



--e*I*16- (Vol. 3 No. 5) October 2004, is published and © 2004 by Earl Kemp. All rights reserved.
It is produced and distributed bi-monthly through <http://efanzines.com> by Bill Burns in an e-edition only.

Contents -- e/16 -- October 2004

[Earl Kemp by Robert Bonfils](#), by Earl Kemp

[Bonfils Cover Art is Back!](#), by Robert Speray

[Wankering Through Time and Space](#), by Earl Kemp

[...Return to sender, address unknown...8 \[el letter column\]](#), by Earl Kemp

[1955 Advent:uring Through the Years 2005](#), by Earl Kemp

[The Advent:Publishers Master Archive](#), compiled by George W. Price

[I am A Fandom of One: A Fan's Manifesto](#), by J.G. Stinson

[How I \(Almost\) Became Ivar Jorgensen](#), by Mike Deckinger

[Incredible \(ecover\)](#), by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)

[Discovering Olaf Stapledon](#), by Bruce R. Gillespie

[A Valedictorian Forbidding Melancholy](#), by Bruce R. Gillespie

["Shrink, I Wanna Kill....,"](#) by Earl Kemp

[The Dragon's Asshole](#), by Earl Kemp

[The Year of the Phoenix](#), by Earl Kemp

[Hot Damn, Vietnam!](#), by Earl Kemp

His view, reiterated continually, is that our government, however popularly elected, represents only the large corporations that control it, as they control the media, through which they persuade the voters to

support only two parties, conservative and reactionary. Wars fill their coffers, so at their behest the government levies heavy taxes for the purpose of waging unprovoked and undeclared wars: Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace lists almost two hundred from 1945 to 2001.

--Edmond S. Morgan, review,

Gore Vidal's *Inventing a Nation: Washington, Adams, Jefferson*

THIS ISSUE OF *e/* is dedicated to my pal Bob from The Porno Factory-Robert Bonfils-The World's G*R*E*A*T*E*S*T Paperback cover artist. We are celebrating his recognition in the current issue of *Illustration Magazine* with several pieces in this issue.

In the world of science fiction, it is also in memory of George Flynn and Pete Graham.

#

I would like to call your attention to Bruce R. Gillespie and the effort to Bring Bruce Bayside, a worthy cause to bring Gillespie from his home in Australia to the Bay Area next February for Corflu and Potlach. There is more about this effort on eFanzines.com and your donation to the cause would be greatly appreciated.

#

As always, everything in this issue of *e/* beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at earlkemp@citlink.net and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is *jefe* around here. If it wasn't for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make *e/* whatever it is. And also, Dave Locke continues as *e/* Grand Quote Master. You will find his assembled words of wisdom separating the articles throughout this issue of *ei*.

Other than Bill Burns and Dave Locke, these are the people who made this issue of *e/* possible: Victor J. Banis, Robert Bonfils, Bruce Brenner, Robert E. Briney, Mike Deckinger, Bruce Gillespie, Elaine Kemp Harris, Dick Jenssen (Ditmar), George W. Price, Robert Speray, Janine Stinson, Jon Stopa, Jodi Wille, and Dan Zimmer.

ARTWORK: This issue of *e/* features original and recycled artwork by Ditmar and recycled artwork by William Rotsler.

If the fragile internationalism of the myth of human brotherhood has returned as a moral force in the modern world, it is because partial human solidarities--those of religion, ethnicity, and class--have

dishonored themselves by the slaughter committed in their names.

-- Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honour*

Earl Kemp by Robert Bonfils*

By Earl Kemp



Earl Kemp and Robert Bonfils at the Paperback Show and Sale, Mission Hills, CA, April 25, 2004. Photo by Jodi Wille.

This is Robert Bonfils Celebration Month. The September issue of *Illustration* magazine finally gives him the recognition and status he deserves. Not only does he get the cover treatment, some thirty plus interior pages are devoted to his story and his art. There are perhaps 100 exquisite color reproductions of Bonfils original artwork and paperback cover reproductions.

Robert Bonfils was The World's G*R*E*A*T*E*S*T Paperback Cover Artist, only no one noticed while the work was ongoing. Decades later, with all his accumulated work at hand, the fact was undeniable.

He grew up in Kansas City and went to the Kansas City Art Institute to learn how to be the artist he became. His classmates were people like Bill and Jim Teason, Ken Riley, Jackson Pollock, Harry Feldman, and with Thomas Hart Benton as an instructor. He did a stint in the Army then moved to Chicago and continued his studies at the Art Institute of Chicago.

He finally landed a job at the prestigious art agency of Stevens, Hall, Biondi and his real education began. The staff of artists there were about the best in town, some the best in the country. They undertook the hands-on task of completing Bonfils' education and turning him into first a professional commercial artist and second the world's greatest paperback cover artist to be.

Here he did covers and illustrations for children's books, covers for Mercury Record albums, and ads for Miller High Life beer.

Eventually Stanley Schrag of Playtime Books and the brothers Sorren of Merit Books all discovered Bonfils, and he began painting his first paperback covers for them.

When Harold W. McCauley retired from Nightstand Books and moved to Florida, William Hamling hired Robert Bonfils to replace him, with a big difference. He was to move to San Diego and help set up an entirely new publishing operation from there. I was doing the same thing. Bonfils was the Art Director and I was the Editor in Chief of what was to become Greenleaf Classics.

Since both of us were moved from Chicago to San Diego at the same time, we were thrown together quite a bit, although we had never known each other while we lived in Chicago.

The best possible thing happened, we became best friends instead of coworkers. We began spending almost all of our free time together; after all we didn't know anyone locally. We partied together, dined together, vacationed together, theatered together. We bar hopped all over Tijuana together...we were soulmates if not twins.

He was pretty adventurous in those days, and had lots of things to catch up with that he had repressed forever, like long trips through wilderness areas and overnight camping in gorgeous, remote locations. He had all kinds of maps and guidebooks showing locations of former Indian villages and we would prowl them, harvesting arrowheads, beads, and pottery shards...all over San Diego County and way into Mexico as well.

Bob bought a huge parcel of land in East County San Diego that was a wonderful hideaway for a very long time. There were huge rock boulders to play on and ancient trees providing abundant shade. The pride of the area was a huge private pond, the new home of almost forgotten skinny dipping from my grade school days. Wild animals and birds galore, fragrant blossoms from native wildflowers...the perfect reflecting place.

Another of Bob's requirements was a big sailboat...a really big sailboat. Its record log said that it had sailed on numerous occasions to exotic ports in Hawaii, Tahiti, etc. in its lifetime...everything that Bob secretly wanted to do himself.

We had some delightful times on board that ship, far out to sea, knowing not what we were doing. The boat would sleep six and had lots of moving around room below deck and much more on deck. What it didn't have was a crew, ever. There were half a dozen of us who would eagerly take on the task, and pretend, and drink and smoke some more Indica, and sail down to Mexico and way out to nowhere, now and then pretending to fish. We would dock in Ensenada Harbor (Baja California, Mexico) in the incredible Bahia de Todo Santos and go into town for liquor.



Robert Bonfils on his boat docked in Ensenada Harbor, Bahia de Todo Santos, Mexico. Photo by Earl Kemp dated November 1967.

The boat was stocked with empty booze bottles. On each trip to Mexico, we would fill all of them with the same type liquor the bottles once held, then sail back to the USA with one of the best stocked bars in town, at a fraction of the local cost.

On one occasion, the ever-popular U.S. Coast Guard approached us well into Mexican waters and turned about to board us. As they were climbing onto the boat on one side of it, some of us were dumping weighted-down pot overboard on the opposite side.

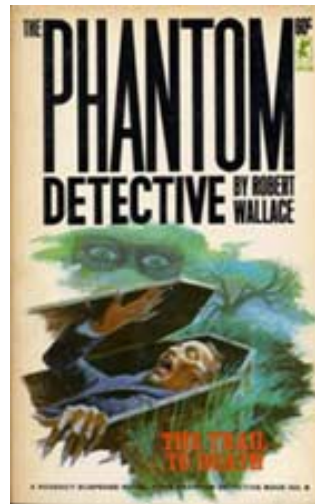
Once, on vacation in Ensenada, we couldn't get a hotel room anywhere in town because of some convention. We spent hours looking for a place to stay and even began offering bribes for rooms. Finally, a kind desk clerk told us that we could probably rent a room at a bordello, and proceeded to give us directions to one he would recommend. It turned out to be a huge old hotel just at the edge of town in a residential neighborhood. It had once been a thing of great grandeur and delight, but was

falling to debris by the time we reached it.

Bob and I spent time examining the overgrown and self-strangling landscaping that had obviously once been quite beautiful. We also checked out the structure itself, most of it boarded up and off limits, lusting for the stained glass windows, the wallpaper, the crystal chandeliers, the hardwood floors in any of several grand ballrooms, etc.

The girls of the establishment, with perhaps a common age of 19, kept pretty busy all night long running up and down the hotel corridors and giggling.

#



The reason we never noticed just how superb an artist Bonfils was around the office was because we were too busy to look at what he was doing. At our peak, we were producing 50 paperback novels every month and one skin magazine every day. It is hard to imagine that today...producing 50 novels a month, painting 50 cover paintings a month...while living and playing and enjoying life.

Posing for some of Bonfils' better covers was an extra special pleasure and just one more fringe benefit of being the boss. One of my earlier favorites, because you can easily tell it was me, was the cover of Robert Silverberg's Sins of Seena (EL306).



Bob asked me to pose for the cover of *The Phantom Detective, The Trail to Death* (CR108). Only thing he didn't tell me was that I was to be a corpse, coming back to life to haunt evildoers forever....

However, my real joy is the four volumes of *Dr. Death* that Bob painted covers for based on my customary demeanor around the office. The first in the series, CR118, is my favorite of the four.

I posed for numerous other covers as well over time, only I am not recognizable in any of them. They are best represented by the cover of *Song of Aaron*, by Richard Amory (GC222). For this picture, Bob asked me to bring along my Killer Kemp black cowboy outfit, my boots, my hat, my holster, and my sixshooter. Then he had me posing as both cowboys on that superb wraparound cover.

In the pose, I and I are lighting a joint to be shared by him and him. I can't be recognizable as either cowboy except I somehow remember looking like that, and wearing those tight-ass clothes for real.

Robert Bonfils is retired now, but he still paints in his studio every day. He concentrates on fine art and commissioned portraits and on recreating, to order, his staggeringly beautiful original cover paintings from the past.

Besides all these wonderful things, I need to urge you to read Robert Speray's "Bonfils Cover Art is Back!" elsewhere in this issue of *e/*.

*Dated July 2004



I posed for both cowboys on this wraparound cover of *Song of Aaron* painted by Robert Bonfils. This is a scan of the 3M progressive color proofs without any of the text.

Smart people believe weird things because they are skilled at defending beliefs they arrived at for nonsmart reasons.

-- Michael Shermer

Bonfils Cover Art is Back!

by Robert Speray

Robert Bonfils (known as Bob) is the artist who did most of the covers for the paperback books published by the Hamling organization edited by Earl Kemp that are known as *Greenleaf Books*. Readers of *e/* have certainly noticed examples of book scans used to illustrate stories and know that Bob's cover art delivers.

Bob's legacy of images has finally become the subject for a wider audience with the publication this month of a lead article about him in [Illustration Magazine](#), THE prestige magazine for reporting on important illustrators.

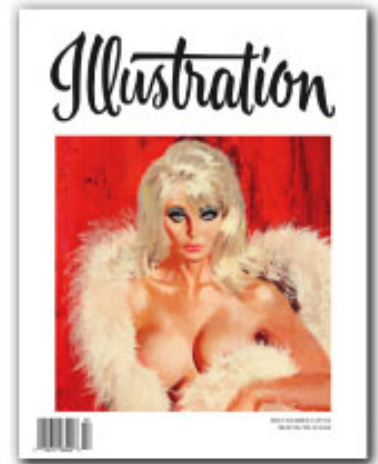


The best thing about this event is that Bonfils art is back on the newsstand. The issue's cover shows one of his sixties paperback covers and it will catch the eye of modern rack browsers as efficiently as it did when first used. The interior article combines an informative autobiography with critical analysis and includes plenty of illustrations.

Kittens Kicks
PR 201 - 1969

The publication of this article marks a key point in a long and twisted adventure spanning decades. A recent run up to this article began

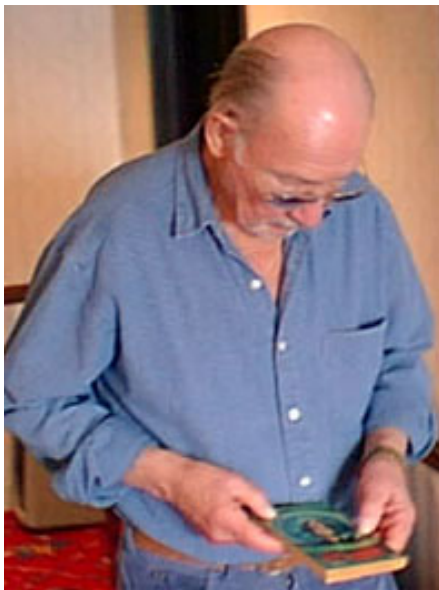
when two retired creators and a long time fan got together somehow, and a crew developed to work on a grand project. The creation of the article is the first public output from that group.



ISSUE ELEVEN
80 Pages, Full Color

I first met Earl Kemp and Bob Bonfils two and a half years ago over a too-short weekend that ended a long search for these characters. Thank you [Lynn Munroe](#) for setting that up.

I brought a few thousand Greenleaf books from my collection to the meeting. These were the center of attention as we sat around visiting, looking at the books and letting them stimulate questions and memories.



Bob Bonfils
February, 2002

It was quite a moment, that meeting, and it was a catalyst for both Bob and Earl to reflect on their past accomplishments, to recall those days and the books that they produced, and to see their work as something entertaining, something important, and something that still resonates today.

The meeting inspired me to take the next step beyond collecting the books into a private archive, and to build an illustrated checklist of all the books produced. This would be the definitive resource used by

researchers and historians evaluating and understanding the period. It would provide a clear attribution about who had done which covers and who had written which books.



Earl Kemp
February, 2002

It has been a fascinating time since that meeting.

Earl has been working his memoirs by publishing *e!* and has maintained a rigorous and large production schedule that adds up to half a foot of paper when printed out to be read without a monitor. Readers should take a moment every few issues to check back on earlier issues and grasp the amount of history and story telling that has accumulated here. It is amazing.

Bob has become active again in pin-up art, re-creating favorite covers for fans. He has become conscious of his legacy and is integrating that past period into his current life. He has also been pressed into service as the main identifier of the artist on every book produced by the Hamling organization.



Bruce Brenner
Portrait by
Bonfils

[Bruce Brenner](#), a dedicated and serious collector of vintage paperback books, stepped up to the task of scanning book covers and entering book information into a spreadsheet. This is the hard work that turns an idea into reality. Not only did he take on the task of capturing facts about books already on hand, he pursued missing books with focused and sustained searching on eBay, and beyond.

All of us have participated in the spring [paperback collecting conventions](#) in Los Angeles for the past two years. Bob and Earl got a taste of the fan interest and appreciation and Bruce and Robert have had Bob and Earl cornered to quiz them endlessly about obscure details that only a obsessed collector can appreciate.

During this time, there has always been a feeling that our efforts would lead to something bigger, perhaps the publication of a book for posterity. A book of substance would imply a widespread appreciation of the work, a full rehabilitation of Earl's reputation, and an acceptance of Bob's stature as an artist. It would also somehow make the collecting process less eccentric with the shading that it had a larger purpose.

During this same period, Dan Zimmer started publishing a high quality quarterly magazine that concentrated on illustration art - *Illustration Magazine*.

This magazine carried informative stories about many commercial artists who did covers for vintage paperbacks and pulps. The articles were interesting and they always included many examples of the art, both in their original art form, and as they were published. The quality of the reproduction was top-notch and the artists that were covered were the best of those who worked during the last half of the 20th century.



Earl, Bruce, Bob, Robert
Los Angeles, 2004

Eventually, a connection was made and Dan Zimmer's desire to publish an article about the work of Robert Bonfils got our attention, and eventually our commitment. Thus began a creative process that has been sweet, tart, and with publication of this issue of *Illustration Magazine*, finally smooth and filling.

Lynn Munroe was drafted into helping out since he had experience in writing about artists, publishing interviews in his own newsletter and sales lists, and publishing articles in *Illustration Magazine*.

His experience and leadership got us started, and led us to the first step which was to visit with Bob in



Lynn Munroe
Lancecon 1999

San Diego for a formal interview. We asked Bob about his life, his influences and his techniques in order to produce a single long story about him and his work.

This meeting produced a written draft by Lynn that got passed around for review. It was reading this draft that inspired Bob to write the story of his life in his own words. It covered many of the same points as Lynn's draft, but with more details and in Bob's own voice.

It turned out that Bob could write an entertaining story himself, and nobody knew.

Lynn reworked his draft into a shorter article using bits not covered in Bob's piece. The new version contained the unique insights and wry voice that are hallmarks of Lynn's writing.

This led to a revised plan to have the article composed of three separate pieces that made up the full story. This meant that I had the job of doing the final piece for the article - a comprehensive review of the cover art, giving my opinion on its pleasure and importance.

Earl did the editing and review of all this writing, helping to tune the final versions into something readable.

Bruce provided an inventory of cover scans to review and a set of about 200 were selected as candidates for use as examples in the article. We used a private web page for sharing images during the review process, refining the set of images until the final set contained about 100 consensus winners.

The review web page was a gallery of thumbnails with full size images available with a click. Selecting the best 200 covers from a set of thousands is easy enough, but selecting the best 100 out of that proved more difficult.



Pieces of vintage original cover art were selected for use and images of the pieces were reviewed using the same technique of a shared web page to display the set of images. A set of about 25 pieces of original art was chosen as final candidates.

A selection of Bob's recent fine art work was provided for review on another web page, resulting in about fifteen pieces selected.

Several photographs of Bob were provided from the archives of Bob Bonfils and Earl Kemp and scans of these were published on another web page for review and selection.

The end result was a set of pages showing low resolution (web quality, jpg format) images that could be selected as examples to use in the magazine article.

Each of these images had a corresponding high resolution scan available. These were digital scans stored in tif format. Images in this form can be used for smaller sized reproduction in a magazine. They are not adequate for full-page sized images.



The tif files were copied to a set of CDs and these were sent to Dan as part of the article submission.



The original pieces of art were photographed by professional studios and four by five inch transparencies were made that could be used by Dan to publish large reproductions in the magazine. These transparencies were sent to Dan who could then do high resolution scans of them for use in large reproductions.

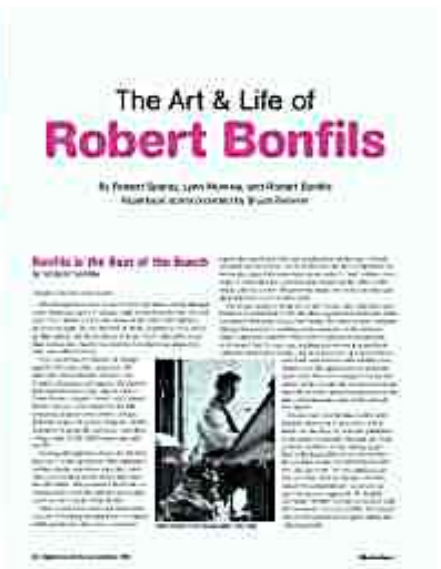
Two art collectors, [Jeff Rich](#) and [Ron Blum](#), had original art in their collections and were enthused enough about supporting the story about Bonfils that they contributed transparencies of their art to the mix.

The actual text of the article was developed in Word and the doc files were sent to Dan as email attachments.

Dan then took on the hard task of putting together all the pieces of the article sent to him, and building an interesting layout for the magazine. He had to select which images to use and their size and position. He had to fit the text into the page count while maintaining the integrity of the story line. He also had to select which image to feature on the cover of the magazine.

