smurfs In his sketch-book. As soon as he was finished he'd erase it and try to draw something else, but all he'd end up with was another smurf.

I'd wandered away from the window and the debate over FIAWOL vs. FIJAGDH, and was deeply torn between another can of The Real Thing or The Un-Cola. In this inattentive state, the conversations in the room mixed together to make a collage of incoherent remarks heard out of context, like audio interlinos.

"Fandom is a semiotic mirror facing itself." That sounded like Patrick.

"Lida Rose, let's pub again --" Moshe and Q. Wertyuiop. Q. was sounding a little drunk on more than memories.

"Faw."

"What's that stand for then?"

"Nothing," said Teresa, "this dip has too much garlic."

"I think the smurfs are a form of radioactive fall-out from the short-circuiting of dimensional barriers. As long as the barriers are down, imagination is impossible."

"Personally, I wish he'd drawn me with pupils in my eyes. Who am I? Little Orphan Annie?"

"Excuse me M'am. Have you seen anyone suspicious among us, besides myself that is? We're really in great danger."

"When I was a trader in the South China Seas we used to do our fanac in the warehouses, and said 'Fandom is a godown hobby'."

Click, click. I looked over to a corner of the room that was suddenly quiet. There stood the Goon, triumphant by one of the beds where Saara sat uncomprehendingly, her wrists cuffed together.

Lise was instantly shouting in the unfortunate Goon's ear for an explanation.

"Aha! Elementary. That is... er... Please stop yelling in my ear first. If you give me a headache I'll forget what you want explained."

"Never mind. Get those handcuffs off her."

"I think my eardrum is split Madam --"

"Yes," said Saara, in a voice like the silk lining of a steel trap. "DO remove the handcuffs before anything else."

The Goon, who was deaf in both ears now, had only a one-track mind. He had the bad judgment to persist in playing cops and robbers, and tried to perform the classic detective story summary of his logic in following the clues to the only possible culprit.

"I was followed here, but since there was no one following me who hadn't followed me into the party, it must have been one of you who followed me here. Follow me? Next, an article of my professional equipment, official police property, was missing. Then I knew the suspect was in the room. I began looking for clues --"

While the Goon indulged in his folly, Lise and Saara gave each other knowing looks. The Kjola tensed the chain links between her wrists, slowly.

"Then the obvious smacked me right in the face, like a cold mackerel slapping the pavement! No true fan steals from another fan -- except maybe good material for an article. Which meant I was looking for a miscreant in fannish disguise! Er... what are you doing with my expensive handcuffs? Coff, coff. And who would be in disguise except someone who was here under false pretenses. Obviously an illegal alien. Urn... I really don7t think that's very good for them, could you stop that? Ahem, and you. Madam, are an alien! Q.E.D. Hey! No! Those cost me $1.49 from my correspondence school! Stop pulling --"

But it was too late. While the Goon revelled in his logic, Saara had increased the tension on the cuffs until, link by link, the cheap metal broke like so many stale pretzels. The mail order restraints lay in pieces on the bedspread. Then Saara forced, the bracelets open with a finger, and threw the broken mechanisms on the bed with the broken links.

"This might be a difficult arrest," admitted the Goon, with uncommon good sense, and looking sadly at the remains.

"Why don't you go and talk to Stu about mystery fiction," Saara consoled the dejected detective. "And I'll give you a new pair of handcuffs after the party."

"Chrome plated, with two keys?" He brightened up.

"Chrome plated, with two keys, and a hidden button to push with your nose in case you lock yourself up by accident."

"Done," he said. "I knew you were innocent from the moment I set eyes on you. I was only putting the real suspect off his guard! You see the one over there eating cheese on corn chips? He's a Chinese communist spy."

The insidious Dr. Pong was in fact sitting as quiet as a Buddha. The party was winding down. Lise was already tidying up before throwing us out. Moshe already had one of the pillows taken out from hiding, and was lying back with his head on the untouched linen. Patrick and Teresa conferred softly with Q. Jophan, on the other hand, sat alone, absorbed by a pile of expensive first editions he found beneath the chair. "Gosh, wow, boy oh boy! A first Dying Earth in mint condition!" he whispered to himself.