He did an amazing job and the result is spectacular.

The article is 32 pages long, with three sections of text written by Bob Bonfils, Lynn Munroe and Robert Speray. There are seven full page reproductions of original art, plus six more pieces shown smaller. 66 book covers are shown, plus twelve record jackets, a magazine cover, three photos, and more.



Layout of opening page in article

This is truly a remarkable day. A set of books published on the edges of the culture during the expanding sixties were pushed down and out by the action of the federal government. Those books have been rescued and pulled back into the world. Their covers are now featured in a serious art magazine, giving legitimacy to the pleasure of their entertainment value, and to the reality of their being art.

The last time a Bonfils image was on a newsstand, the country was struggling with an unpopular war

and a Republican president was found to be a liar and a crook. What is going on here? Is there some need of American civilization that a Bonfils cover must be on our newsstand during times of political stress?

A lot of effort, sacrifice and will power along with a hearty dose of luck and love, and some early dollops of dirty-old-man brought the books and art forward to this time and place. Let's celebrate and enjoy the result.

The publication of this article is an accomplishment that feels extra fine, as an honor to all those who contributed along the way. It isn't yet the full blown book that still exists in the stars, but seeing the story about Robert Bonfils and the illustrations of his art featured so well gives a deep pleasure, and satisfaction that progress does exist.

It's great to have Bonfils art back on the cover.

[Subscribe to *Illustration Magazine*](#) and tell Dan you saw it here.

The public will believe anything, so long as it is not founded on truth.
--Edith Sitwell

Wankering Through Time and Space

By Earl Kemp

When Harlan Ellison formed Nightstand Books for William Hamling in 1959, Hamling kept rigid control of the covers and the direction of his paperback books.

His editors, as well as a number of his writers, all came from a common background of science fiction and fantasy. As did Hamling himself, and Frances Yerxa Hamling, his wife. As did Raymond A. Palmer and Richard S. Shaver, his coinorporators. As did Milton Luros, Hamling's contemporary, colleague, and sometimes competitor. There had been numerous science fiction magazines in Hamling's past, most notably *Imagination* and *Imaginative Tales*. And all the work at The Porno Factory was carried on within what could be described as a science fiction atmosphere.

For many of these reasons, there was a constant attempt to insert some science fiction elements into some of the novels, or something at least a bit on the fantastic side. And, with each of these attempts, whenever Hamling would discover it, he would object and reinform us that our books were about real people doing real things and nothing fantastic or otherworldly could ever be allowed to interfere with that.

Did that stop us? No.

As time passed and things began to change, Hamling relaxed his hold on the covers and then, eventually, turned their production over exclusively to the art department. To Robert Bonfils and to his cohort Harry Bremner. And sales took off.

#

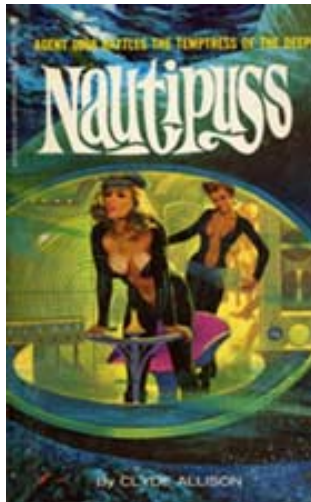
Somewhere throughout the cosmos, scattered here and there in cyberspace, are the directly science fiction and fantasy related Greenleaf sleaze paperbacks.

I have assembled a small gallery of them here, to display the progression of time and morals...the very books that lead to uncontrollable ejaculations on the parts of millions of one-hand-reading fans during those halcyon years of unadulterated sleaze.

In making the selection of covers for this article, I deliberately avoided the commonplace sectors, such as witchcraft, voodoo, satanic worship, weird cults, etc. and focused only onto the prime subject matter.

All hands ready? Got lotion? Tissue?

Begin the ritual....



EL309
Nautipuss, by Clyde Allison. This superb cover painting was done by Robert Bonfils in 1965.



GC205
Orgy of the Dead, by Ed Wood. Cover by Robert Bonfils dated 1966



GC206
Queen of Blood, by Charles Nuetzel. Cover by Robert Bonfils dated 1966.



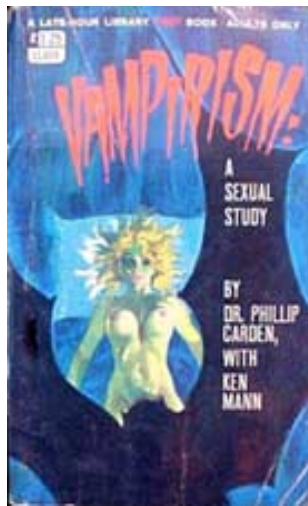
GC220
Those Sexy Saucer People, by Jan Hudson (George H. Smith). This unique cover painting was done by Ed Smith in 1967.



GC223
The Real UFO Invasion, by Raymond A. Palmer. Cover ? dated 1967



GC405
Pet, by Jocelyn Ryder. Cover design by Harry Bremner dated 1969.



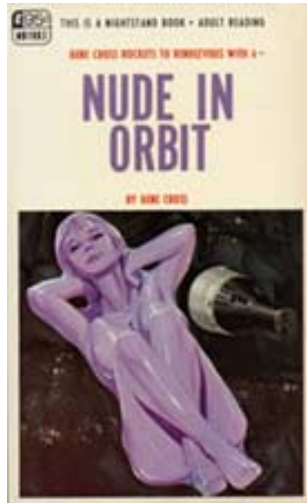
LL819
Vampirism!, by Dr. Phillip Garden. Cover painting by Robert Bonfils dated 1969.



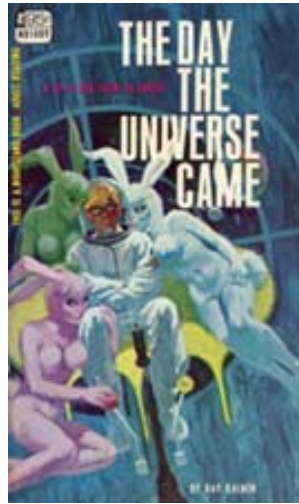
LB1106
The Sinners of Whang, by John Dexter. Superlative cover painting by Robert Bonfils dated 1965.



LB1218
Her, by J.X. Williams. A fantastic cover painting by Darrel Millsap.



NB1883
Nude in Orbit, by Gene Cross. Cover painting by Darrel Millsap dated 1968.



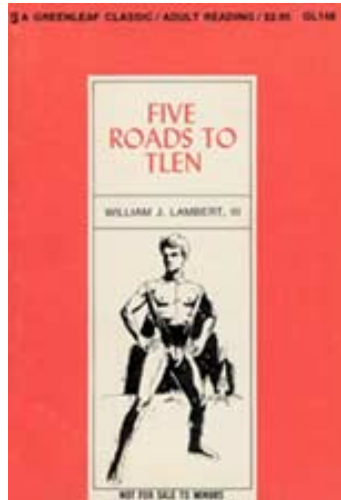
NB1889
The Day the Universe Came, by Ray Kalnen. Painting by Robert Bonfils dated 1968.



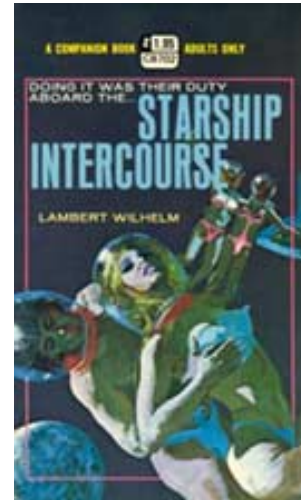
PR212
Fantasex, by J.X. Williams (Vivien Kern). Cover by Robert Bonfils dated 1969.



A1030 *Zero Gravity Swap*, by Cal. I. Pygaster. Cover painting by Darrel Millsap dated 1970.



GL148 *Five Roads to Tlen*, by William J. Lambert III. Cover by Harry Bremner. This was the first volume in a successful series that included a number of sequels.



CB702 *Starship Intercourse*, by Lambert Wilhelm (William J. Lambert III). Painting by Robert Bonfils dated 1971.

UFOs exist. Flying saucers do not.
 --Mercury 7 astronaut Scott Carpenter

...Return to sender, address unknown.... 8

The Official *e/* Letters to the Editor Column

Artwork recycled William Rotsler

By Earl Kemp

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to earlkemp@citlink.net or by snail mail to P.O. Box 6642, Kingman, AZ 86402-6642 and thank you.

Also, please note, I observe DNQs and make arbitrary and capricious deletions from these letters in order to remain on topic.

This is the official Letter Column of *e/*, and following are a few quotes from a few of those letters concerning the last issue of *e/*. All this in an effort to get you to write letters of comment to *e/* so you can look for them when they appear here.

Tuesday August 3, 2004

Ian's article really came out well - I see you used my quote on that one! I was so impressed by it when it appeared on *Wegenheim*, and I'm pleased you got it for *e/*. I also thought your piece about CeeCee was very powerful, and what a kicker at the end.

I occasionally can't tell if your stories are truth, fiction, or something in between, but I'm very glad to help you share them.

--Bill Burns

#

Too much of a good thing!

Got your latest, and could hardly contain myself from rushing in to read, read, read - especially all of that "Loon" insider info.

Luckily, your excellent *e/15* will, hopefully, be right there, waiting, when I can finally get a breather!

Keep up the good work!; it's always fun to read about all you were "up" to (sexual innuendo intended!) in the "good old days".

--William

(aka William J. Lambert III, William Maltese, Chad Stuart, Kyle Reich, Lambert Wilhelm, William Mauser, Cort Forbes, "Joey", Billy Lambert, W. J. Lambert III, Raymond Lang, Raymond Lange, Alex von Mann, Bryant Tyler - et al).

#

Scanned the latest issue. Wow! How do you do it, where do you find all these fascinating people?

--TOM Ramirez (Tony Calvano)

Thursday August 5, 2004

You've probably been wondering why I'm behind in commenting on *e!*. Good reason -- slow modem.... However, I did get to download the last three *e/s* yesterday, and it hit me all over again what a fine magazine you're publishing. A pity it's not in paper version. I could print in colour on Elaine's inkjet printer, but that would take forever and a small fortune in toner cartridge. I actually print on my laser printer, which is much, much faster, but only in black and white, and only one side of the paper. Still the content is there.

In particular, thanks for the material on Lawrence Block and Robert Silverberg. That's a side of the publishing/writing industry that few Australians see, because there is no under-level of profitable hackwork (detective, porn, war, etc) in Australia for which people can write. You either have to have a success with your first novel or you fail. In Block's case, it seems, he had had years of training and practice before he published his 'first novel' under his own name. I read it the other day -- now called *Coward's Kiss*, and it's a zippy read, especially compared with a few of his recent Matt Scudder books.

I suppose I should write in depth about Block, who is the one writer these days who always provides a good reading experience. Sometimes his books are brilliant, but usually not. But always a totally enjoyable reading experience. Many of his books I've read then given away or sold, so I can't do an authoritative article on him. But there must be someone Out There who can do an article on all the books officially published as 'Lawrence Block'.

Silverberg doesn't talk to me at conventions (i.e. three Aussiecons) because of the Silverberg special I did for *SF Commentary* in 1977. You published its cover in your Silverberg section. The brilliant David Levine-ish cover is by Stephen Campbell, who disappears for years at a time, but who turned up only a few weeks ago for dinner. Stephen helped me with most of the issues of *SFC* I did during its first year in 1969. Steve now looks a weathered late 30s (although I know he must be 50) this year, whereas I just look middle aged. Steve's new girlfriend was just a bit puzzled by all this talk about people we last saw twenty or thirty years ago.

The issue itself was an attack on what seemed like the pretensions that Silverberg had during the late sixties and early seventies to being an 'artist'. The books from that period were nowhere near as interesting as some of the books from the end of the period that Silverberg seemed to think was his hack era. To do a special issue on a writer and choose articles attacking the work of the writer in question was a Big Mistake by an immature personality. No good apologising after the fact -- it's possible to do great wrong for what seemed like Pure Critical Motives, actually a fit of smart-arsery (as we spell it). I still don't like any Silverberg novels after *Up the Line* except *Hawksbill Station* and *The Stochastic Man*, but I would really like to turn back time and obliterate that issue of *SFC* (although most of the articles were superb in themselves, especially George Turner's).

Your own adventures are turning into an epic. I look forward to the next issue, and probably I will have further comments on the issues I've just downloaded.

--Bruce Gillespie

Bruce, do I need to cut any of these Silverberg comments out? --Earl

Friday August 6, 2004

No, you can use my comments on Bob Silverberg any way you wish. It's my version of an apology, even if twenty years too late. I've always loved his anthologies, of course, especially the *Avram*

Davidson Treasury, and more and more I like his short stories and novellas from the 1970s as I reread them in anthologies. I suspect that one day I will go back to the novels from that period and be bowled over by them. And, of course, Silverberg is one of the great non-fiction writers, including the annual issue of his fanzine for FAPA.

The other late 60s/early 70s Silverberg novel I like a lot is *Downward to the Earth*.

--Bruce Gillespie

Tuesday August 17, 2004

Eric Lindsay mentions there seems to be a colour barrier in fandom. I can name about a dozen black fans who are friends of mine, so perhaps I don't see such a colour distinction myself. It shouldn't be there; there are fans of every descent. One friend, Wayne Brown of Rochester, NY, says his black friends say that SF fandom is a geeky white interest, and they refer to him as an Oreo cookie. His attitude is the right one; who cares if your fellow fan is black, white or green with red stripes? Wayne is one of the driving forces in Rochester fandom, and he runs the local club and convention.

The Gertzman article is an eye-opener. The lines between literature, erotica and just smut were quite blurred then, as was the line between the so-called pervert and the artiste. I guess the various parties they all attended were more research than anything else? Hm?

We all approach our sexuality one stumbling step at a time, and when we're young, we find out about the pleasures we can bring about for ourselves and the ways they are done. There's no real owner's manual for such a thing, not that we'd read it... For every bit of pleasure, there's some frustration, and for some, there was a lot of the latter, and not much of the former. How many muscular guys and sexually precocious girls got all the attention at school? How many short, skinny guys did without any attention from the girls in high school, and didn't get any action until university? (Just described myself there...at least, I was skinny back then.) The last thing we need, and you got it, Earl, was to have that sexuality portrayed as disgusting and something to hide and keep it hidden. Yvonne and I have many gay friends, and we are among the few straights in that crowd. We figure that love and happiness are tough enough to find as they are; who are we to dictate who they must find it with? At the Worldcon in Toronto last year, eight men walked into a room full of people, and with those people as witness, they emerged as four couples, happy and content and loving. That's what it's all about.



Pretending to be Canadian just so you won't catch it for being an American...there's still a lot of that going on. I know Westerners of many nationalities are getting caught up in the political action in Iraq, but being American can get you killed. The parallels between Vietnam and Iraq are starting to mount up, and in some cases, what's going on in Iraq is worse. I must wonder what's going on in the heart of hearts of Bush Sr., wondering what kind of idiot monster he sired.

The rest of the issue is a fun read, but as written before, slightly out of my experience. Avram Davidson is one author I've enjoyed over the years, and one author I'd wanted to meet.

--Lloyd Penney

The problem was that Avram and I had such a pleasant relationship -- from time to time, he would send stories, and I would send money. I've heard he was supposed to be difficult -- I never found him so. We argued now and then on obscure points -- like whether Pannonia was east or west of Trans-Balkania -- but I would always give in if he insisted, and he would give in if I insisted. It helped that I was using a proofreader that could proof in several languages, including Latvian. On publication of his last book during his lifetime, he specified a batch of the signed-limited copies to go to various friends; I sent him sheets to sign, he signed them, and I sent them out. He did see the finished book, *Adventures in Unhistory* before he died.

I was always a fan of Dr Eszterhazy, and was lucky to be editing *Amazing Stories* when he came to write the second series ("Young Dr Eszterhazy," et alii). I bought 'em all, and George Barr illustrated them all.

--George Scithers

Friday August 20, 2004

The latest opus from Earl Kemp is just as magnificent as those that preceded it; *E*I 15* kicks off with a letter column headed by Robert Silverberg, and containing extensive missives from Mike Deckinger and Eric Lindsay. Then there's a political guest editorial by Joni Stopa. And then there's the meat of it: Jay A. Gertzman on Eddie Mishkin and erotic storywriters and publishers, a piece both fascinating and almost academic. Then an essay by Ian Williams about writing; Jan Stinson on her experiences with erotica and porn; and then a busload of autobiographical stuff from Earl. All of the above is illustrated with reproductions of book covers, candid -- sometimes quite candid -- photographs, and also the occasional Rotsler. The 77-page issue concludes with a tribute to a tribute to Avram Davidson by Bruce Gillespie.

Woof. And I'm hardly doing it justice. Earl is a singularity. You can read *E*I 15* in html or pdf, available from the [Earl Kemp page](#) at [eFanzines.com](#).

--Victor Gonzalez, <http://www.trufen.net>

Saturday August 21, 2004

I've recently come across your *e*I* e-zine, and I'm very impressed. The material is fascinating--both the visual archive and the historical narratives.

I came across your site because of an interest of mine that touches on your history--Richard Shaver and Ray Palmer. I've organized art exhibitions devoted to Shaver (which inevitably involves Palmer), and I'm currently preparing a book about Shaver. I found the short description of Shaver being called to testify in 1966, and a bit about the way Shaver and Palmer became partners in Blake Pharmaceuticals. I'm not entirely clear about their relationships to the various Hamling organizations--Blake, Freedom, Greenleaf, Corinth--if you've written something that will clarify that for me, please direct me to it (I've spent several hours with your site, but have yet to read all of it). Did Palmer or Shaver write any of the sex books?

If you have any memories or suggestions for sources about Shaver or Palmer and his milieu (Bea Mahaffey anecdotes, for example), I'd be most interested. I haven't tracked down much info about their connection to the porno books, and I could also use more "inside fandom" details about the fan move to boycott *Amazing* because of the Shaver Mystery stories. Any such info would be greatly appreciated.

In any case, I applaud your ongoing project--it's an exemplary use of the Internet. Please keep at it.

--Brian Tucker

Monday August 23, 2004

The first comment that caught my eye in el15 was Eric Lindsay's mention of Oz and U.S. fandom being largely WASPs (and I wouldn't imagine that U.K. fandom does much better). That's not literally the case, of course, because WASP stands for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and I'd say Protestants are probably a distinct minority in fandom, but I assume Eric's using the term as it's often used, a synonym for the "white" or Caucasian race.

My first major quibble with what that seems to imply is the fact that in the sf subculture we have always had a substantial number of Jewish fans -- heck, when I was living in New York, I was made an honorary Jew myself.

Then too, while I can't think of more than a handful of blacks who've been involved -- Samuel Delaney, Octavia Butler, Elliot Shorter (mentioned by Eric), Vijay Bowen [both Elliot and Vijay were TAFF winners] and "Carl Brandon" (a hoax who turned out not to be black after all) being the only ones I can name off hand -- surely their quite obvious and widespread acceptance points away from a conscious WASPish exclusion. (Not, mind you, that I think Eric was attempting to make that his point, only that it might be inferred from what he wrote.)

As for other non-WASPs, we don't have a great number of Asians or people of Spanish descent, but we do have a few. And, again, if there's been any conscious exclusion going on, it's escaped my notice.



I do think the likely culprit is not prejudice/bigotry but the simple fact that there's not a great deal available in mainstream science fiction that appeals to any values other than middle-class American, of which WASP is the primary (but not sole) component. That's probably what has this inevitable impact on the general racial makeup of fandom. Not, of course, that the microcosm is totally "about" science fiction. We don't talk about sf to the exclusion of all else and we've long had the phenomenon of "fake fans," people who participate because they enjoy the company of fans rather than being particularly enamored of the genre. While the latter might at first seem to open fandom's doors to more people of color, the truth is it's a "phenomenon" only to the extent that it's the exception rather than the rule, and to reach the point where we can come to that conclusion about it, most of us travel via some early enjoyment (at the very least) of that Crazy Buck Rogers Stuff. Thus, while fandom has a lot of things that might be enjoyed by people of color, few of them get here to find that out because the genre has little appeal to draw them here.

Jon Stopa's given us an interesting take on a segment of the crazy quilt that is the Shrub's war on Iraq -- all of it ironic, even if some parts are clearly speculative. The true irony almost makes my heart bleed for the poor Bushies: Most of the weapons of mass destruction which Iraq once had were supplied either directly or indirectly by us in support of their war against Iran. (By "us" I mean primarily the U.S., the U.K., Italy and Germany.) Between 1985-90, the U.S. government approved for export to Iraq \$1.5 billion worth of biological agents and high-tech equipment with military application; U.S.

military intelligence considered it "likely" that Iraq would use gas against their Iranian foes and their own Kurdish dissidents but we turned a blind eye to it at the time and in fact sold them (among other things) the helicopters they needed to deliver the stuff, provided them with satellite intelligence regarding where to deliver it and U.S. companies were licensed by the commerce department to export biological and chemical materials including bacillus anthracis (which causes anthrax) and clostridium botulinum (the source of botulism). But, hey, this is just tip-of-the-iceberg stuff; there are even more scary things detailed at <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2002/506/506p12.htm> -- go check it out.

My point being, however, that the administration was not *totally* off their asses (excepting, of course, where they just flat out lied about it) in their claims that Iraq had at least some WMDs, since so many of them had been directly involved during the '80s and '90s in making profits to ensure that they did. The point of pity comes from their apparent ignorance of how many of them had been dismantled, left to rust and/or sold off somewhere else in the interim. This is partly Hussein's fault, given that his baulking from time to time against UN arms inspections seems in retrospect to have been designed to convince the world, most probably primarily his neighbors, that he still had a few WMDs hidden somewhere. Why, in that "friendly" area of the world, the Iraqis might want to leave that impression is probably far beyond any Bushie's ability to comprehend.

It's not that I didn't enjoy Ian Williams' Personal Journey -- I did -- but I kept expecting him to return to a point he only touched on briefly, so I was a bit disappointed that he never did. Specifically: "Who knows, maybe in the writing I'll tell myself something I hadn't realised." Perhaps Ian just didn't recognize that as a revelation when he stumbled across -- or maybe it just isn't the sort of thing that's all that important to him. So perhaps my disappointment is just a reflection of how important that is to me, in my own writing.

I've got about 100,000 words of professional sf/fantasy in print (a novel and close to a dozen shorter works), more than 10 times that as a professional editor and journalist and easily 10-20 times that again in essays, LoCs, articles, reviews, columns, mailing comments &c. as a fan who's been involved in the microcosm for what's approaching the half-century mark.

Charles Burbee once told me that if you want to be a writer it's important to have something to say. Like so many things Burb said, that was succinct, to the point and absolutely true. All writing is the desire to communicate, which is also rather obvious -- but a large part of what I've written has been in response to things others have written (this eLoc being a case in point) and I've picked out what I want to respond to based on my feeling that I Have Something To Say about it. But while I have a general idea when I make the choice, I'm usually not entirely sure just what that's going to be -- until I wrestle with it a while on the way to getting it down in black and white. It's in the process of trying to make my ideas clear to someone else that I actually end up clarifying, for primarily my own benefit, what I actually think. That's the big reason I keep on doing it.

(Of course in my case there remains a Major Problem: I try too hard to nail it all down, to clarify things that are probably already clear enough and to explain anything even remotely associated with my point that might be misunderstood. The result is that I frequently wind up throwing up a host of trees around the one I want to focus on, and that one -- often as not -- gets lost in the forest I'm at fault for having provided. I've been working on that one since 1956. Maybe I'll eventually get it right.)

Okay, now, taking the focus off me and putting it back on Ian, I noticed that he entertained us at a few points by writing a bit messily but then explaining immediately afterward that he knew he'd been writing

a bit messily, saying just what he'd done wrong and explaining why he'd done it on purpose. But he did miss at least one when he was talking about grammar (and commas in particular): "Which isn't to say I don't have a good basic knowledge of grammar, of course I do." You, Earl, of all people should recognize 37x when you see it.

Don't get me wrong; I also at times need to stop and wipe the froth from my lips when I get into a passionate discussion of The Proper Use Of The Comma. True, I don't hate the serial comma as much as I once did -- perhaps because something Teresa Nielsen Hayden wrote (albeit not in direct response to me) trumped my concern. By "serial comma" I mean the one that comes before "and" in a list: saying, "A, B, C, and D" instead of "A, B, C and D." It's particularly bad if you have an independent clause inserted after the "and": use of the serial comma would require one to say, "I like A, B, C, and, at times, D" where eliminating it would not have you tripping over so many commas, since it would be "I like A, B, C and, at times, D." Teresa simply pointed out that not having that comma can at times make all the difference, as in the phrase, "I want to thank my parents, God and Ayn Rand."

Wow. I'm just back from a hearty dip in your own contributions to the issue and I was so fascinated in my reading that I neglected to stop for any comment hooks along the way.

One thing I'm really curious about, though, is something you mentioned in passing more than once -- you indicated that the Authorities routinely went through the Greenleaf offices in burglar fashion at night after the offices were closed. I don't doubt the possibility, but I'm curious about your certainty.

Was this something that actually came out later on, something they admitted to when you were prosecuted, and therefore (presumably) something they had court authorization to do?

Or was it, instead, unauthorized and clandestine and, if so, did you have suspicions that it was going on at the time?

I ask because I think in that position, if it was something I suspected at the time, I would have been inclined first to set up a few little "traps" to be certain it was going on -- and then, once I was, to Do Something about it. You could've done marvels with a few paper matches and a spool of fine dark thread -- setting the matches up in front of doors and tying the thread low between, say, chairs and tables or the bottoms of file drawers, where opening the doors would knock the matches over or broken threads would indicate that someone had walked between the chair and table or opened the filing cabinet.

Once it was firmly established that it was going on, if any pattern of regularity could be established, I think I would have been inclined to try to leave someone behind in the office with a baseball bat to "explain things" to the intruders. Or a .22, to shoot them in the feet. Once subdued, I'd call the local law and do what was needed to prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law....

This, of course, is Monday morning quarterbacking of the worst sort; I realize it. But it does seem an interesting and possibly even amusing way to tie of their resources and put them on the defensive, so I kind of wonder why it wasn't tried.

--rich brown (DrGafia)

Saturday September 4, 2004

I know it's a late LoC, but it's still a LoC.

el13 was another great read. Particularly enjoyed Bruce Gillespie's piece on J.G. Ballard. I have a question on it. He says a New Wave writer ". . . demonstrates the qualities the New Wavers claimed for themselves: a genuine love of words and fine writing, and an eye for brain-twisting plots that are intriguing and memorable." Given this definition, what about Gene Wolfe? If anyone loves words and comes up with brain-twisting plots, it's him.

While I realize it's probably a typo, anyone who hasn't read the Le Guin classic should know it's titled *The *Left* Hand of Darkness*.

Bruce Gillespie's description of John Clute as "word drunk" is absolutely perfect; I read Clute's latest collection *Scores* recently and enjoyed it a great deal. Clute's critical theory still eludes me (haven't read the relevant sections of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* yet), but I delight in his passion for the best in science fiction. As a reader, I'm grateful that Clute is willing and able to turn the spotlight on the legends and the lightweights; the former deserve the notice, and the latter need to be told when their work has failed to complete the task the writer gave it at the work's commencement. In my view, there's nothing worse than a book that doesn't follow through with its set-up.

I would have to disagree with Bruce about the Amber series; I enjoyed it a great deal when I first read it, and will try to re-read it again soon to see if it's as good now. My first experiment with re-reading an SF novel from my own "golden age" was with Andre Norton's *Moon of Three Rings*, and it was just as good (if not better, in some places; experience brings a new depth) the second time round, which pleased me greatly.

I'm curious if any *el* readers think they've spotted the latest New Wave yet.

The excerpt from Victor Banis' novel *The Why Not* was both funny and melancholy. I thank him for allowing you to share it with your readers, as I doubt I'd ever be able to find a copy of the book.

Interesting trip down memory lane with your thoughts on Donald Westlake. I recall reading some of his mysteries, but never knew he wrote porn novels.

The "Al Bundy" quote at the end of "Partying With the Economous" reminds me yet again why I never watched that show; I've met enough arseholes in my life and prefer to keep the total as small as possible.

--Janine Stinson

Sunday September 5, 2004

More great stuff in this. But, a question: why aren't **all** the block quotes (and not just the Block quotes, ar ar) either indented and spaced (without font change) or used in a different font? I got confused more than a few times reading this as to who was "speaking" from paragraph to paragraph. Could you take pity on this poor reader and delineate the changes in "speaker" more clearly in future issues? Or is this what happens when your html file is converted to PDF?

If that jacket cover from *\$20 Lust* is supposed to feature the character of Mona, then why isn't her hair the same as the book's description ("long golden hair breaking over creamy shoulders")?



Re: the original illo for "Lie Back and Enjoy It," I have to ask something. If a man sees that illo and gets interested in reading the story, then comes to the part where the "girl" is described by the narrator and reads that she's wearing "dungarees" and "a man's shirt," doesn't that ruin the mental picture the male reader has already constructed and, therefore, cause him to stop reading the story because the art and the writer's description don't match? Maybe it's just me, but it seems the same thing as deducing from dungarees and a man's shirt that what's underneath is delectable, only to find out upon the eventual unveiling that what's underneath those clothes bursts that fantasy bubble.

Perhaps I've been reading outdated research material, but everything I've read says that men are more sexually stimulated by visual materials than women (hence the popularity of *Playboy* and its ilk).

Anyway, it was fun to read those two pulp stories from Lawrence Block and Robert Silverberg; quite pristine examples of the fiction of their times, I'd guess. And I got a good laugh out of the Rotsler illo about not skipping the boring parts.

--Janine Stinson

#

I'm digging through your fascinating website and e-zine contribs and want to thank you so much for the work and info you provide. I'm good pals with Bhob Stewart on this side of the Divide, as well as the few other Ron Haydock associates who survive. Ron is my all time icon/idol and I've written extensively about his career(s) as a rock n roller/smut scribe/monster zine editor/film star.

--Miriam Linna

A tyrant is always stirring up some war or other, in order that the people may require a leader.

-- Plato (c.428-348 BC), *Republic, Book VIII*

1955 Advent:uring Through the Years 2005

By Earl Kemp

Robert Briney
Sidney Coleman (Retired 2001)
Earl Kemp
James O'Meara
George Price
Jon Stopa
Ed Wood (Deceased 1995)

In the first issue of el, my friend and Advent partner George Price wrote an article under this same heading. It was George's inside view of the history of Advent:Publishers. The thought occurred to me that I should use the same title to introduce George's Master Archive of the titles published by Advent: Publishers.

Originally I wanted George to name the piece "Fifty Years of Advent" only George was adamant. Because it hadn't actually been fifty years of Advent, we couldn't say it. Now, of course, as it is still not quite yet 2005, Advent is still not yet fifty years old.

It's a bit difficult, though, to think of this not being at least the pre celebration to Advent's Fiftieth Anniversary...that will be accomplished with the publication of Joseph Major's definitive study of Heinlein's juvenile novels, *Heinlein's Children*.

#

Questions regarding the availability of Advent titles, and orders for same, should be addressed directly to <http://nesfa.org/press/Books/Advent/index.html> who have been handling those tasks for a number of years now and are expected to continue doing so in the future.

Following is George Price's Master Archive of Advent titles:

#

The Advent:Publishers Master Archive

Compiled by George W. Price
(with a little help from Robert E. Briney, Earl Kemp, and Jon Stopa)

[Publisher's note: Because of the size of the Advent Master Archive, it has been created as a separate file. [Click here](#) to view it.]



Mr. and Mrs. George Price
photographed in August 2004.

In Italy for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love--they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.

--Orson Welles, *The Third Man*

I Am A Fandom of One: A Fan's Manifesto

Artwork recycled William Rotsler

By J.G. Stinson

I ask the fundamental question: What is a fan?

I answer: I am.

When a person picks up a book that is special in content and likes that book, and wants to read more, a fan is born. When a person chances to see a fanzine somewhere, picks it up, likes what's inside and wants to read more, a fan is born. When a person walks into a hotel off the street, sees something interesting going on, asks questions and discovers a science fiction convention and wants to learn

more, a fan is born. When a person sees a film with sfnal content (whether it be story or special effects or critters or whatever) and wants to see more, and does so, a fan is born.



I asked Janine to provide a snowplow photo of herself in the manner of [Dave Locke](#). She giggled, agreed, and furnished this photo, complete with her caption: "Jan Stinson aboard a standard-issue Army snow plow, taking her turn in clearing her battalion's barracks parking lot at Fort Meade, Maryland, 1983-4. Jan wishes she had one of these now, since she lives in Michigan."

I became a fan the day I started reading "The Stars My Destination" by Alfred Bester and didn't want to stop reading it. Everything after that was an expansion of my fannish experience. There are many doors into fandom, and all of them are right.

When the definition of fan is so narrowly drawn that it excludes any portion of the science-fiction readership, I must question the motives of those who draw it thus. Why is it so important to delineate that term so restrictively? Is it so drawn because those who defined it that way want to create their own tribe and post a sign that says "No Non-Fans Allowed!" Is this the fannish version of the treehouse exclusionary principle? Why can't anyone with an interest in SF be included in fandom? Is there not enough room for that many in Fandom's Treehouse?

Science fiction has been hailed as a literature of inclusion. Why, then, do some proponents of fandom choose to exclude those who are interested in science fiction but not fandom (regardless of the reason)? Is it really down to the difference between fiawol and fijagh? "You just don't get it" is a cop-out. That's not an answer, it's an excuse, and a flimsy one.

Science fiction has now pervaded much of our everyday lives, so why separate fandom from the rest of the world? I thought fandom was for sharing, that it was something to pass on to others with the same interest, not a contest.

Perhaps the most important question I have for science fiction fandom is: Would fandom not be better served by a more inclusionary definition?

There is a portion of the Christian Bible that records Jesus as saying wherever two or more Christians are gathered, there he would be. I say that wherever two or more people who like and want to share their experience of science fiction are gathered, there is fandom also.

That is my definition of fandom. It includes everyone reading this, and everyone who will never see it but has an interest in some form of science fiction, be it books, TV, films, games, or anime.

Am I angry? A bit. Am I angry enough to turn my back on those who consider themselves part of fandom? No. Why?



Because I am a fandom of one. So are you all, and you are all welcome

And Shrub's dad was a shithead, too: July 3 1988 | Mistaking it for a F-14 fighter plane, the American warship USS Vincennes shoots down Iran Air flight 655, killing all 290 people aboard. Despite his country's having recklessly downed a passenger airliner while operating inside Iran's territorial waters, Vice President George Bush declares a month later: "I will never apologize for the United States of America, ever. I don't care what the facts are."

--Daily Rotten, 7/3/03

How I (Almost) Became Ivar Jorgensen

By Mike Deckinger



Mike Deckinger in January
2004.

From 1964 through 1971, I lived in Newark, New Jersey. Never known as the most inviting location in the state, Newark was wracked by social unrest in the mid 60's, similar to what was occurring in other major locales. No wonder that I chose to describe my living habitat as: on the very edge of Newark, bordered by their far less threatening towns.

My distant neighbor in Newark was Sam Moskowitz, five miles away. My closer neighbor was pulp writer and editor Paul W. Fairman, who lived half a block away.

Paul had begun writing for Ziff-Davis in the 40's, eventually becoming part of editor Ray Palmer's writing stable. Paul used both his own name and the more popular penname "Ivar Jorgensen." He also utilized several "house names," shared pseudonyms employed by various writers. He wrote primarily action-oriented tales with accelerated pacing and limited character. Paul had also appeared in the "slicks" like Saturday Evening Post. In his later years he wrote *The Man From S.T.U.D.* soft-core series under the transparent name

of F.W. Paul, in counterpoint to *The Man From O.R.G.Y.* by Ted Mark (Ted Gottfried). As a ghost, he completed Lester del Rey's final three novels, which del Rey had contracted but was unable to complete.

And finally, he contributed to the once thriving gothic genre as "Paula Fairman," a name assumed by his daughter after his death.

We would meet every month or so to chat about the market at that time, as well as his experiences working for the pulps in past years. He always expressed the warmest of feelings toward his associates; perhaps strongest toward former manic editor Ray Palmer. Palmer had suffered a spinal deformity, due to a crippling accident, and was frequently in pain, but he pushed himself with inhuman determination. He wrote, edited, was a father, and a valuable component of weekly poker sessions. No, Paul had never met the infamous Richard Shaver, whose paranoid fantasies of cave dwelling boosted sales of Ziff-Davis pulps during the late 40's, and attracted the studied scrutiny of the lunatic

fringe. He did affirm that Shaver's manuscripts were indecipherable messes, always rewritten by Palmer. Did Palmer believe any of the nonsense that Shaver sought to promote as fact? Of course not, but he knew it would sell magazines. The uncomfortable notoriety the "Shaver Mystery" earned for Ziff-Davis eventually led to the termination of further flights of fancy from Shaver.

Paul was non-committal about the media adaptations of his works. Two low budget science fiction films: *Target Earth* and *Invasion of the Saucer Men*, as well as a half hour *Twilight Zone* and a few other pieces were based on published stories. He accepted the fact that once story rights were sold he, as the original author, was out of the picture. He therefore harbored no regrets about the lack of similarity between the printed and the filmed works. He understood the process, was properly compensated, and had no further involvement in what developed. He had been offered a screen-writing job on another project, but turned it down because he felt more comfortable writing for the printed page, rather than the screen. He rejected a teaching position because he felt incapable of training others in an avocation that he performed with mechanical precision.

"Nine Worlds West," was a Fairman entry in the April 1951 *Fantastic Adventures*, writing as "Clee Garson." By far the best thing about this novelette was the cover, by boudoir artist Harold McCauley. A girl is depicted leaping into a pit of flame, possibly flung by a green man leering behind her. Unlike most cover models, which are caricatured to resemble the idealized female form, she has a sense of humanity to her. The story seems to borrow heavily from Leigh Brackett's ruthless Martian landscapes, but with none of Brackett's plotting intricacies or sharp characterizations. Two opposing alien races are The Hairless Ones and The Tall Ones, and we have an Earthman named "Butch." The back page displayed a full-page ad for the ubiquitous sect known as The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization). In the 50's and 60's, ads for The Rosicrucians and their mystical trappings were common in sf magazines. The Rosicrucians have survived to the present day, and maintain a museum of Egyptian artifacts, and a mummy or two, in San Jose, California, where they originated in the early part of the 20th century. Check out their web site.

Amazing Stories for April 1951 headlined Fairman's "The Glory That Was Rome," under the house name E.K. Jarvis. This meandering space adventure was situated in a city called New Rome, modeled after ancient Rome by an alien despot. The conceptual ambition of the plot was overpowered by the plodding execution. Isaac Asimov had a minor Susan Calvin story in the issue.

Robert Gibson Jones provided the stunning cover for Fairman's "Invasion from the Deep," (*Fantastic Adventures*, May 1951). Offering a refreshing variation from the customary metallic bikini-clad lady of pulp antiquity, this woman wore a seductive Frederick's of Hollywood bra cup set, while astride a gigantic, and definitely benign, sea horse. The incomparable Virgil Finlay illustrated Fairman's story, but there was more drama in the cover than the tired plot line. Short fiction from Theodore Sturgeon, Raymond F. Jones, and L. Sprague de Camp rounded out the issue.



Paul W. Fairman from *Imagination*, February 1956.