Saara took my hand and pulled me over to the drapes. She opened them enough for us to look out at the first signs of dawn spreading over the Washington sprawl.

"We have to go when the sun touches the horizon. There's only a few minutes left."

"I know. Stu and I could only figure out how to make your visits last about six hours. Can't you discover a better way?"

"Maybe," she said, and winked. "But let's work on that sometime when we don't have company. When is the next visit?"

"March I think, at Lunacon. If I don't get there, then Disclave, later this spring."

She stepped up to the window and touched her nose to it, leaving a mark in the condensation, and two marks further down. I looked at the wetness on her nose and nipples and knew March was none too soon. Dummy! I'd talked all night about fandom!

The sky was turning lemon-coloured, streaked with dark grey. The horizon was in dark shadows still. But the apparent skyline was only another bank of cloud lying low over the hills, and the dazzling brim of the sun appeared suddenly between hilltops and cloud. Saara was gone.

Also vanished were the bumbling detective, the inscrutable Pong, the song and dance man for Void, and fandom's archetype. Gone not into limbo, thank ghu, but into a more colourful and vivid world than the one I was left in with Moshe's timid snoring and a bowl of soggy asparagus sticks.

I took the seat vacated by Jophan. Looking around at the shadowy room might have led a lesser mind to think "who was more real, them or us"? But such appalling banality isn't a fitting close to such a night as that had been. (It could very well be the subject of a future article, though.) While I watched the others subside into sleep, my thoughts struggled over less familiar ground, to conclude that every party in some sense partook of that night's. For a brief while we all live in a colourful, more vivid world of larger-than-life characters, who are ourselves, and then we diminish in the morning light to resume small lives of jobs and responsibilities.

It wasn't necessarily so, though. The sun had risen above the haze and had thrown a sheet of brightness through the drapes. It lay on the carpet, wrinkled over my feet, and asserted a different conceptual frame of my choosing.

Scenic Rout | Written 16 April 1987 | First publication

Julie Holiday stretched five ways at once. Arms and legs reached out to the limits of their sockets, and Julie's back arched over with snaps and pops from the unused joints as she began again the game of staying awake. A point in her favour was that it was impossible to drop off in the hotel room's comfortless straight-back chairs. In fact it was difficult not to slip out of them. It was something like five a.m. and pointless to look at her watch. If it were dawn yet there'd be a pale aura behind the drapes where still was deepest shadow.

She'd been brought awake by the word "Prolix", heard among the quiet murmurings that had caused her drowsiness.

Pettipoint wanted to know whether it was true her next issue of Prolix had an article soft on the Ryatt Act, as they were calling it.

Pettipoint sat square across from Julie, a rather imposing man as fans went, with bristly beard like a porcupine's mane, if porcupines had manes, squeezed up eyes that burned up through the thick ice of heavy prescription glasses, and a scowl for most occasions. "Jophan Say Pub Your Ish" rolled over the extra-large blue sea of his t-shirt as he moved.

"I really don't know why you bother,*' he said, "with him. The man doesn't know his own mind. If it wasn't for Vegas, who put him up to it, Buttes'd never have thought up all that nonsense about Ryatt in the first place."

"Really? How do you figure that?" she countered, not at all curious.

Stammer next to Pettipoint said, "Tell her about the letters Will. That proves it!" Stammer was a lesser copy of Pettipoint, the beard, myopia, and bulk, but without the air of the self-appointed spokesman. His ego had, long ago been domesticated by stronger fans. "I saw them and was appalled!"

"It's just like Seth says. I got these letters from Lebenon just before she went to Britain, and they were written BEFORE Vegas said one word in defense of Ryatt in print, and they were exactly what Buttes wrote in Easy Money two or three months LATER... AFTER which Vegas publicly joined the bandwagon against Soiree Fandom."