Ivar Jorgensen first appeared, as author of "Whom the Gods Would Slay," for the June 1951 issue of *Fantastic Adventures*. A manufactured autobiography, accompanied by a threadbare pencil sketch, introduced Jorgensen as a Norwegian fisherman, from the province of Rogland, who came to the U.S. A. seeking fame and fortune. "Whom the Gods Would Slay" was an epic encounter between seafaring Vikings and alien invaders, written in determined Hollywood Biblical dialect. Imagine how a true Norseman like Poul Anderson, or a craftsman like Robert Silverberg, would have handled this theme. For those who might have been rattled by 1951's cold war propaganda, an ad from Science Kits Limited offered a build-your-own Geiger counter for a very reasonable \$29.95.



"The Man Who Stopped at Nothing" earned Fairman the cover of the November 1951 *Fantastic Adventures*. The emphasis was more on humor than thrills, but humor rarely succeeded in the pulp magazines. Using faux Damon Runyon characters in a misshapen life after death plot, the story flounders along. Its sole purpose was to highlight the slightly risqué cover that promised more than it delivered.

Fairman snared the cover for "The Girl Who Loved Death," published under his own name in *Amazing Stories* September 1952. The cover by Walter Popp depicted a man manipulating a miniature female over a blazing vat with a pair of Waldos. The story was written in punchy, hardboiled private eye style and featured private eye Nick Saturday chasing a missing person. There was a faltering science

fictional element, but the story remained inert. A minor character, noting the reduction in crime, laments "...even Philip Marlowe and Paul Pine are out of work." (Paul Pine was a gumshoe created by editor Howard Browne). Only in the pulps would a paucity of lawlessness be a cause for distress.



"Professor Mainbocher's Planet," by Ivar Jorgensen, appeared in the digest size *Amazing Stories* of December 1955. The cover depicted a man with an ax frantically flailing away at pink globes sprouting coiling tentacles, which roughly corresponded to a scene in the story. The titular professor is a Dr. Moreau-type experimenter on a distant world. Our hero, on an investigative mission, is ominously warned by a companion that if they are caught: "He will have us killed on sight, or worse." After escalating misadventures, the duo succeeds in overcoming Professor Mainbocher. As he is about to face retribution at the claws of one of his creatures, he pleads: "A brain such as mine should not be allowed to perish." Good try, Doc.

Viliers Gerson wrote book reviews in a column titled "The Spectroscope," in this same issue. One of the volumes reviewed is *The Two Towers*. Gerson gives the book generally high marks, compares it favorably to *The Worm Ouroboros* by E.R. Eddison, and eagerly looks forward to the forthcoming third volume, unavailable in the U.S. at the time. This was written in December 1955, long before Tolkien infiltrated the college campuses and then the mainstream. In fact, the only place where Tolkien had received any recognition was in the sf world, and it was through this continued acclamation that a broader non-genre readership was established.

If there are any commonalities about the stories cited about, it is that they all are unpublishable, will never be anthologized, and will never be cited as examples of respectable prose. *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* were slanted toward teen and pre-teen readership, and the contributing authors responded with fiction aimed in that direction. Even if they were better writers than the published work indicated, it was still necessary to maintain the magazines' identities.

One afternoon, Paul suggested we expand his own fiction for possible paperback publication. The ground rules were simple; I'd select a suitable story, rewrite and develop it to novel length, and submit it through his agent. The fee would be split and the byline determined later. Why not Ivar Jorgensen? I thought. The elusive Mr. Jorgensen had been resurrected before, why not again?

To this day I don't recall the story we picked, other than it was a typical pulpish thud-and blunder novelette, originally published under Fairman's name. He approved the choice and I attacked it.

The first draft was a struggle. Upon completion he made a number of suggestions, all so absolutely correct that it seemed inconceivable anyone could have overlooked these faults to begin with. I plumped up the action, modified conflicts, created new characters, modernized dialogue and inserted several provocative elements far removed from the story's pulp antecedents. Paul took a hard look, and showed me where to cut off lengthy exposition and blunt dialogue so it sounded like real people talking.

The second draft was better but satisfaction was still beyond my grasp. There were more areas that needed tinkering, more character identifications to be established, and more motivations to be given a semblance of verisimilitude.

Following a third labored draft, Paul felt it was ready for submission and delivered it to his agent.

The agent came back with additional suggestions for story flow, all thoroughly reasonable. More significantly, however, he had some bad news. Paul's agent felt that there could possibly be copyright infringement issues here. A recent case, elsewhere in the country, had been settled in favor of the original publication source, which vindictively then sued the offending author for a small fortune. Neither of us was inclined to take on Ziff-Davis at this point, even though there was absolutely no indication that they would follow the same course of action.

Additionally, I was beginning to feel a sliver of unease. I was participating in the creation of a product I had often harbored faint contempt for. When it came to literature I often thought of myself, with undisguised snobbery, as a "purist." Sure I read the old pulps, enjoyed and savored many of them, and viewed them as a stepping-stone in the natural evolutionary course of sf. I knew pulp writing existed as a pivotal step and did not represent the tremendous strides taken in the maturation of the field. Was this hypocrisy to then participate in the formation of what I viewed as a tarnished by-product?

That's where it ended. A few months later I packed up everything and moved to the West Coast, trading societal upheavals for geological upheavals. I lost contact with Paul Fairman until I learned of his death several years later.

The manuscript I had labored over, as well as the carbons, were irretrievably lost. I never mourned them; I am grateful today that I don't have to suffer the extreme embarrassment of reading them, or worse, knowing others might have the opportunity to do so.

Still and all, I regret neither the time spent in creating this epic, the many revisions, nor its final fate.

Call me...Ivar.

A time comes when silence is betrayal. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought, within one's own bosom and in the surrounding world.

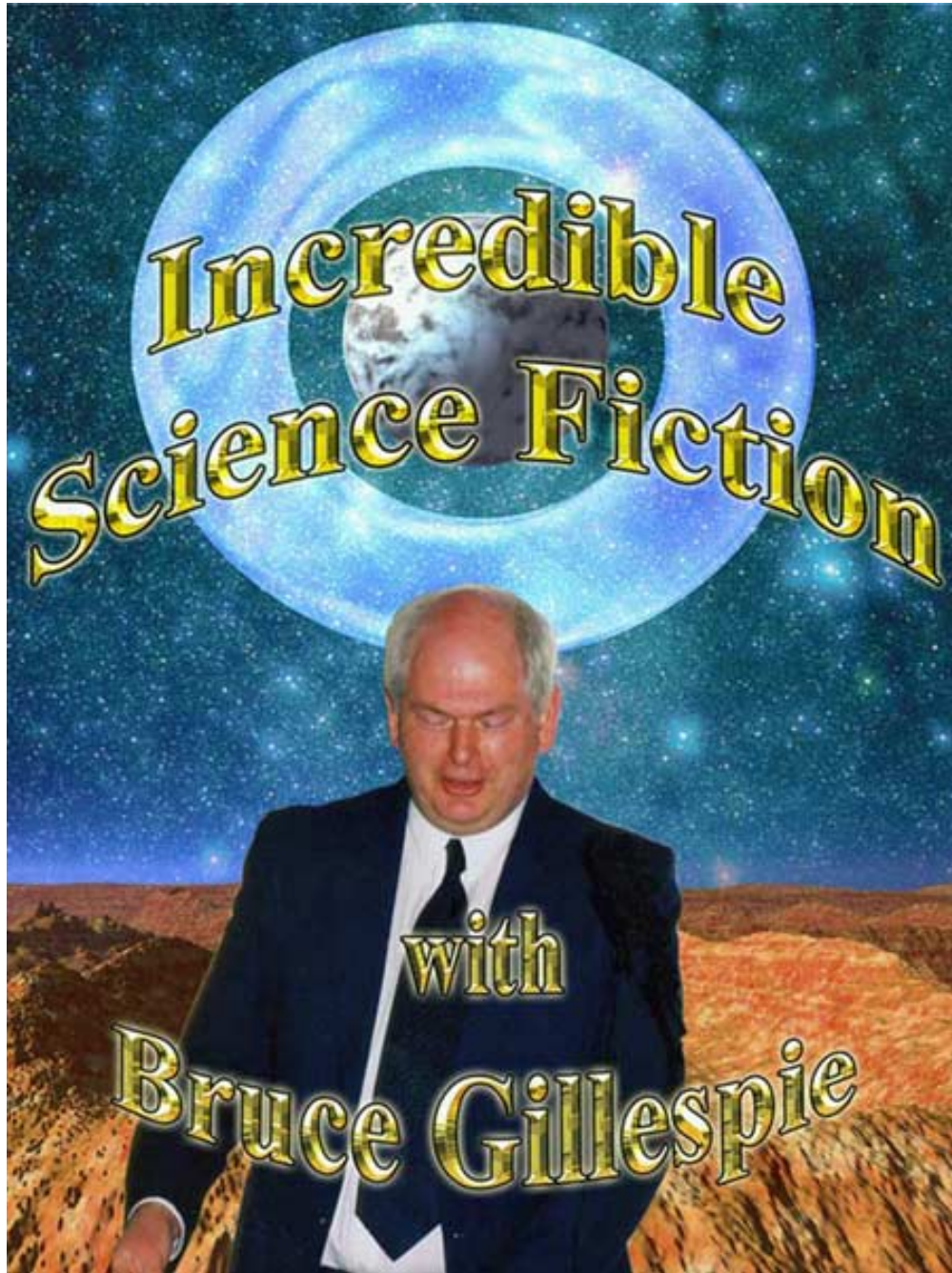
--Dr. M.L. King Jr.

I asked Dick Jenssen to have Ditmar create a special ecover for this issue of my ezine.

That ecover should feature Bruce R. Gillespie as a cover boy. Further, Ditmar was to remain silent about that cover so it would surprise Bruce when it appeared here.

This issue is a special double issue with two pieces by Bruce Gillespie, focusing on the world of Olaf Stapledon and Brian Aldiss. Some of the best of Bruce Gillespie, the same [BBB](#) to San Francisco next February.

Here is Ditmar's ecover for *e/* October 2004:



Incredible

Photo (May 2003), background art (September, 1999) and compositing by
Dick Jensen (August, 2004)

You can't fight in here, this is the War Room!
--Peter Sellers, Dr. Strangelove

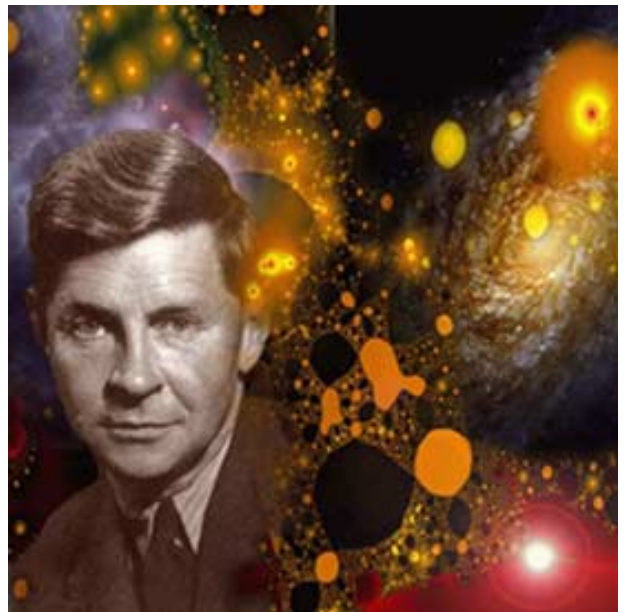
[The following article was written in Australian (mostly British) English. Every effort has been made to retain this language intact and to not translate it into US English. -Earl Kemp]

Discovering Olaf Stapledon*

Artwork by Dick Jenssen (Ditmar)

By Bruce R. Gillespie

Olaf Stapledon [William Olaf Stapledon] had no Scandinavian family links, but even that name "Olaf" made him seem slightly alien in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s, when his books appeared. He was brought up mainly in Port Saïd, where he and his family were the only permanent white residents. When he returned to England, he lived in and near Liverpool, becoming one of the few famous Liverpoolians never to move permanently to London. An earnest man who desperately wanted to help humanity, he proved inept at almost everything he did but writing, and to his perpetual shame was only able to support his family because of the inheritance he received after his father died. He remained an outsider all his life, yet few isolates have produced works that are as interesting as those of Olaf Stapledon.



Universe Maker

Photo from the cover of *Olaf Stapledon: Speaker for the Future*, by Brian Crossley (Liverpool University Press) (unknown photographer and date); fractal background and compositing by Dick Jenssen (August, 2004)

Why should one pay attention to Stapledon and his works? As far back as I can remember, he has always been the *other* great British literary science fiction writer. H.G. Wells is the first: *the* father of science fiction, the great British SF writer whose works I've read. If Wells is an island universe, Stapledon is the next one, there in the 1930s, separated from Wells by mainly black space. Stapledon wrote his major works almost before the birth of modern Campbellian science fiction. His works prefigure everything that came later, but today they are largely unread, and to many people they are unreadable. When his major novels were reissued in 1973 by Penguin, I gave up on *Star Maker* after reading 70 pages of it, and therefore did not try *Last and First Men*. A few years ago I sold most of my Stapledon books. Thanks, Dick Jenssen and Alan Stewart, for lending me copies of the books I no longer have.

I've returned to Stapledon only because of Robert Crossley's biography, *Olaf Stapledon: Speaking for the Future*. And I came across the biography only because of the indirect intervention of Brian Aldiss, who provides its Foreword. A few years ago David Seed of Liverpool University was setting up a

program of critical books about science fiction. He asked Brian Aldiss for suggestions for volumes. Brian suggested *The Best of SF Commentary*. That book still does not exist, although that's hardly the fault of David Seed, but dealing with Seed alerted me to the fine books that had already appeared in the program. A request for review copies followed, and one of them was the Crossley biography of Stapledon. Reading Crossley's excellent biography sent me straight back to the fiction.

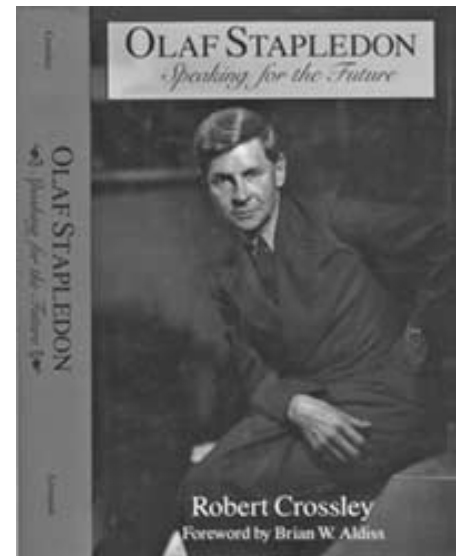
Two particular images of Olaf Stapledon stay clearly with me after reading this biography. The first appears in the "Acknowledgements":

The person most instrumental to this project and who most deserved to see it come to fruition is no longer alive. Agnes Stapledon, whose preservation of her husband's papers made a circumstantial account of his life possible, gave me unrestricted access both to manuscripts she had donated to the University of Liverpool and to the great wealth of materials she retained in her possession. Although we had only corresponded, never met, when I first talked with her in a nursing home in 1982, she handed over the keys to her house and invited me to move in and read whatever I found. This was the single most generous offer I have received in my career as a scholar, and now many years later I remain moved by her extraordinary gesture of trust. Agnes Stapledon died in the spring of 1984, three days before her ninetieth birthday. (p. xv)

As Crossley says, "when he died in 1950, nearly everything [Stapledon] had written and everything he had stood for was fading from popular memory."

The second image from Crossley's biography tells us much about the position that Stapledon's work retains today: legendary, but little read:

On 29 March 1949 my only biographical predecessor, Sam Moskowitz, saw Stapledon on a stage at a peace rally in Newark, New Jersey, in his single brief moment of international notoriety. The Cold War was in progress. He had just crossed the Atlantic for the first time in his life and encountered the new American witch-hunt in its first virulent outbreak.... On that March night Moskowitz may have been the only person in the Mosque Theater who had read any of Stapledon's fiction, the only one who hadn't come to hear political oratory but to see a legend. The name of Olaf Stapledon had passed by word of mouth through a small group of American science fiction readers who had discovered his out-of-print fantasies and fables in the 1930s...Theodore Sturgeon... phoned the Waldorf and asked if he could spare time for a social evening with some New York fans of his fiction. Stapledon had reason to make room in his schedule for Sturgeon and his friends. Several science-fiction writers had learned that his funds were frozen when he entered the United States and that he had appealed, unsuccessfully, to an American publisher for pocket money. Frederik Pohl immediately wrote to Stapledon with an offer of help and asked in return only that he try to meet with some of his American colleagues when he was in New York. On 31 March, Stapledon showed up at the West Side apartment of Fletcher Pratt, who was hosting the Hydra Club, a science-fiction discussion group that included two of the most important American editors of the genre--John W. Campbell and Donald Wollheim. A night of handshaking, autographing, and discussion of *Last and First Men*, *Odd John* and *Sirius* with an author who was a legendary figure for American science-fiction readers provided the solitary and wholly unpublicized moment when Olaf's literary accomplishment was recognized during his American journey. (pp. 8, 9, 379)



Why are these images important for understanding the life and work of Olaf Stapledon?

Meet Agnes Stapledon, Olaf's Australian cousin with whom he fell in love with when she was only twelve and he was in his late teens, but for whom he waited more than a decade; a classic love story that has had its own book written about it. Yet she was a woman much sinned against during the last decade of Stapledon's life. Stapledon, who looked youthful until his death while his wife aged at the normal rate, conducted several love affairs during his last decade, and seriously suggested to Agnes the 1940s equivalent of an open marriage. Yet Agnes maintained the marriage and kept her husband's study intact, nearly as he left it thirty-two years earlier. She had been patiently waiting for the biographer who might never have turned up. She was one of the few human beings to whom Stapledon was close, and she is presented in various idealised guises throughout the novels.

How did Stapledon's work slip out of popularity? His first three novels, *Last and First Men*, *Last Men in London*, and *Odd John*, were received ecstatically by reviewers in Britain and America, and sold very well. Crossley recalls the roll call of puzzled praise from journals such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Oxford Magazine*, *The New York Times* and *The New York Tribune*. J.B. Priestley declared *Last and First Men* as the season's "outstanding odd book", which resisted "any recognised category". *The Oxford Magazine* said that the "boldest imaginings of Mr Wells pale before the dreams of Mr Stapledon. In the late 1930s *Last and First Men* was well enough regarded to be picked as one of the first ten books in Penguin's series of Pelican paperbacks.



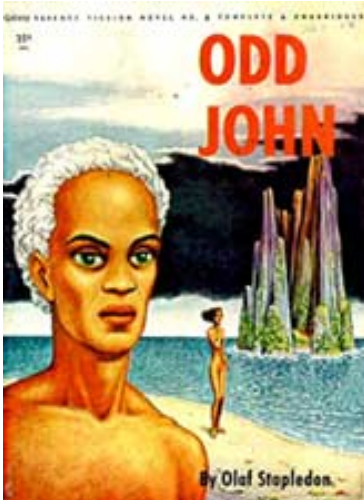
Brian Aldiss in the late 1990s.

A decade later after their great success, Stapledon's books could not be bought, except in secondhand stores. His influence remained not in the mainstream of English intellectual life, but deeply imprinted on the field of science fiction, both on writers and fans. He was the author who set off Arthur C. Clarke towards a writing career. "In a medical officer's quarters in India during World War II, Brian Aldiss glanced through a copy of the Pelican edition while he was awaiting an inoculation and was so captivated that for the only time in his life he stole a book. Stanislaw Lem's method of taking an idea for a walk seems to owe much to Stapledon, as does the scope of the work of Cordwainer Smith. Sam Moskowitz, Stapledon's witness in 1949, wrote the only Stapledon biography that precedes Crossley's. It's a 17-page essay, "Olaf Stapledon: Cosmic Philosopher", that appears in Moskowitz's *Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction*. In fandom, Stapledon's influence appeared in the famous Eight Stages of Fandom, invented by Jack Speer and Robert Silverberg to mirror Stapledon's Eighteen Stages of Mankind.