Aside from Julie, Pettipoint, and Stammer there were five or six other fans in room 1014. Most were drawn in a circle around Pettipoint. A couple were talking quietly on the other bed about a photo album Julie had seen earlier. Apart from a couple of shots taken in a pub, the faces were the same ones that got photographed at Wiscon, Midwestcon, or Minicon, Julie had noticed. Another fan was asleep on the same bed. He slept on his stomach, and he'd taken the pillow out from under the cover to prop under his chin. He blurred into the wreckage of a long stale room party.

Pettipoint had subsided for the moment. Another fan was talking, a weedy looking convention regular named Stewey who always seemed to be around, though nobody could ever think of what he did, if anything, in fandom. He wore so many name-tags that the plastic rustled when he moved. When he spoke he hesitated often, drawing out a long agonizing ummmm. After one or two of these people stopped listening. Someone would start talking as though Stewey were finished, and if Stewey minded he was too vague to protest.

Two or three ummmms were all the time it took for Pettipoint to take over again, to everyone's relief. He said, "That's right. Where's he get off attacking me and my friends? No one attacked him or his friends. Not until after he --"

"That's right!" broke in Stammer.

Julie relaxed gradually into her chair, her mind wandering. Would I have to write another tedious explanatory editorial, she thought, balancing what I really think with what's constructive to say? Not to mention safe? Was Pettipoint going to make an issue of the article she'd sent to Vague when it was published? Would he care that it was good more than what it signified to his hyperpoliticalized imagination? To be fair, Pettipoint and she had worked out their differences ages ago, and Pettipoint had been lavish in his praise for her fanac of late. Oh why in hell couldn't she just publish her ish and not worry about any of this? Why couldn't they?

" -- but you show me anywhere I said that Vagus was anything but a superb writer. We were friends. Not personally, but -- "

What should her next issue be like, if she could do whatever she wanted? Nothing at all about the Ryatt Act, of course. She'd really like to write a casual, sentimental, rather poesy reminiscence of last summer's trip out west. Bradburian with a swirl of Leaves of Grass. She had that piece by Don Vagus she liked, about a telescope he built when he was a kid. How he ordered it from Edmond Scientific, and immediately broke the lens. In learning to grind a new one, he replaced the parts one by one until he'd built a much more powerful telescope from scratch. Those last lines moved her with memories she'd never had -- "The instrument I had laboured on for the last months of my childhood stood pointing toward the stars. But my eye followed it backward, down its black length, past the eye-piece to the floor where, never assembled after all, the pieces of a kid's dream rested in their box." If she could have only had an article like Tracy Hayward Nelson's in the last Izzat. It would go well with Don's. Something humourous and British by Lanyard would lighten things up a bit before the closing number. She'd have to have something pretty good as the grand finale of a perfect zine. Yeah. If only she could get Pettipoint himself to write what he's best at. When he'd put his mind to it he'd written outstanding things. Wouldn't it be nice if he'd write her one like that one on Genesis in Heavy Water, or the one on

"-- always said he was overrated. What could be easier than tidying up a lot of memories by looking through a pair of heavy prescription rose-coloured glasses? ANYbody can do that. So what right does he have to complain that fandom hasn't treated him right? Hasn't he been nominated every year since

1983 for a Fan Huguenots? It was only the other day, in an issue of Spanish Inquisition that the Monsigneur was saying how much he liked The Devils of Loudun in Vague. Vagus had a very real stake in fandom, and it just burns me up -- "

"That's just right *sqaaauw*. *Kut, kut.* Stammer wants a cracker," said the parrot on Pettipoint's shoulder. A large plastic cricket next to them striated his name tags, and played a rough tune Julie thought was "Katydid, Katydidn't".

Julie was more interested in looking out the window anyway. The weight of movement settled her back in her chair, which was wide and soft now, and held her hips with a snug seat-belt. Outside it was daylight. Bright golden sunlight fell in her lap in a warm square pool through the glass. The wheel was hot under her hands, and her left arm sun-burnt.

It was three days' drive from the con to Nebraska, she thought. At once she remembered three days of driving in the mid-west. The crumpled landscapes of creek-rotten farm-land, dotted with cows or ponies, fenced off from the woodlots, and broad richer fields of corn had alternated over the last few hundred miles. There were fleeting impressions of bill-boards, highway markers, main streets, and porched ginger-bread houses you momentarily wished you'd grown up in. It was a different universe from the no-man's land and junk-food outposts visible from the interstates. Nevertheless, it was all familiar.

The world had changed at St. Louis. A bridge jumped from the familiar world across the Father of Waters, and landed traffic in the West. Beyond the hills behind the city, the land leveled off. Ground cover turned to Prairie grass. Farms were ranches. Grain replaced mixed corn and greens, and wooden windmills brought up briny water for cattle. Roads were straighter, and cities further apart. You could run out of gas here.

Now she remembered stopping yesterday in the tiny town of Mission South Dakota. This was where Oglala Sioux lived, but looked much like white towns anywhere on the plains. Sitting Bull was right. Look at what the Papago Indians got for being wimpy. This place had a main street several blocks long, paved, with ordinary store-fronts. But everyone was browner than the sun made then, and men wore large, functional looking cowboy hats. Not the silly looking dude-hats of truckers and country-singers. Julie recalled stopping in Mission for a bite to eat, and gas. The restaurant she picked was plain and clean, and had intriguing items on the menu. She'd chosen a Taco plate and was served a feast of the freshest ground beef, cheese, lettuce and tomatoes that she'd ever eaten. It was much the same in every small town she stopped at. People talked different too, with a variety of languid or nasal drawls that she found herself picking up.

'Bout mid-long through the Dakotas the land gets browner and the grass thinner, until water is a foreign force. Its infrequent invasions leave scars in the earth. The low rolling hills begin to turn into bluffs. Erosion carves small gullies that grow into arroyos. North of the highway a line of mesas are visible in the distance. Two days out from the bridge, Julie had come to the badlands.

Neither the largest nor most spectacular of badlands, those created by White River as it chewed its way down the sandstone and shale sediments near Wall South Dakota were by far the easiest to see. From highway Ninety a good paved road, highway Two-Forty, drove through the choice area. What's left of a vanished layer of earth has melted in the seasonal rains into fantastic sand-castles to either side of the road. The road issues from their battlements and skirts for miles along the lip of a cliff. This is cut into a deeper layer, so that the road is now above rather than below the formations. Spread along the horizon as she drove Julie saw endless vistas of canyons, pinnacles, and mesas. Bleached in the noon-day sun, they slowly blushed as the sun fell lower in the sky.

She'd stopped, briefly, at several look-out points. One time a spur ran out from the look-out two-or-three hundred feet. It had looked well trodden, so Julie'd stepped over the guard-rail and walked carefully to the end. The last few feet were down-slope to a small knob surrounded on three sides by sheer drops of at least a hundred feet, and were too dangerous. She was satisfied to look into the canyons from a moderately safe vantage. She looked over the edge, and sunlight wasn't reaching the bottom. Looking back, her car was shrunk so she could cover it with her outstretched thumb. Nothing but space around her, and it felt grand. Julie scuffled the clay with her shoe, kicking up a solid pebble with a curious curled up look about it. She picked it up, and crumbled away some of the brittle matrix. It was a snail shell, thirty million years old.

Then she was in the car again, headed west once more. She remembered ahead to returning the way she'd come, and saw the badlands in moonlight. Deer would be frightened away when she stopped to stare at the brilliant full moon in its blue setting, and at the silver chiaroscuro of the formations below. But that would be later. Now she was in Wyoming. The badlands were a hundred miles behind, and the twisted volcanic Black Hills between.

Three hard days of driving had brought Julie to range and mountain country. The pine-covered Big Horn Mountains stopped Ninety in its tracks. Ninety broke north and south, but smaller roads penetrated the wilderness west. Julie'd taken Sixteen, south of Ft. Phil Kearny that the cavalry couldn't keep when Red Cloud said "Go". Although the mountains were shrouded in dark forest, the ranges on the other side were getting on to desert.