If, then, Stapledon's memory is kept faithfully but rather vaguely alive only by science fiction people, why remember him at all? I find it hard to answer that question, but I can assert that there would be an enormous gap in the SF universe if he had never existed.

This is the first time I've prepared an essay about a writer whose style I can't recommend. In *Last and First Men* and *Last Men in London* his tales are reports from some far-future observer delivering by telepathy a historical document to a receptive scribe of the 1930s. Remember, Penguin first published *Last and First Men* as a Pelican, i.e. non-fiction. There are few definable characters; instead, the characters are entire races of people. Stapledon writes in a nineteenth-century over-fussy style that must have seemed quaint in the 1940s. Even his two novels, *Sirius* and *Odd John*, are related by narrators who are not on stage during most of the events of the book. Relying on secondhand reports,

each narrator presents what is more like a documentary than a novel. Only Stapledon's ability to highlight sharp images or events--often very funny images or events despite the solemn imperturbability of the author's sentences--gives artistic power to these books.



Reading Stapledon, then, presents a real problem of style versus content. A reader of science fiction cannot avoid being interested in Stapledon because the whole field is indebted to him. One can make a fairly long list of stories that owe some or all of their ideas to Stapledon, yet I suspect that many of these unwitting plagiarists have never read his works. Between them, Wells and Stapledon created modern science fiction, yet Stapledon knew little of American genre science fiction until after he had done most of his best work.

In *Last and First Men*, Stapledon's first novel, he tells the history of humanity from his own present time until 2 billion years in the future. Humanity rises and falls on Earth until the year 5 million, when the human race moves to Venus. After several ups and downs there, they migrate to Neptune, which has become habitable as the Sun swells into a giant star. After 2 billion years, the Sun is about to fill the entire

solar system, destroying the Sixteenth Men even as they try to find a way to spread the seeds of humanity to the stars.

The main features of *Last and First Men* are its sense of time and its emphasis on the cyclic nature of human endeavour. Very little science fiction, even today, embraces the vast amounts of time that Stapledon takes for granted. Given that, he shows an acute sense of current history. For someone writing in 1930, Stapledon gets the main features of World War II fairly right--although I find in a later, 1954, edition of the book, the chapters on the 1930s and 1940s have been deleted because they are regarded as no longer accurate! Stapledon is rather fond of destructive forces, so there is not much left of Europe after World War II. America and China dominate the world. Later, a war between them leaves viable human activity only in small sections of the Southern Hemisphere. Civilisation renews itself in Patagonia. The people there form a civilisation that is much more self-aware and civilised than ours, but lacks much of our technology, because physical resources have been destroyed during the wars. Every Utopia has an Achilles' heel; the Patagonian civilisation falls; humanity is reduced to a tiny group of people living in the Arctic; but over time the race resurrects itself, only to find that the Moon is about disintegrate into the Earth. Off to Venus we go for umpteen million years; in part as a conquering race, destroying the native Venusians, and later becoming flying creatures. When humanity gets to Neptune, we adapt ourselves to massive gravitational forces and change shape altogether.



H.G. Wells.

What makes Stapledon a follower of H.G. Wells, but very different from the nineteenth-century British Utopians who preceded him, is his refusal to believe in a prescriptive Utopia. His vision is always Darwinian, not Marxist. Humanity does not inevitably improve; no revolution will settle human destiny once and for all. Instead, every now and again the vastness of time and the profligacy of human activity will enable some great society to emerge. Stapledon has no faith that evolution will automatically turn out a "superior" species. He clearly approves some of his far-future varieties of humanity, but he sees that nobody is immune to the massive natural forces that actually decide our fates. The overall flavour of *Last and First Men* is of vast melancholy; even the greatest achievements

of humanity will disappear in time.

It's fairly easy to see in *Last and First Men* an extension of the melancholy that pervades the penultimate scene of H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. The very last living creature on Earth, possibly our remote descendant, crawls along a beach beside a silent sea while a giant sun fills the sky. Kaput: end of everything. What makes Stapledon different is not only the immensely greater time perspective that he gives his book, but that he does not confine his viewpoint to that of a lone time traveller. In cutting himself off from a single character, he loses that tactile excitement of adventure that one always finds in Wells. He replaces it with width of perspective and completeness of detail. Using what quickly became one of the main clichés of science fiction--telepathy--as the means by which the far-future narrator tells his history, Stapledon tries to give his book the scope of an epic in which any individual disappears into the background of millions of years of history. The effect is to make all events co-existent, but it also removes the urgency of adventure narrative. To make up for this, *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker* function as encyclopedias of exciting SF ideas, most of which have been used by later writers, but many of which have not.

Stapledon is fond of little idea chapters that often have the vivacity lacking in the whole book. For instance, in *Last and First Men* he uses a few chapters to tell of the alien race that develops on Mars and later attempts to conquer Earth. Very different from Wells's Martians, this alien race is a group mind made up of ultra-microscopic independent flying moving creatures. Lem's cloud-like creatures in *The Invincible* are very much like Stapledon's Martians. You can almost watch Stapledon's mind elaborating on the original idea: first the tiny creatures, then "vital unities" forming nervous systems, then forming complicated neural systems; then "the Martian cloud-jelly" which "could bring to bear immense forces which could also be controlled for very delicate manipulation.

In *Star Maker*, nearly a decade later, all the elements of *Last and First Men* are pushed to their furthest limit. Despite the recent efforts of such authors as Greg Benford, Stephen Baxter and Greg Bear, *Star Maker* remains the most ambitious SF novel ever written. As with the works of those other authors, its sheer ambition often makes it just a shade unreadable.

The plot, such as it is, of *Star Maker* is founded in an unexplained fantasy, which perhaps explains why the book is not better known:

One night when I had tasted bitterness I went out on to the hill. Dark heather checked my feet. Below marched the suburban street lamps. Windows, their curtains drawn, were shut eyes, inwardly watching the lives of dreams. Beyond the sea's level darkness a lighthouse pulsed. Overhead, obscurity....

I sat down on the heather. Overhead obscurity was now in full retreat. In its rear the freed population of the sky sprang out of hiding, star by star. On every side the shadowy hills or the guessed, featureless sea extended beyond sight. But the hawk-flight of imagination followed them as they curved downward below the horizon. I perceived that I was on a little round grain of rock and metal, filmed with water and with air, whirling in sunlight and darkness. And on the skin of that little grain all the swarms of men, generation by generation, had lived in labour and blindness, with intermittent joy and intermittent lucidity of spirit. And all their history, with its folk-wanderings, its empires, its philosophies, its proud sciences, its social revolutions, its increasing hunger for community, was but a flicker in one day of the lives of stars. (p. 231)

And then, just like John Carter in the first of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars novels, the narrator looks back down the hill, to find his home and hometown vanished.

I myself was seemingly disembodied, for I could neither see nor touch my own flesh. And when I willed

to move my limbs, nothing happened. I had no limbs. The familiar inner perceptions of my body, and the headache which had oppressed me since morning, had given way to a vague lightness and exhilaration. (p. 233)

Then, just like that, the narrator's disembodied mind takes off for the stars. As a method of transport, it certainly beats faster-than-light spaceships.

It's impossible to summarise the content of *Star Maker*, so I won't. It's enough to say that it takes in, absorbs and spits out the entire action of *Last and First Men* as the merest footnote in its own time scale, which is the entire history of the universe. The narrator quickly loses track of Earth and our solar system. Somewhere out there he finds an alternative Earth. Life on the other Earth merely mirrors the rather dismal recent history of his own Earth, which is now so obviously heading towards World War II. He finds as a companion Bvalltu, both an inhabitant of the Other Earth and a mind who can accompany him as he ventures further into the universe.

Star Maker becomes both dazzling and wearying because Stapledon sets himself free from all constraints of time and space, while maintaining the prose of a scrupulous documentary observer. The nearest thing to passion we find is:

As our skill in disembodied flight increased, we found intense pleasure in sweeping hither and thither among the stars. We tasted the delights at once of skating and of flight. Time after time, for sheer joy, we traced huge figures-of-eight in and out around the two partners of a double star. Sometimes we stayed motionless for long periods to watch at close quarters the waxing and waning of a variable. Often we plunged into a congested cluster, and slid amongst its suns like a car gliding among the lights of a city....

His range of glimpsed civilisations includes an extraordinary number of biologies that are not based on our own assumptions. Most aliens in most SF books are basically ourselves in funny suits, but Stapledon's aliens are regularly based on truly alien premises. One planet's race has evolved from essentially slug-like ancestors. On another planet, a mollusc-like creature evolves until it becomes a living ship, with sails, rudder and prow, all part of the creature itself. Says the narrator: "It was a strange experience to enter the mind of an intelligent ship, to see the foam circling under one's nose..., to taste the bitter or delicious currents streaming past one's flanks, to feel the pressure of air on the sails as one beat up against the breeze, to hear beneath the water-line the rush and murmur of distant shoals of fishes..." (p. 286)

The more alien the creature, the more the narrator seems to identify with it. Towards the end of the book, his main races form a vast empire of associated stars, then universes. When vast plumes of gas begin to protrude from the stars, destroying entirely planetary systems, the main planetary races discover that the stars are sentient, and have become irritated by these pesky upstarts. The other races are able to establish contact with the stars, temporarily ending the havoc. On the surface of the stars live the flame creatures, who reappear in a rather poor novella of Stapledon's, "The Flames. Anticipating by some years all those stories of the heat death of the universe, the travellers see a future in which all the stars begin to falter and die. They venture backward in time, looking for the origins of the universe, and discover that even the nebulas were originally aware creatures, before they began to break down into separate stars.

Unfortunately religion raises its ugly head, giving rise to the title of the book. In this, Stapledon was very much a thinker bound by his times. His star travellers look for a barely glimpsed supermind, or super star, that lies behind all this vast activity. What they find is hardly any conventional God, but a remote experimenter that has spent forever making universe after universe. Our universe, billions of

years old though it might be, turns out to be merely an experiment, one of a long series. In the book's last pages, Stapledon speculates about the evolution of the *Star Maker* itself, and writes some of his finest prose.



Stapledonian Man

Artwork by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen) (August, 2000)

Why was Stapledon able to write these two novels, seemingly without any precedent but Wells? Not even his biographer can answer this question. Stapledon destroyed the working notes for all his novels, and once he was published and recognised, he was not above contributing to his own legendary status. Stapledon told the story that *Last and First Men* began with a holiday that he and Agnes took on the cliffs of Wales. In later years he talked about his "Anglesey experience", of standing on the cliffs and watching seals play on the rocks below him. He would claim later that the plan of *Last and First Men* came to him "in a flash." "The seals he observed were sunning themselves on the rocks, squirming and squealing with almost human vulnerability as the waves hit and drenched their warmed skin with cold spray. This much Agnes Stapledon, nearly fifty years after the event, could say for sure." Stapledon wrote later "Long ago (it was while I was scrambling on a rugged coast, where great waves broke in blossom on the rocks) I had a sudden fantasy of man's whole future, aeon upon aeon of strange vicissitudes and gallant endeavours in world after world, seeking a glory never clearly conceived, often betrayed, but little by little revealed." Crossley doubts Stapledon's claimed timetable of events, i.e. that *Last and First Men* was written shortly after the 1928 experience. It is much more likely, and much better fits Stapledon's personality, that he had been making laborious notes, and corresponding with researchers in many fields, long before 1928.

Curiously, Crossley fails to mention a very similar incident that occurs in Stapledon's oddest book, *Last*

Men in London. This is the second of the novels supposedly narrated by the far-future Neptunian to someone of Stapledon's time. After a preamble in which the Neptunian tells of his idyllic life in the extreme far future just before the solar system is about to be destroyed, he tells of how he became an official time explorer. In order to research Stapledon's own era he hitched his mind to a man of the time, Paul. Paul is, of course, Stapledon, but so is the 1930s teller of the tale, and the far-future Neptunian. In telling Paul's story, Stapledon gives us what must be very close to an autobiography, but it lacks the immediacy of an autobiography, because it is also the story of a far-future researcher being very puzzled by our own civilisation. As Stapledon's biographer, Crossley found in *Last Men in London* a valuable record of Stapledon's hair-raising experiences as a stretcher-bearer in France during World War I.

In *Last Men in London*, Paul and his father are standing on a crag overlooking a lake:

It was his father who first pointed out to him the crossing wave-trains of a mountain tarn, and by eloquent description made him feel that the whole physical world was in some manner a lake rippled by myriads of such crossing waves, great and small, swift and slow.... They counted five distinct systems of waves, some small and sharp, some broad and faint. There were also occasional brief cat's paws complicating the pattern. Father and son went down to the sheltered side of the lake and contemplated its more peaceful undulations. With a sense almost of sacrilege, Paul stirred the water with his stick, and sent ripple after ripple in widening circles. The father said, 'That is what you are yourself, a stirring up of the water, so that waves spread across the world. When the stirring stops, there will be no more ripples.... Thus did an imaginative amateur anticipate in a happy guess the 'wave mechanics' which was to prove the crowning achievement of the physics of the First Men. Paul was given to understand that even his own body, whatever else it was, was certainly a turmoil of waves, inconceivably complex, but no less orderly than the waves on the tarn.... It gave him a sense of the extreme subtlety and inevitability of existence. (pp. 84--5)

If Stapledon's work is based on certain basic images, then this must be the major one, not just the vision of seals on rocks. To see the universe as a pattern of intersecting ripples appears to have freed Stapledon from the intellectual constraints of traditional religion. At one time he was much influenced by an inner-city pastor, who stood for traditional religion. Paul (i.e. Olaf) shows this pastor, called the Archangel in the novel, some of his youthful poems. What for Paul had seemed a growing sense of God-in-the-Universe seems like heresy to the pastor. Paul returns to a sense of "all that vastness within which man is but a tremulous candle-flame, very soon to be extinguished. With this sentence we are back at the kernel of *Last and First Men*.

Stapledon wrote two novels that are very different from his time chronicles. *Odd John* and *Sirius* are both limited to small time and space frames, are structured quite conventionally, and are absorbing as novels. *Sirius* is certainly the best written of all Stapledon's works; the most dramatic, the most comic, the most vivid, and interestingly, the first of his books to be largely ignored in Britain and not taken up by an American publisher.

Both *Odd John* and *Sirius* are superman novels--or, in the case, of *Sirius*, a super-dog novel. Both owe much to Beresford's *The Hampdenshire Wonder*, which is one of the few British novels that link Wells's early work and Stapledon's major novels. Beresford's book tells of a super-intelligent child who is eventually so bored and dismayed by the human race that he commits suicide. The hero of *Odd John*, very similar to Beresford's superchild, and also to the main character of George Turner's *Brain Child*, is horrified and disgusted by the human race to which he feels superior. He assembles a small group of like-minded children spread throughout the world and sets up a Utopia on a Pacific island. In

turn, the rest of humanity tries to capture the island, whereupon the children destroy their Utopia and commit suicide. The superchild idea has been used plenty of times since, especially in John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* and Sturgeon's *More than Human*, but *Odd John* was rightly judged a remarkable book when it appeared in 1936.

Sirius, published in 1944, is a much more closely observed book, and much more adventurous. Sirius is one of a number of dogs specially bred to be a super-dog, but he is the only experiment that succeeds. Stapledon's scientific reading is as exemplary as ever, since the combination of gene selection and foetus manipulation he describes sounds much like methods that might be used today. Stapledon had no time for the crude theories of eugenics that were popular in the 1930s and remained prominent in magazine science fiction for decades to come.

Sirius grows up in the household of his "inventor", Thomas Trelone, his wife Elizabeth, based on Agnes, and his daughter Plaxy, who is almost certainly based on Stapledon's unconsummated love of that time. Part of Trelone's method is to slow down Sirius's development so that he ages at much the same rate as Plaxy, the daughter. In this way Sirius and Plaxy, who can never become lovers, become deeply attached to each other. The family grows up on a farm outside Liverpool. For much of his life Sirius is employed as a very clever sheep-herder, but Trelone also teaches him to speak and to read. Since Sirius cannot reveal his accomplishments to more than a small number of humans, he is separated from humanity. Since he is obviously quite different from all other dogs, he is separated from his own kind, except when he can find a willing bitch. Sirius suffers from a deep isolation whose poignancy matches that of the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

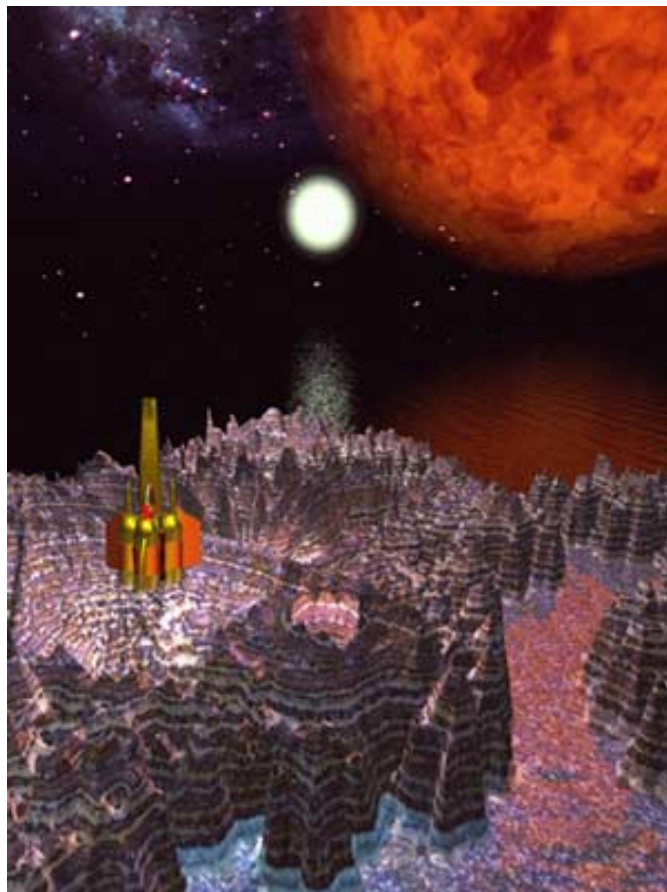
Sirius, like *Odd John* before him, is Stapledon's ideal observer of human foibles. Except that, unlike a satirist, Stapledon is not interested in human frailties, except as evidence of some deep horror at the centre of the human race. Like *Odd John*, Sirius is eventually destroyed by stupid, blind humanity, but not before Sirius has invented a new kind of singing and come to some kind of understanding of a world in which he is always a stranger. Much of the cleverness of the book is the way in which Stapledon shows how Sirius remains doggy as well as human: his assumptions based on smell, not sight; constantly frustrated because he does not have hands; constantly tempted to abandon his training program and revert to wild dog status.

What links the two sides of Stapledon's work? Most of the clues can be found in *Last Men in London*, which on any other grounds is Stapledon's least readable book. In that book he speaks of Paul's sense of the "overwhelming presence of the Cosmos. Stapledon's father was an amateur astronomer, and in every one of the books the stars are seen more as personal friends than far-off objects. In *Star Maker* we find sentient stars; in *Last Men in London* Stapledon speaks of most members of the human race as "unlit beacons". In "The Flames", published in 1947, his alien creature wants to take over the human race, saying: "You will no longer be the frustrated, bewildered, embittered, vindictive mental cripples that most of you now are". Stapledon's two super-beings, *Odd John* and *Sirius*, escape from being "mental cripples", but there is no place for them in the world.

During the 1920s and 1930s Stapledon became convinced that there was little hope left for civilised humanity. He had undergone World War I, in his role as pamphleteer for the various Working Men's Groups in Liverpool had seen the effects of the Depression on society during the 1920s and 1930s, and could see clearly the approach of World War II. He believed that conventional weapons would destroy almost all inhabitants of the northern hemisphere during the War. At the end of the War, his prophecy proved incorrect, but the power of atomic weapons had now been unveiled. No wonder he was pessimistic!