And she was pushing hard now, across country so poor that it was not even good cattle country. Mesquite and prairie grass were seared in the height of summer. Ahead of the road, beyond the ridges on the horizon, dark shapes rose. Grey chevrons of clouds, one after the other, each a little thicker until they closed the westerly sun from sight. Was weather coming? No, next morning the sky'd be blue, and by mid-morning dust and heat haze would turn it pale salmon. No cloud would be seen overhead. The clouds west-ward would still be there, but Julie'd be close enough to see the cauliflower heads of brilliant white cumulous. The dark shapes beneath then would still be grey and low-lying. Mountains. Big mountains; 11,000 feet tall. Clouds steamed off their peaks and boiled in slow motion as masses of heated air rose and expanded. These were the Gallatins and Absarokas. South lay the Wind River Range, and north the Rockies receded out of sight.

Hidden in the mountains ahead was a bowl like depression where Julie'd stop. It was the caldera of a vast volcanic collapse that 75,000 years ago devastated three states. The floor has risen to push the bottom up again in a rugged, forested dome which will one day erupt again. Around the edge of this swelling dome, an irregular, narrow trough runs most of the way around in a circle. It is broken where the rushing Yellowstone River has delved a deep canyon through the yellow rock, giving the land its name. The river flows wide from a shallow lake, then leaps over two spectacular waterfalls into the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. It has carved sharp pinnacles, and exposed petrified forest, lava columns, and hot springs as it tilled the yellow earth. Elsewhere, lesser rivers such as the Firehole have cut the circle deeper, and brought up other hot springs. Neither the greatest, nor most frequent, but the most famous of all erupting springs in Yellowstone is Old Faithful. And this is Mecca for Julie as she approaches through the East Entrance.

She was entering the park, and already recalling how she'd set up the tent and heat tins of corned beef hash and vegetables over a fire. She'd brush the falling ashes out of her hair and away from the food, but not carefully. A little ash in the meal was homage to the park, and part of the charm of cooking over a fire. Though the solidified and sometimes burned leavings at the bottom of a cold pot weren't. The sleeping bag would smell of her body when she zipped herself in -- not an unpleasant smell, but a guarantee of warmth against the night chill, and reassurance that the great spaces outside wouldn't touch her skin.

When morning came, thought Julie, she'd shake off her cocoon and step out into the low slanting sunshine, just beginning to skim over the unseen Madison Plateau. Warm water lay all around the campsite, trickling over ghostly flats and slowing among the dead roots of lodge-pole pines. Boiling water filled hot springs that were ringed orange, yellow, and green around black-blue grottoes. It would steam as it met the cool air, so causing heavy curtains of mist to drift in front of the valley walls, hiding them. Then the curtains would rent themselves to reveal purple hills beyond.

Taller plumes would-float with the mist like the long necks of sea serpents above water. When they sailed across the sun they'd blaze inside with stolen light for a few seconds, then pass by. Geyser made, each cotton candy plume would dissipate slowly. Then new ones upwind would rear their heads, to renew the endless silent parade.

Perhaps there'd be bison nearby. They graze fearlessly close to the camp-grounds, and never suffer cars to go by before they've every one of them crossed the highway.

All that in the morning.

Now Julie slept.

She slept truly.

And she woke.

A raucous voice cut through the pretty pictures in her mind with harsh words. Pettipoint had totalled his score and announced himself winner in the one-sided debate just finished.

"Well, he's only hurt himself. He's turned his back on what he calls Soiree Fandom and slammed the door so hard behind him he can never come back. And Buttes is just standing out in the cold, wondering what happened. Meanwhile, we're all inside, too damned busy having a good time to even notice Vagus is gone!

"Julie? Isn't that what you think?

"Joo-leee? Oh, I didn't wake you up did I?"

"Ah, no," said Julie, shaking the sleep out of her head. "What were you saying? I was just thinking of something else."

"I thought so. We'd all agreed that it was over for Vagus except for the jokes. But you looked as though you weren't sure. What do you think?"

"I wasn't thinking anything," said Julie, tiredly.

"You just said you were thinking!"

"About that? Why?"

"It's what we were talking about, wasn't it? What else was there to think about?"