However, many thinking people during the 1930s were as disturbed by events as he was. What made

Stapledon different was his unwillingness to see a hope of a solution in any of the alternatives offered. In one of the better passages of *Last Men in London*, the main character debunks every single solution, either social or personal, offered during the 1930s to solve the crises at the time. The social engineering solutions offered by either Nazism or Communism are unacceptable, because they allow no room for the personal; intensely personal solutions, such as Buddhism, are unacceptable because they allow the mediator to ignore the world. Stapledon shows the harsh side of his personality: his belief that only an evolutionary superior human being could bring hope to the world--hence his two most interesting novels, *Odd John* and *Sirius*. But his proposed superior beings are not superior in the way that pervaded fascist thought at the time and continued in much science fiction throughout the next thirty years. Born into our civilisation, Stapledon's superior beings are largely ineffective in society, since they will see things clearly and not be gulled by the assumptions of that society. They will have a sense of responsibility for the whole of humanity, but will put this responsibility into action only at the personal level, not as a collective party of government.



Binary Takeoff

Artwork by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen) (May, 2001)

If I'm not clearer than that, it's because

Stapledon becomes very muddled when he tries to show us what his superior human being or cosmic philosophy will be like. It has something to do with the Cosmic Mind; hence his interest in telepathy, but Stapledon would never allow the individual mind to be swallowed up by such a Cosmic Mind. The only way he can think about his ideal humanity is to skip current humanity and write of various Utopias in *Last and First Men*, or skip humanity altogether in *Star Maker*. There's Olaf, and there's the universe, and not much in between. In Olaf Stapledon we find a fertile mind forced to arid conclusions. Hence the rather dry way he has of writing. Hence the lack of human characters, except in *Odd John* and *Sirius*. Worse, Stapledon is a would-be monk who would throw off traditionally puritanical constraints on sexual expression; a would-be believer in God who cannot believe in anything but the great forces of the universe. What we continue to be grateful for is that this very frustrated individual was also wonderfully inventive, and that we science fiction readers, if hardly anybody else, can still enjoy the best of his inventions.

Bibliography of editions used:

Crossley, Robert, *Olaf Stapledon: Speaking for the Future*, Foreword by Brian W. Aldiss, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994, 474 pp.

Moskowitz, Sam, *Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction*, New York: Meridian Books, 1963, 354 pp.

Stapledon, Olaf, *Last and First Men*, London: Methuen, 1930, 355 pp.

Stapledon, Olaf, *Last Men in London*, London: The Science Fiction Book Club, 1963 (first published 1932), 312 pp.

Stapledon, Olaf, *Odd John* and *Sirius*, New York: Dover Publications, 1972, 309 pp.

Stapledon, Olaf, *To the End of Time*, selected and introduced by Basil Davenport, New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 775 pp. Contains *Last and First Men* (originally published 1930), *Star Maker* (1937), *Odd John* (1935), *Sirius* (1944) and "The Flames' (1947).

- - -

* Copyright by Bruce Gillespie, 31 March 1997

If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie.
--Tim O'Brien

[The following article was written in Australian (mostly British) English. Every effort has been made to retain this language intact and to not translate it into US English. -Earl Kemp]

A Valediction Forbidding Melancholy: Aldiss and the Far Future

By Bruce Gillespie

I

To peer into the far future points us back to science fiction's past. H G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon, science fiction's two British pioneers, make most later writers seem redundant.

Join Wells's Time Traveller (*The Time Machine*, 1895) as he hurtles forward in time, covering hundreds, then thousands, then millions of years:

At last a steady twilight brooded over the earth, a twilight only broken now and then when a comet glared across the darkling sky. The band of light that had indicated the sun had long since disappeared; for the sun had ceased to set-it simply rose and fell in the west, and grew ever broader and more red . . . At last, some time before I stopped, the sun, red and very large, halted motionless upon the horizon, a vast dome glowing with a dull heat . . . The earth had come to rest with one face to the sun.

On a beach many millions of years in future he encounters the world's last living creature and probably humanity's remote descendant: "a monstrous crab-like creature . . . as large as yonder table, with its many legs moving slowly and uncertainly, its big claws swaying, its long antennae . . . and its stalked eyes gleaming at you on either side of its metallic front."

The beach itself shows few signs of life apart from its crab-like inhabitants: "There were no breakers and no waves, for not a breath of wind was stirring. Only a slight oily swell rose and fell like a gentle breathing."

Here we see Wells's genius for destroying, with spectacular images and clear prose, pious nineteenth-century ideas of the Last Days, those potent Biblical images of spectacular retribution and reward that people had traditionally learned from the Book of Revelation. In the final pages of *The Time Machine*, he dramatises for his 1895 public new ideas about Earth's vastly elongated future, the expansion and decay of the dying sun, and the devolution and eventual disappearance of life itself.

The mood we derive from Wells's final days, however, is still Biblical: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." It matches that mood of dying fall at the end of the nineteenth century, the failure of optimism that is most noticeable in the music of the time-Mahler's mocking *Ländler* and Vaughan Williams' revival of medieval modes-and culminates in World War I, Proust, and all that.



Global Adam and Eve

Artwork by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen) (November, 2001)

Thirty million years of future, however, offer us a good long time before all human endeavour, and life itself, expires on a cold beach under an immense red sun. In 1930, Olaf Stapledon takes up Wells's challenge in *Last and First Men*, lengthening the range of human life considerably, to two billion years.

Like Wells, Stapledon faced the problem of sending back information from the future to we observers in the dim past. Wells solved the problem by allowing his Time Traveller to ride his time machine back from the far future to deliver his message. Stapledon's far-future inhabitant sends back the story of humanity's future as a message implanted directly in the mind of the writer. Convenient, but this hardly solves the problem that would bedevil all far future fiction from 1930 onward: how can any information from the far future make any sense to a person from our own time?

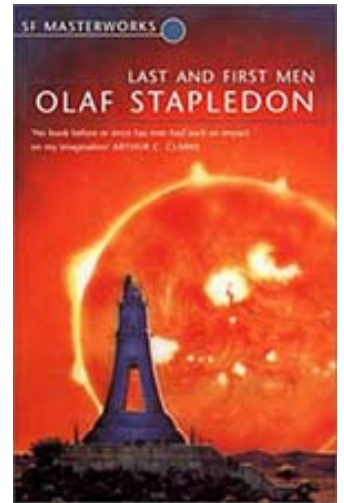
Wells solved the problem by making it redundant. In *The Time Machine*, we only know that part of

future events that his Time Traveller can observe or reasonably guess.

Stapledon's observer transmits what he believes we make sense to the people of 1930. Stapledon pretends not to be writing fiction, but documented fact. So successful was his ploy that when in 1937 Penguin printed the first paperback edition of *Last and First Men*, the firm published it as a Pelican Book (reference book), not a Penguin Book (fiction).

Last and First Men follows the many stages of human existence, as humans try various social experiments, conduct disastrous wars, almost disappear from the earth, rebuild civilisation, then take off for Venus, then the outer planets, as the sun begins to cool and grow. Humanity's final stage is living on Neptune, just before the sun begins the final paroxysm that will destroy the solar system.

You would think that after two billion years, humanity would have grown a bit sick of life in general. But no, the urge to cling onto life remains at the end: "Great are the stars, and man is of no account to them. But man is a fair spirit, whom a star conceived and a star kills. He is greater than those bright blind companies. For though in them there is incalculable potentiality, in him there is achievement, small, but actual." Brave words indeed, and melancholy, since at the beginning of *Last and First Men* Stapledon successfully predicts the pattern of human ignobility of humanity that would dominate the 1930s and 1940s.



II



The scale and implications of Wells's and Stapledon's work are too immense to be taken on directly. From time to time, British SF writers return to elements of their work as sources of inspiration. Brian W. Aldiss was the next British SF writer to take up the challenges presented by Wells and Stapledon. He did this in several short stories published in the 1960s, and in the series of novelettes that were collected and expanded into the novel *Hothouse* (1962, issued in the USA as *The Long Afternoon of Earth*).

Most of the stories that Aldiss wrote within a few years of the *Hothouse* pieces share a deep poetic melancholy and pessimism that was to gradually dissipate in his later work. 'Old Hundredth' is a condensed fable about humanity's failing itself. Having found a way to become immortal, humans abdicate from a never-quite-decaying world. The last

conscious creature, a giant sloth, offers a small, but significant challenge to the assumptions of this world.

Much the same pattern can be found in 'The Source' and 'The Worm That Flies', in which one man seeks humanity's vital origins in far futures from which all vitality has been leached. The tone of these stories perhaps owes more to Don A. Stuart's (John W. Campbell's) 'Twilight' and 'Forgetfulness' (genre classics from the late 1930s) than Wells and Stapledon, but Aldiss adds many original notions and his own yearnings towards the mood of late Victorian poetry.

At first glance, *Hothouse* seems to echo the melancholy sonority of stories like 'Old Hundredth' and the last pages of Wells's *Time Machine*. Several million years in the future, the sun is slowly expanding as it approaches the final stages of its life. The earth presents only one face to the sun, as the moon

presents one face to earth: "They were locked face to face, and so would be, until the sands of time ceased to run, or the sun ceased to shine." The side of earth that faces the sun is a fevered jungle dominated by one continent-covering tree, a distant descendant of the banyan. At the edges of this jungle, during the final sections of the novel, the sun appears to slip below the horizon:

Just for a moment the sun still shone on them. They had a last glimpse of a world with gold in the dull air, a floor of black foliage . . . the shoulder of the hill shrugged upwards, and down they jolted into the world of night. With one voice they gave forth a cry: a cry that echoed into the unseen wastes about them, dying as it fled.



The overall impression of the decay of the earth and entropic loss of dynamism throughout the solar system is reinforced by the travels of the traversers, 'gross vegetable equivalent[s] of a spider', as they play their way between earth and moon:

. . . the multitudinous strands of cable floated across the gap between them, uniting the worlds. Back and forth the traversers could shuttle at will, vegetable astronauts huge and insensible, with Earth and Luna both enmeshed in their indifferent net.

With surprising suitability, the old age of the Earth was snared about with cobwebs.

Much that we take for granted has changed radically. Animal life, including humanity, has almost disappeared from the world. Plants have changed greatly, becoming mobile vegetable hunters and hunted, weaving their way through the branches of the gigantic tree that dominates the world. They include the trappersnapper, a 'horny caselike affair, just a pair of square jaws', and the leapycreeper, whose 'roots and stems were also tongues and lashes.

Humanity is now reduced to a few isolated tribes of child-like people, resembling Wells's Eloi more than his Morlocks, but facing moment-to-moment difficulties that threaten at any moment to destroy the species:

A section of the bark gaped wide, revealing a pale deadly mouth. An oystermaw . . . had dug itself into the tree. Jabbing swiftly, Flor thrust her stick into the trap. As the jaws closed, she pulled with all her might, Lily-yo steadying her. The oystermaw, taken by surprise, was wrenched from its socket. Opening its maw in shock, it sailed outward through the air. A rayplane took it without trying.



Bruce Gillespie and Brian Aldiss at Stonehenge in 1974.

As with the Greene tribe in Aldiss's first novel, *Non-Stop*, these primitive people retain only fragments of earlier languages and culture. They try to retain a social organisation, despite staying constantly on the move. Other creatures met during the novel, such as the morel and the sodal, are scarcely recognisable remnants of creatures alive in our own time. In a Wellsian time stream, they would be the very last stage before Earth's history disintegrates and begins that inevitable decline that ends with that final crab on the last shore of the last ocean. In a Stapledonian time stream, Aldiss's people would

be the merest footnotes to humanity's greater story, one flickering downturn in humanity's fortunes before its story begins again.

III

In catching and grasping the baton of the long view handed on by Wells and Stapledon, what has Aldiss actually done with it? On the description of *Hothouse* I've given so far, he seems to be taking us on a journey that is at the tag end of all things, an era when everything we value from our own time is about to be extinguished. Yet as soon as we begin reading the book, the mood of melancholy disappears. Within the first few pages of the novel, the child-like tribe defeat several of the jungle's dangerous creatures, lose several of their number of to a few others and suffer a split in the group, as a result of which several members decide to take a ride on a traverser up one of the cables of the web towards the moon. The moon, we find, has become a paradise, a planet more congenial to humans than the banyan-covered earth. The members of the tribe who stay behind on earth, forever being caught by and escaping from the many creatures of the jungle, begin a pilgrimage that takes them out to sea and on a voyage towards the sun-bereft section of the planet.



All, then, is full of life, adventure, peril-and for the reader, a great deal of fun. *Hothouse* is one of Aldiss's 'comic infernoes', a series of pratfalls as well as adventures. Gren, the tribesman who becomes separated from the rest of the group, teams up with Yattmur, from one of the very few other groups of humans on Earth. They take with them the tummy-bellies, ridiculous fat little creatures who had been physically connected to a tree on the shore until Gren cut off their 'tails. Aldiss makes them into the Fools of his adventure, like Lear's fool a way in which the author can express, in continual childish whining nonsense, truths that Gren will not acknowledge:

. . . they came scampering forward, seizing Gren's and Yattmur's hands. "O mighty master and sandwich-makers!" they cried. "All this mighty watery world sailing is too much badness, too much badness, for we have sailed away and lost all the world. The world has gone by bad sailing and we must quickly good-sail to get it back."

Another memorable comic invention found in *Hothouse* is the "heckler": a small flying machine, an artifact from the twenty-first century found in a cave. When the travellers activate it by accident, it can still bleat out its propaganda messages. They call it "Beauty":

With scarcely a murmur, Beauty rose from the ground, hovered before their eyes, rose above their heads. They cried with astonishment, they fell backwards, breaking the yellow container. It made no difference to Beauty. Superb in powered flight, it wheeled above them, glowing richly in the sun.

When it had gained sufficient altitude, it spoke.

"Make the world safe for democracy!" it cried. Its voice was not loud but piercing . . . "Who rigged the disastrous dock strike of '31?" Beauty demanded rhetorically. "The same men who would put a ring through your noses today. Think of yourselves, friends and vote for SRH-vote for freedom!"

Aldiss makes Beauty into one of the most memorable "characters" from the novel, and also takes a

neat swipe at the pretensions of our own civilisation.

If *Hothouse* has grandeur and enormous verbal energy, what then gives it weight? And if most critics don't place it as highly as Wells's or Stapledon's best works, why would I want to claim Aldiss as their direct literary descendant?

What at first seems a great weakness of *Hothouse* is in fact one of its strengths. Aldiss makes no pretence to be writing a realistic novel. This is not a documentary sent back from the future. "Nobody cared any more", writes Aldiss in the book's second paragraph, "for the big questions that begin 'How long . . .?' or 'Why . . .?'" It was no longer a place for mind. It was a place for growth, for vegetables. It was like a *Hothouse*." None of the author's observations could have been made by anybody living in the era in which this book takes place. This is god's-viewpoint writing at its most unapologetic.

What literary powers, then, does Aldiss give his narrator that were unavailable to Wells's Time Traveller or Stapledon's Last Man? Characterisation, in a word. No matter how vast this future world, how teeming in life, that world can only become conscious in the minds of self-aware observers. In such a world, then, it becomes Aldiss's task to inject personal consciousness into his world, and show us the effect of that reintroduction.

In this whole vast world, two small humans, Gren and Yattmur, occupy our point of view. The threat to them comes not from outside monsters, but from a morel—an intelligent fungus that slides from a tree onto Gren's back and becomes a parasite of his mind and body. Aldiss's Jungian morel, who develops into the third main character of the novel, finds that Gren's mind contains the ancestral memory of all human history, including scenes from the world as it was before the earth became a *Hothouse*. The morel invades Gren's nervous system and increasingly "Like a dusty harp, it [the morel's voice] seemed to twang in some lost attic of his head." Gren becomes cut off from his surroundings by the experiences that the morel finds hidden in his mind. Yattmur is left to guide the action and feel anguish at the way Gren becomes detached from her and the tummy-bellies, for whom they have taken on responsibility. She follows Gren because she loves him and there is no one else left in the world for her. Twice during the novel, Gren and Yattmur find pleasant places where they could have settled and spent the rest of their lives. Each time, the morel drives Gren on, and Yattmur follows. The morel wants to reproduce itself, by attaching its new second half to Laren, the baby born to Gren and Yattmur. Gren is so befuddled that he becomes a willing partner of the morel's scheme to trick Yattmur into handing over the baby. The scene where the baby just manages to escape its fate is a masterpiece of horror, yet has a comic outcome, by which the morel finds a new host in a traverser, which sets off for the moon. Gren feels that he has woken from a dream:

It was over. The parasite was defeated. He would never again hear the inner voice of the morel twanging through his brain.

At that, loneliness more than triumph filled him. But he searched wildly along the corridors of his memory and thought, He has left me something good: I can evaluate, I can order my mind, I can remember what he taught me—and he knew so much.

The vastness of Aldiss's vision, then, is given poignancy because of his belief in the importance of individual characters. But this very richness, this capacity of Gren and Yattmur to grow in humanity and eventually take responsibility for a world that had seemed to be destroying them, makes us reevaluate the book's more obvious and extravagant ideas.

Aldiss, as godlike author, asserts that this world is hurtling towards devolution. During the book's last few pages, an unexpectedly bright burst of the sun's energy warns that the earth is about to undergo further great change. The sodal, a Lewis Carroll-like giant fish carried around by servants, the last

creature to have direct memories of Earth's past, asserts:

" . . . not only does nature have to be wound up to wind down, it has to wind down to be wound up. . . . So nature is devolving. Again the forms are blurring! They never ceased to be anything but inter-dependent-the one always living off the other-and now they merge together once"ore. Were the tummy-bellies vegetable or human? Are the sharp-furs human or animal?"

Do we find here the sigh of melancholy that we find in Wells when his traveller was faced with the same process of devolution at the end of *The Time Machine*? Do we find here the 'vanity of vanities' feeling that overcomes us when we read in Stapledon of humanity's endless declines and falls and hollow triumphs? Not a bit of it.

Aldiss's tone is so mercurial, so committed to simultaneous joy, struggle and ferocity, that I and other readers have often speculated about its origins. In his recent autobiography, *The Twinkling of an Eye*, Aldiss suggests the origin of a major element in the novel:

In those gardens, we came to the Biggest Tree in the World, an old banyan. It crept across the park in all directions, as if setting out to conquer the whole globe. . . . Thanks to its longevity-not least in the imagination-the Calcutta banyan eventually reached England, entered one of my books, and filled the whole globe.

The *Hothouse* world itself based more on Aldiss's experiences in Burma during World War II than on any fiction he had ever read. The first 200 pages of *The Twinkling of an Eye* are saturated in Aldiss's excitement at remembering his escape Britain, being stripped down to bare essentials, including the shedding all of his childhood and teenage doubts and assumptions-and glorying in the tropical sunlight:

I would lie basking, a strange part-coloured fish, buttocks and legs white, torso deep brown, in the shallow water . . . We could see nothing but the clear blue sky overhead, the clear water below, flowing over its gravel bed, and the grassy banks of the canal . . .

This could be almost a quotation from a quiet moment in *Hothouse*.

If the emotional tone of *Hothouse* is given much of its sombre anchoring strength by its movement from light into darkness, so the book probably owes much to Aldiss's pilgrimage back from Burma and Sumatra to a sun-starved, ungrateful, joyless Britain in the years after World War II. He says little in his autobiography about his failed first marriage, but in a speech in 1978 in Melbourne, which both I and the editor of this volume attended, Aldiss told of the circumstances under which *Hothouse* was written. Cut off from his first wife and his first two children, he lived a hand-to-mouth existence for some years, in a flat above a commercial bath house, from which the steam rose continually through his floor. What more appropriate inspiration for a novel called *Hothouse*?

The process of writing *Hothouse* gave Aldiss a new life, a vigorously independent spirit and the basis of his later success (his only Hugo Award). It allowed him to leap free from the limitations of post-war Britain. Irrepressible hope enlivens every line of *Hothouse*. While humanity remains, consciousness remains, and while consciousness remains, ferocious intellectual energy remains a possibility. Devolution is not something to be sighed about. Devolution is seen not as simplification, but simply the other side of evolution. Both are continuous adaptations to change. In *An Age*, five years later (*Cryptozoic!* in all later editions), Aldiss takes the idea one step further, proposing that the vast sweep of our "evolutionary" past is merely a prediction of our devolutionary future, and that what we think of as our future is in fact our constantly forgotten past. We adapt, not devolve; Aldiss celebrates life, not

mourns its changes. The visions of Wells and Stapledon have not failed, but are constantly renewed.

Editions Used

Brian W. Aldiss, *Hothouse*, London: Faber & Faber, 1962

Olaf Stapledon, *Last and First Men*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1934 Fountain Library edition of 1930 first edition

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine and Other Stories*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946

Other Items of Interest

Brian Aldiss, *The Twinkling of an Eye: My Life as an Englishman*, London: Little, Brown, 1998

Brian W. Aldiss, *An Age*, London: Faber & Faber, 1967

Brian W. Aldiss, *A Romance of the Equator: Best Fantasy Stories*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1989

Brian W. Aldiss. Foreword to Robert Crossley, *Olaf Stapledon: Speaking for the Future*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994

Brian W. Aldiss and David Wingrove, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1986 (entries on H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon)

Bruce Gillespie, 'Literature Which Awakens Us: The Science Fiction of Brian W. Aldiss', in Michael J. Tolley and Kirpal Singh (eds), *The Stellar Gauge: Essays on Science Fiction Writers*, Melbourne: Norstrilia Press, 1980

- - -

*This piece was written in August 2000 and appeared in *Tirra Lirra*, a Melbourne magazine of articles about the arts. It is based on an article that last appeared in *The Stellar Gauge*, edited by Kirpal Singh and Michael Tolley for Norstrilia Press in 1979. It was one of the best books we published at Norstrilia Press. --Bruce Gillespie.

He'd killed a couple of dozen men for the crime, he always said, of wearing the other side's uniform. ... There were no enemies in war. Just victims. Victims of historical process.

--Joe Haldeman, *The Coming*

"Shrink, I Wanna Kill...."*

Or "I play your dick one long time, Charlie...."

By Earl Kemp

When I moved to California with The Porno Factory in 1965 and purchased a house in suburban El Cajon, one of the neighbor's 18-year-old sons became my tour guide for lust filled Tijuana. In fact, Harold Butler became much more than that. He was the bareass nature boy who took me on the thrill ride of my life up until that point in time. I wrote of this once-in-a-lifetime experience as "Eat at the Blue Fox," in *e/3*.

Because I had moved directly from high school into an adult world of work and slavery, of marriage and fatherhood, I missed out on being a kid...a teenager...a hell-bent goof-off trying to find myself, horsing around, experimenting...recognizing within myself a consciously aware life.

There is a cliché that covers parts of it, something about "the child being father to the man" that really looks perverted and dangerously askew from the outside but looks like perfection from an internal point of view.

Harold and I, along with some of his buddies, did it all. We went hunting for things like deer and coyotes and varmints to kill. We collected and carried around a lot of guns and ammo. We affected camouflage (hunting, *not* military) when we wore clothes at all. We would take exhausting hikes just outside town wearing only gun belts and holsters slung low on our hips. (And with fully loaded six-shooters in those holsters. We were somehow playing John Wayne fading away into the western sunset.) Other than that, we wore engineer boots because the terrain was too painful on bare feet. We roamed at will through wilderness areas that, today, contain nothing but condos after condos...no naturalness left, no more deer and coyotes and varmints to kill. A countywide ordinance against the firing of any weapon. A world of delight and fantasy that no longer exists for anyone.

And for most of that time, the awful killing years were running rampant in Vietnam.

So much so that, a year or so later, most of those guys who formed that thoroughly alive no-holds-barred gang drifted off into the military in various different services.

It was like the loss of a brother when Harold Butler volunteered for the Marines and then was sent off to Vietnam right out of basic training. About the only things he knew how to do well were kill critters (not innocent people), party, and smoke dope. Little wonder I missed him so very much.

Naturally we kept in as close touch as possible over those years, writing each other regularly, and making occasional surprise telephone calls in the middle of the night. On one occasion, when he somehow got leave through mere accident, he went directly to Tan Son Nhat and bought a ticket to Los Angeles on the next flight out of Saigon. That was very illegal, of course, because his one-week pass forbid any such spontaneous foolishness.

I picked him up at LAX, fully loaded for a camping trip, and we spent a few delightful days basking in the sun on the Colorado River while he tried to forget about all that awful killing and stinking buddy body bagging...and then he flew right back to Vietnam and no one ever knew he had technically been AWOL...sort of like George Bush...hiding out from the awful killing years.

#

Along came 1967.

My third daughter was born in August, just one month before I went to Vietnam. Then, in October, the Big One was born when President Johnson, via Public Law 90-100, started the wheels rolling for the Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, and began the inspiration for my personal ode to freedom and political duplicity, only I didn't know it at the time.

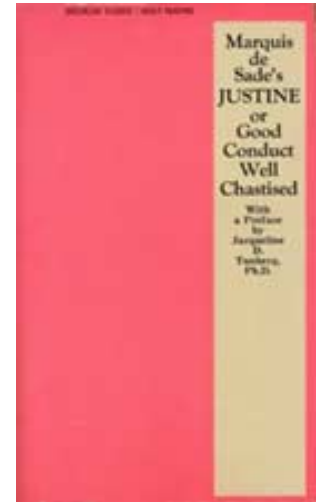
By 1967 I had turned into a bitter, frustrated, ashamed American. It was all I could do to just get through each day with all that bloodshed on my conscience. I felt as if I was personally involved in killing all those totally innocent Vietnamese women, infants, children, cripples, and geriatrics that appeared to delighted the USA administration so thoroughly.

I was quite involved with a number of professors from San Diego State University who wanted me to lecture to their classes about political protest...particularly about "Pornography as Political Protest."

One of those professors, Dr. Jacqueline D. Tunberg, was very influential on me because she was, personally, so obsessed with the duplicity of our government and the fraudulent extent they went to pretend that what we were doing over there was in some manner for our protection or benefit. [Sound familiar, Bush?]

She was also a powerful and articulate expert witness for the defense in any First Amendment related trial going on around San Diego. I watched her several times embarrass and humiliate prosecuting attorneys with her superior knowledge and because of their ineptness. I was very sorry that she never had the opportunity to defend any Greenleaf Classic product...and especially me personally.

Time allows itself to double back upon reality. (History repeats itself, says the cliché.) Today's lies about Iraq and why we must protect America from what they might someday think of trying to do to us by killing thousands and thousands of totally innocent peons...right down to suckling babies...before they make their mythical move against the USA in the name of George Bush's (and his bought and paid for owners') obscene personal profits perfectly echoes those awful killing years.



Only these new awful killing years are going to last forever...as long as there is a drop of fossil fuel left in Saudi Arabia to steal for use in our guzzling SUVs and tin box Hummers....



This is the actual peace symbol that I wore for numbers of those war-protesting years.

Between writing occasional introductions to some of Greenleaf's better pornography, Dr. Tunberg ruined me. While I spent time with her in her classroom at San Diego State University and in her lovely home, she stuffed my mind and my thoughts with contempt for damned near every false word that came out of Washington, DC. I got to the point where the sight of military camouflage or an olive drab vehicle passing in the street would make me cringe with despair and have to fight off nausea and vomiting. She would run into the streets shaking her fist at them and damning them to hell. I wore an anti-war peace symbol around my neck most of the time during those awful killing years and spoke out on every occasion possible about our atrocities that the normal-is there any such thing?-citizens would be taxed to pay for over many decades to come, and about all the innocent blood staining our hands and our consciences.

#

One of the anomalies of the entire situation was that we weren't in a war at all, according to the spin doctors. We were merely "policing" the "gooks" while we were bathing them in Agent Orange and wiping out their rice paddies along with their livestock and their progeny. For all practical purposes, it was business as usual...and that business part was damned important, only not quite so important as it is today, in Iraq, for Halliburton, Cheney, Bush, Ashcroft, Rumsfeld, et.al.

A totally business profit-driven venture that is obvious to one and all in spite of the double-think and incredible fraudulent labels put upon everything to avoid using any of the real words that correctly apply. Terrorist, terrorism, insurgents...my ass. The only terrorism going on is being committed by us, the terrorists...the USofA...motherfuckers of the world....

The most inconvenient thing going on in 1967, for the more affluent Saigon residents, was an additional one-week wait for repair parts from General Motors in Detroit to get their beat up old Chevys back on the road.

The regularly scheduled airline flights, from all over the world, continued almost without interruption in and out of Saigon International.

That's where I got the idea of going there in the first place.

#

In an exchange of letters with Harold Butler, I somehow mentioned the fact that there was nothing to prevent me from going to Vietnam as a private citizen...of touring the entire country for that matter...right in the middle of those awful killing years.

Harold took my comments to heart and challenged me to do it. I began seriously investigating the possibility and discovered that there was, indeed, nothing that could legally keep me from going there. Plans were put into place and given a high priority.

I bragged to Harold that I could come and visit him within two weeks as I accepted his challenge to put up or shut up and, by September 1967, all the ducks were in place, all the reservations made, and all the tickets purchased.

#

When I told William Hamling, my boss at Greenleaf Classics, that I was going to Vietnam right in the middle of those awful killing years, I thought he would have a stroke. Perhaps it was some leftover personal feelings from his tour of duty in Korea many years earlier.

It took a bit of doing for me to convince him that I was going regardless of how he felt about it. Only I did promise him that I would be very careful, that I wouldn't get into any firefight situations, and that I would come back to work without a single war injury scratch marring my absolute perfection.

#

As usual, I did my best to make parts of the trip business related. I lived off an expense account as much as I possibly could whenever traveling, including most of the personal side ventures and adventures. Toward that end, I began accumulating press credentials. The most important one was obtained from the *Los Angeles Free Press*. It was my favorite anti-establishment newspaper, and I had a passing relationship with Art Kunkin, the boss and managing editor at the time. I asked Art if he would go along with my plan and name me as his official foreign correspondent for the purposes of my Vietnam trip. He readily agreed and furnished me with legitimate credentials.

I had long held a cherished secret of being a foreign correspondent in the first place, harking back to old black and white MGM movies starring Clark Gable and Rosalind Russell who found romance between dodging bullets and evil doers. My real life foreign correspondent hero was Eric Sevareid.

Once, during 1962, as Chair of ChiCon III, I almost got to meet him. I was scheduled to do an interview plugging the World Science Fiction Convention on a local Chicago CBS radio station when Sevareid abruptly appeared, rushing in from O'Hare airport with an important, world shaking news update that

had to be released as quickly as possible. The studio people asked me if I would please wait while Severeid played through the studio, and I quickly agreed, seizing upon the chance to finally meet my reporter hero.

I was allowed to stay inside the studio with the crew while the star reporter did his thing. And did he ever. He rushed into that studio all flushed with excitement, dressed in a perfectly uncrumpled \$1,000 suit (1960 dollars) and a long, flopping trench coat, and took over totally. He sat down at a desk before a microphone and, without hesitation or pausing for breath, went directly into his news spiel. I forget what important thing had to be broadcast just at that moment, I was so totally captured by his personality and magnetism.

He reeled off his words with calculated precision, each one of them falling sharply upon my ears and the ears of the network world. And then he finished talking, stood up, turned around, and started to leave the studio.

I stepped in front of him, blocking his exit from the studio, and extended my hand to him. I began saying, "I've admired your work for years...." But that was too little and too late.

He somehow sidestepped and passed by me completely, moving on out of the studio without even looking at me, and disappeared in a puff of high-energy smoke.

"He didn't even see me," I said, astonished, to the network interviewer I was there to see.

"That's nothing," he said. "He never sees a one of us either."

#

I had some *Playboy* executive stationery left over from a gift given to me by one of their unnamed executives who once told me, "write your own damned not *Playboy* letters," so I did. And I signed that letter with a fake name certifying that I was writing a special article on Vietnam for *Playboy* magazine.

Then, using every one of Greenleaf's subsidiary letterheads (I think there were three of them plus Greenleaf at the time), and a different typewriter for each, I wrote myself additional letters of reference To Whom It May Concern attesting to my authenticity as a certified foreign correspondent. By the time I reached Vietnam, I had more paperwork backing me up than any reporter who had yet been there during those awful killing years.

Eventually, the only one that was ever accepted and used was Art Kunkin's *Los Angeles Free Press* credentials.

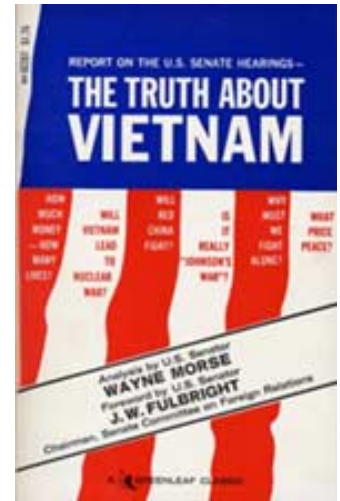
#

There was a minor problem with my airline tickets for the final flight to Vietnam itself. I had planned my dangerous excursion as a side trip from Hong Kong and return. It turned out that most regular flights in and out of Saigon were completely sold out as far as tourist class tickets were concerned. There were so many military types on leave filling up each of those airplanes that there were no seats left over that could be sold. My travel agent asked me if I would mind going first class from Hong Kong to Saigon, because there were always openings there.

He told me that I would have to occupy a seat along with the high ranking military, the very affluent

businessmen profiting from the war, and all the covert operations guys who kept sneaking in and out of Vietnam doing deeds dirtier than the routine grunts were already perpetrating day after day. It was a big sacrifice to make, but I did it, and okayed the first class tickets.

Hong Kong, as a British Crown Colony, was a most favorite stopping place for me. There were also some excellent restaurants where I experimented with things like bird's nest soup and thousand year eggs. I adored everything about Hong Kong, especially the shopping. I was snob enough to want to stay in Victoria for comfort's sake, if not for safety, but I actually preferred Kowloon by a wide margin. I added that "for safety's sake" part because I was there on a couple of occasions when there was much violence going on in the form of protests, marches, car bombings...normal things that I could watch from inside my hotel room high up in the Hilton. Sort of reminded me of some running gun battles I had seen in the streets of downtown Tijuana a couple of years earlier.



We published this book in 1966.

I had also become extremely annoyed by the USA Administration's edict that absolutely no Chinese product could be purchased, used, or owned by any USA citizen not a part of that Administration. What would Wal-Mart do without them these days? For that reason alone, I did my best to make sure that everything I purchased, especially in Hong Kong, was certified to be of 100% pure Chinese origin. I was especially fond of their tailoring. Every time I would go to Hong Kong, I would order three or four suits and a dozen or so dress shirts to go along with them. There were a couple of tailors who kept my measurements on file and would even make things for me on my telephone orders from the States.

My impending visit to Vietnam was not going to interfere with my tonsorial splendor, especially on an expense account. I did my usual, took the Star Ferry over to Kowloon and went right to my subversive tailor and got down to the nitty-gritty. I picked out the fabrics that I wanted--always pure silk with really flamboyant silk print linings--and then settled on the styles I most preferred. They were classy, Armani of the period ripoffs...really severe and distinctive business suits. And, after getting the tailor's assurance that every stitch of every inch of thread, every button, zipper, and secret hidden pocket would be positively, actually performed inside mainland China, I felt ready to head on to the war and my first actual personal glimpse of those awful killing years. I knew the suits would be ready and waiting for me at the Hilton when I returned from my tour of the war.

I put all of my luggage, the pornography and photographs I had been acquiring in Tokyo while en route to Hong Kong, in storage with the Hilton concierge and assured him that I would return within a week or so to claim them, and for him to hold any packages that were delivered for me in the meantime. Sometimes it is amazing what a healthy tip can purchase. I packed what few things I was going to hand carry to Vietnam with me into a backpack and a large camera bag. I knew ahead of time that I would have to wear soiled clothes and wash out my underwear and socks by hand, hanging them over something to dry overnights. Another trick I had picked up from my travels.

And then I was off to Saigon with a "High Ho, Silver, and away...."

#

My flight from Hong Kong to Saigon, first class on Air Cathay, was my first experience with that particular airline. It was very nice indeed, with a perfectly smooth landing at Tan Son Nhat. I moved quickly and effortlessly through customs and into the airport proper where I found it congested with

USA citizens and that surprised me for some reason.

The airport shuttle into town was a beat-up old Volkswagen van of the hippie variety very popular around the world. There were perhaps 10 passengers in the van. The driver started cautiously, avoiding the airport traffic and literally hundreds of bicycles, each carrying from two to four full-grown adults. I had never seen anything like them before, anywhere I had ever been...literally a sea of humanity on bicycles moving in every direction simultaneously, darting in and out between autos, and crossing through traffic precariously. I started taking photos of them through the van windows.

I was so occupied with all the strangeness unfolding before my eyes that I hardly paid attention to any of my fellow van passengers, and then I heard a very familiar name.

Coincidences on the scale of millions to one rarely ever happen to me, yet there was one going on right behind my back. I heard a female voice speak the words, "Dick Eney." Or at least I thought I did.

Dick Eney had been a long time friend of mine from science fiction fandom. In fact, it was Dick to whom I passed along the figurative gavel after I Chaired the 1962 World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago. Eney was the 1963 Chair for the Washington, DC WorldCon. Thinking that I could perhaps be mistaken, or at least more delusional than normal, I forced myself to eavesdrop.

There were two young ladies seated directly behind me, and yes, they were definitely talking about Dick Eney. Finally, I couldn't resist the temptation any longer, so I turned around and spoke to them.

"I couldn't help but overhear you say the name of Dick Eney. Could you tell me if he's from Washington, DC?" I asked.

One of the attractive young ladies answered me. "Why, yes, he is. Do you know him?"

"Yes," I said. "I've known him for perhaps a decade. You wouldn't know how I could get in touch with him, would you?"

"Of course," she replied. "Here, I'll write his telephone number down for you." And she proceeded to do so on a slip of paper and handed it to me. "It's his office number," she said. "I don't know his home phone."

I thanked her for her kindness and returned to watching the bicycles weaving through the traffic. And then we reached the first stop on the trip into Saigon, my stop in fact, at the Caravel Hotel. I had a reservation there but instead of claiming it, I phoned Dick Eney.

When he answered the phone, I said, "Hello, Dick, it's Earl. I just happen to be in town for a bit and wondered if you could put up a visiting fan for a couple of days."

He laughed and said, "Sure, no problem. I won't be off work for a couple of hours though. Where are you?"

"I'm calling from the Caravel lobby," I said.

"Okay, that's as good a place as any to wait. Better than most. Write down my address and meet me there at five o'clock," he said.

#

Dick Eney lived in a very nice apartment building at One Mack Din Che. From the moment I saw the building I began having second thoughts about my hasty request for free fannish shelter because it was just that imposing. Not only that, it was directly across the street from the main entrance to the US embassy, a structure that I ordinarily avoided like the plague wherever I went. My suspicions were aroused and loud alarm bells began ringing inside my head.

Something fishy going on here....

Nevertheless, Dick greeted me warmly and invited me into his apartment, a third floor walkup with an excellent view out the windows and down the streets fronting the building. It was an impressive apartment inside also, with two large bedrooms each with its own bath and bidet, and plenty of roaming around room. It could have easily accommodated a whole family instead of just one person all by himself.



Richard Eney on a Saigon street.
Photo by Earl Kemp dated September 1967.

While I was there, Dick did his best to entertain me, filling me in on the local scene, and taking me around town and showing me where things were that I might be interested in. We both had cameras and were taking a lot of pictures; I wanted to remember everything I could about that much-publicized city. [Something dreadful happened to my Vietnam photos...they caught a virus. The emulsion on the film began crinkling and cracking, destroying the images. Eventually I wound up with only half a dozen usable photos out of the several hundred that I had taken while I was there.]