Two seconds later the door to room 1014 slammed hard, and Julie was gone. Pettipoint and the others talked all the rest of the night about her laughter as she Walked Away From It All. She didn't sound mad. Just, well, free of some burden which they didn't understand.


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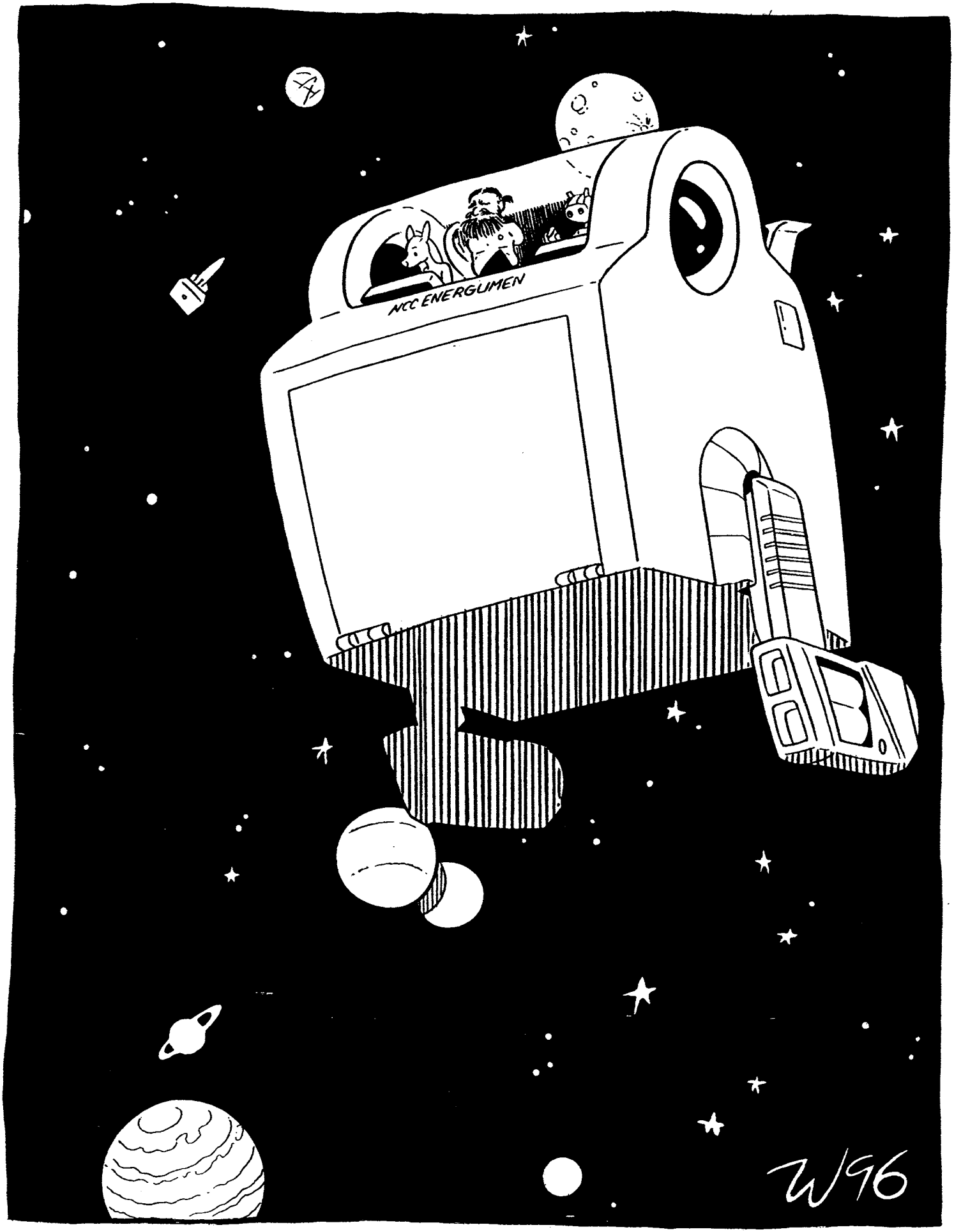
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