In fact, I discovered that I really liked Saigon and everywhere I looked I saw things that reminded me of Paris, it was that much French and a great deal less Vietnamese. The sidewalks were even marked in the same manner as Paris sidewalks. The manhole covers were exactly as I remembered them from there. The streets were very wide, imposing boulevards. And, while it felt French, it was also very American.

Familiar signs, billboards, etc. were everywhere I looked. Coca-Cola, Texaco, Citibank, Bank of America, Xerox, General Motors...everything but franchise barfburgers, for which I gave a silent prayer in thanksgiving.

The hot action went on not only in the downtown section but elsewhere as well. There were hookers all over the place. A brief stop anywhere would cause them to collect around us like a gaggle of starving geese.

"I play your dick one long time, Charlie," was the first words out of each of their mouths as they grabbed onto my crotch and began kneading my flesh through my trousers. "Fuckie suckie? I real good, Charlie."

I quickly formed the opinion that Vietnam had somehow become one huge whorehouse for the benefit of the US military. One thing was clearly in evidence, despotism free and rampant. There was beer seeming to run through the gutters and down the storm drains, and all of it was US beer, brought into Vietnam by the entire planeloads for the teenage freedom fighters to consume. Later I was to see

pallet after pallet of beer cases at every military outpost, airport, and barracks area that I visited. And drugs...my God the drugs...omnipresent. At times I was sure the very air of Vietnam was laced with pot smoke. And all of this was done with the full knowledge and permission of the US Administration. [I shudder to think how much of Iraq, with a totally different moral structure, has been turned into a military bordello.]

Escaping from the clutches of the teenage hookers, Dick and I moved elsewhere on our familiarizing tour.

The highlight of our first excursion was dinner at Maxim's rooftop restaurant, the ultimate in French haute cuisine. I felt for a brief time as if I was back in Le Coupole in Paris. Eating out there on the rooftop, with the huge ugly helicopters roaring by and the Mekong River just visible in the distance, made those awful killing years much more of a fantasy than a reality.

#

The next day I had business to take care of. First I had to go to a local photographer and get some passport photos taken for my ID cards, because I had used up all that I had brought with me prior to arriving in Vietnam. I also needed to obtain a photo ID visa for Australia, where I planned to let down from my wartime jaunt; I got one at the Australian embassy. With new photos in hand, I went to the USA Press Corps office with my ream of credentials and obtained my military press pass. This document entitled me to priority seating on any military passenger plane going anywhere in country. Then I went to the Vietnamese Press Corps office and obtained my official Vietnamese Press Pass.



Being on my own, with Dick back at work in his embassy office doing God only knows what, I went walking around the downtown area again. [My imagination was drawing all kinds of comparisons with Sean Connery, G. Gordon Liddy, James Bond, and Alger Hiss. Finally I decided he wasn't really the local CIA chief after all, and tried to end my ongoing mental search for his true identity; one thing I knew for sure, whatever it was, "it's Eney's fault."]

"I play your dick one long time, Charlie," assaulted me from every direction. Not since I had last been in Tijuana had so many prostitutes grabbed my dick before first speaking to me. Some of them brazenly slipping their hands directly into my pants and fondling and pulling on my naked flesh right

out there on the Saigon sidewalks in front of God, the CIA, and everybody.

Hookers were everywhere in every size, shape, and of every imaginable age. I swear some of them were even preteens, but then Vietnamese females are quite small and young appearing to begin with.

Just for grins, I ducked into the Bank of America building and stood in line for the next available teller. I didn't need money, I was just curious as to how I would be welcomed as a BofA accountholder. The man in line behind me began talking to me, recognizing me as a tourist who was new in town.

When I told him that I was going to withdraw \$200, he broke into loud laughter. "That'll last you a good hour in Saigon," he said. "After the whores get through working you over."

Nevertheless, because I really didn't need the money, I stuck to my plan and easily withdrew only \$200 from my El Cajon, California account. The system worked perfectly.

As time continued, I discovered that the man who laughed at me was wrong. I didn't need that money at all. By then I felt my pockets were stuffed with money. I was carrying US dollars, Hong Kong dollars, Vietnamese currency, and US script. And, when I eventually left Vietnam, I carried most of that money along with me.

#

Leaving Saigon for my northbound trip, I flew in a military transport for the first time in my life. My Press Passes worked fantastically well. I could even bump low-rank military from that plane should I insist upon it, but I never did. They were as entitled to flying around free (free hell...that was my tax money paying for all those awful killing to begin with) as I was, perhaps more so. Inside that transport, I was surprised to find that there were no seats, no "please fasten your seat belts," just large, interwoven nets hanging from the sides of the plane. You leaned back into those nets and nestled yourself as securely as you could, holding onto the webbing for dear life.

My first stop was in Phu By, just an ordinary military base surrounded by lots of skids of US beer, and my second was Chu Li, my real destination, surrounded by yet even more skids of beer. I was just about to win that challenge that Harold Butler had thrown at me a few weeks earlier...put up or shut up.

The way I had it figured, I'd just walk up to him unannounced and say, "Well, old buddy, here I am...."

#

There was an administration building adjacent to the Chu Li airport landing strip and I went into it seeking information. All I had to do was mention the name Harold Butler. Evidently the clerk in charge knew him and gave me directions to his barracks.

The Marine Corps barracks at Chu Li were all identical, laid out in tight rows, like streets, hut after hut. It would have been easy to get lost without that clerk's good instructions. As it was, I walked directly to the correct barracks building and right into it, and there was Harold, with shock and genuine surprise on his face.

"Well, old buddy," I said, "here I am...."

I knew at least one other grunt in that barracks through correspondence. He had gotten my address

from Harold previously and wrote to me, asking me to exchange letters with him, and I had been doing just that. In time, other guys from that cabin also became my correspondents. It felt as if they had adopted me, or were at least holding on to me for some vague amount of security.

I managed to remain in contact with some of those guys for almost two decades, even visiting one of them as his houseguest in Flagstaff, Arizona after his tour of duty was over. Then, as I have a habit of doing, I lost them all one by one, including my best friend there, Harold Butler, some 20 years down the line. However, their memory will remain with me for as long as I live, and I will love those few good men for all that time.

It was like old home week for me, the way those Marines welcomed me into their blood drenched and dope filled world. They felt they knew me from having read most of the letters I had been sending Harold, Rich Glazer, and others for well over a year.

It was a bit like a university frat house, with everyone well into everyone else. They not only slept and partied in that barracks, but also cooked and ate there as well. The first night we had some excellent fresh Chinese top sirloin cooked to perfection, and a lot of beer, and emptied a bottle of Royal Suntory that I had brought from Tokyo for the occasion.

And then they inducted me into the Dragon's Asshole [See details of this structure elsewhere in this issue of *ei*.] that they had constructed directly beneath their barracks. It was do-up time in spades. Those guys had a healthy supply of pot, hashish, and Thai sticks all spread out inside that rock-star-poster-decorated underground room. They had good sound and fine music and bongos and pipes and Zig-Zag cut corners...for a while there I shared true paradise with those wonderful grunts.



This photo is the best of the lot showing the Suntory I brought with me from Tokyo to share with the gang in the barracks in Chu Li. Dated September 1967.



That's me on the left with some of the grunts in the U.S.M.C. barracks in Chu Li. We are all posing atop the Devil's Asshole. Dated September 1967.

They made me feel like a king and treated me royally, making up a special bunk for me that just happened to be unoccupied and available. It was the closest thing I had ever experienced to actual military life, being too old, too married, and too many times a father for the draft to want me for any reason other than to shut me up from bad-mouthing the Administration and those awful killing years.

But all good things finally have to come to an end, and the time I had allowed myself to spend with Harold in Chu Li finished. I said good-bye to my new-found family of friends and admirers, gathered up my meager belongings, and Harold and I walked back to the Chu Li airport together. We said good-bye there and he headed off for his duty post, driving one of the big rigs around picking up debris of all sorts. I went into the airport to wait for the next flight out of Chu Li.

A major approached me and told me to follow him and, curious, I did. We went into a private office that was located behind the airport structure where he closed the door behind us.

Instantly he went into a hard-ass interrogation routine. At least he thought he was doing that, and he was attempting to do so, but I only laughed at him. I had been on the grill so many times before, by real professional Federal fuckers, that he was only amusing to me.

"How dare you laugh at me?" he said in astonishment. "Don't you know I'm a ranking officer? I need to know what you're doing here and how you managed it."

I laughed some more, and then said, "And I'm a civilian. A legally authorized and certified Press Card carrying noncombatant. You have nothing to say about anything I do."

"You realize that it would be very easy for you to die right here, this minute, don't you?" he asked.

"Are you threatening me?" I tried to make my tone sound as ominous and as unimpressed as I possibly could.

"Well, not exactly," he said, "just advising you. Things happen here that no one would ever know about, is all."

"If that's all you have to say to me," I said, "then I'm outa here. Have a good day and a long life, sir...." I remember I deliberately worked at prolonging that "sir," just for his benefit.

The transport was already waiting on the tarmac and I boarded it right away, snuggling into the mesh webbing, my heart pounding with excitement and astonishment, and the plane took off right away, winging me away from Chu Li and the Dragon's Asshole.

#



Tomas Cannizaro did this highly stylized cover painting.

With my major objective of going to Vietnam accomplished, I reverted back to my long cherished fantasy of being a foreign correspondent, and headed north to where the awful killing years were raging full tilt boogie. During my entire stay in Vietnam, every day, I wrote a dispatch and mailed it, through military frank, to Art Kunkin at the Los Angeles Free Press. I felt I had to do something to earn my keep, however minor. Every one of those dispatches was intensely personal, highly subjective, and concentrated on "these are the things I see."

And, not a one of them ever saw print and I managed to not save a single copy over the years.

They mostly concentrated on the way I felt the US was spoiling the country, never mind how they were massacring the innocent civilian populace. They pointed out the unexpected abundance of freely distributed, without need of a physician or a diagnosis, pharmaceuticals. It is my considered opinion that the rampant, frequent use of Darvon alone destroyed many of those US military men for the rest of their lives, Agent Orange notwithstanding. There were also cigarettes by the cargo plane load, dumped everywhere, further killing the young chain smokers, and beer, my God the amount of

beer was unbelievable...right up there with drugs like marijuana and hashish.

I had the distinct feeling that in addition to turning most of the Vietnamese females into prostitutes ("I

play your dick one long time, Charlie."), the US was the biggest drug supplier during all of those awful killing years. It was not possible for them to not know that they were omnipresent and in continuous use at all times. How are things in Iraq these days...?

From Chu Li I took the first available transport plane right to the imaginary line dividing the nation of Vietnam into two mythical parts, the north being dominated by Commie Pinkos and the south by terrified terrorist in olive drag. Da Nang, that fantastic place with a fabulous history nestled right on the waterfront, was my chosen destination.

I cannot remember how it was that I was assigned a Jeep and a driver, but they were just one of the Press Corps perks, I imagine, and definitely one I took advantage of. I was driven all around the area, to familiarize me with it, and taken to the Press Corps residence where I was assigned a private room. The residence was much like most of the military installations I visited while I was there, of a very temporary nature and overfilled with Stateside beer. I remember thin walls and cheap ambience, but at least it was privacy of a sort, provided you tried not to hear the sounds from adjacent rooms that weren't easy to ignore.

I liked Da Nang quite a bit...peaceful and charming...with lots of chickens and pigs roaming free and dodging the Jeep as it would careen down the mostly dirt streets trying to obliterate them along with some of the slower-moving civilians.

As a foreign correspondent, I was offered all kinds of help from the military, including frequent daily briefings to update the status of the police action. That and fly-over tours right to the heart of the matter in helicopters or phantom jets. Being the natural born wussy that I am, I declined all such invitations. I could see and hear enough of the war from my relatively safe distant vantage point.

While I was there a particularly attractive young female reporter from one of the major USA television networks was also occupying a room in the Press Corps residence. I can't remember her name but I can certainly remember how popular she was with the higher ranking military officers. There was a retinue of at least half a dozen of them surrounding her at all times, each of them trying to get closer to her than the other. They did absolutely everything for her, all her fetching and carrying, helping her stand up and move about as if she was somehow helpless without them. They flocked to her and escorted her everywhere she went while she was there. I wish I could remember who she was but I can't.

All around me it was clearly evident that the war was really raging. As I moved around the town on my own, looking and listening into the distant horizons, I could hear gunfire and see smoke from the larger explosions. I was altogether too close to the action for my own good, I felt, and flinched at times like a mighty cowardly lion.

I particularly loved the waterfront area and spent a lot of time there, looking at the gunboats on patrol, the few commercial vessels that dared to brave those waters, and the valiant seagulls darting here and there.

Finally I decided that I had enough of the whole damn war and while I had not actually seen any of that awful killing, I could smell it in the very air I was breathing and feel it surrounding me and creeping ever closer. I knew it was time for me to get out of there.

The transport plane that was to take me away from Da Nang, fully loaded with passengers, taxied out to the end of the airport runway preparing for takeoff. Then, just at the very last minute, the flight was aborted. There was something wrong with the landing gear on one of the wheels. They evacuated the

plane and told all of us to remain very close by while repairs were made. It took almost two hours, while we roamed around the end of the runway, watching the rockets firing in the distance and listening to the explosions of the larger guns, seeing the clouds of smoke spiraling upward in the distance, for those repairs to be made. They consisted of cannibalizing another plane from the area and replacing the defective mechanisms.

Then, finally, we were ordered back on board and the plane took off, flying nonstop to Phu By and, after picking up a few new passengers, went on to Saigon. It was quite an exciting trip altogether and I could pretend to myself that I had barely escaped death, only that was certainly a bit of a stretch to accomplish.

I didn't even go back into town, preferring to stay at Tan Son Nhat until I could board the next Air Cathay flight leaving Saigon. It went to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and that was okay by me. At least I was out of the frying pan of Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge had not yet started perfecting their total annihilation routine, so I felt quite safe indeed. I really enjoyed Phnom Penh, in fact, because it was quite different from anything I had yet seen. It was very hot and humid. The most outstanding thing I recall from that short visit was reptilian. There were chameleons...lizards...everywhere, crawling up the walls and across the ceilings of every room I entered. It was a good thing that I liked lizards, I suppose, and still do.

#

On to Hong Kong, finally, seated there in the first class section of that Air Cathay plane and munching on Russian caviar and drinking French champagne and being thoroughly poisoned because of some unsanitary handling of that beluga. By the time I was able to leave that plane in Hong Kong and command a taxi from the airport to the Hilton, I was in intense pain.

It was a massive case of diarrhea. It was touch and go just getting from the registration desk into my room on the 12th floor and closing the door behind me. And there I remained for five whole days...I couldn't leave the room. I couldn't really move around or walk. I spent those five days literally crawling from my bed to the toilet and back, shitting nonstop. There was nothing inside me to evacuate, yet I did, over and over and over. Dry heaves, seated on the bathroom floor and hugging the commode.

Room service did their damndest to help me out, bringing me thin soups and bland breads to try to ingest...those and lots and lots of anti-crap over-the-counter drugs.

By the sixth day I felt strong enough to finally leave that hotel room, with all my luggage including my new certified forbidden red Chinese hand-tailored suits, shirts, and other new illegal things in hand, and head out to the airport and then on to Sydney, Australia. I spent a leisurely week there trying to recover from my first class dumping disaster, sort of like R and R from Vietnam. As a consequence of



Here I am at the Tan Son Nhat airport waiting for the next plane out of town. September 1967.

my weakened condition, I wasn't able to enjoy Sydney as much as I should have, and developed a lifelong hatred for mutton in any form, because it seemed to be the only food item served in any restaurant I visited.

#

My entire Vietnam experience, as an anti-war activist and an actual on-the-scene observer, would grow to haunt my days and my dreams for many decades to come. Perhaps they still do. I was not prepared for them to rest so heavily and so uneasily within my memory.

I was not prepared for them to intrude upon many other aspects of my life, since then...but they have.

There was a time, while I was locked up in Terminal Island and attending Creative Writing classes- what a laugh!-and trying to write short stories on assignment. Even then my thoughts could not escape Vietnam. One such story, "The Year of the Phoenix," follows within this section of this issue of *ei*.

A bit later, I tried my hand at writing a contemporary novel, and failed, but the subject is Vietnam. The plot of the novel hinged upon being in Vietnam and doing the things that would haunt the protagonists all their lives...much as doing so had haunted mine.

Relevant portions of that disaster novel manuscript focusing on Vietnam have been excerpted and they also will follow within this section of this issue of *ei*.

I am annoyed that events in Iraq these days cause my mind to automatically shift into Vietnam mode all over again; so much of the rhetoric and the underlying purposes are regrettably the same.

Peace!

*For every grunt who was ever in Chu Lai and lived to tell the tale. Dated September 2004.

Vietnam was a genocidal conflict in which the US military routinely killed civilians (several millions when you include the "illegal" wars in Laos and Cambodia), toppled governments, destroyed farmlands

and animals, misconstrued and delayed peace agreements, and lied to the world throughout.

--Victor Gonzalez, TruFen, May 27, 2004

The Dragon's Asshole*

By Earl Kemp

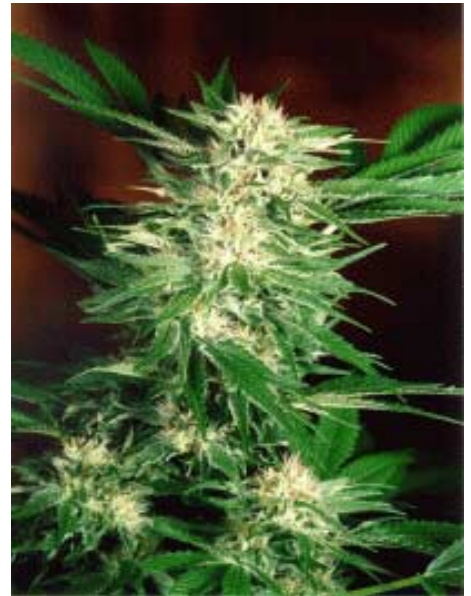
"Purple Haze" by Jimi Hendrix was blasting out from the stereo.

The Dragon's Asshole was dug from beneath their barracks in Chu Li, 1st Calvary Division, 178th Battalion, U.S.M.C. The soil was mostly sandy, almost beach-like, and pretty easy to dig. The hardest part had been just getting rid of the piles of dirt they had to dispose of Colditzlike, without anyone seeing them do it who shouldn't see them. Everyone from the lieutenant down knew, of course, but



what the fuck, war being hell and all that, they might not live until tomorrow anyway. Fuck it, take another couple of free and omnipresent Darvons and phase out....

The sandy soil had other advantages, also, like when the monsoons came. They called every rainstorm a monsoon around Chu Li, though some of them really were. The water would be absorbed pretty quickly and leave the top level dry enough to move the big rigs around on, the trucks that would



Big bud.

routinely drive around the area, picking up the bodies like a well-oiled cadaver corps.

When the Asshole was finished, you couldn't even tell it was there by looking. The barracks tent, a 20'x20' frame with a wooden floor and a metal top and sides set above the Asshole and hid it all. One of the two-tiered bunks had to be moved aside to reveal the hole that led down a makeshift ladder into the Asshole, and a couple of extension cords trailed off down the same opening. There were a series of ventilation holes opening directly into the barracks and outside of it too, to bring in fresh air, the guys always said, but they were really to let out all those endless clouds of marijuana and hashish smoke that seemed to gather up down there continuously and grow stronger by the minute as the volume increased.

The fragile top and sides of the barracks were never enough to keep the rain outside. Rain would find ways through the tin roofing and all over the floor and dripping onto the double-deck bunks. Many nights they had stayed up all night, the dirty dozen who shared that unit, moving their bunks into dry spots and hammering nail holes through the floorboards to help increase the drainage, standing in the front door of the barracks, dicks in hand, pissing out into the rain, too goddamned stubborn or lazy to swim through the deluge all the way to the latrine and back.

And all that rain that feel through the roof and through the barracks and through the wooden floorboards and pot-smoke vents fell right into the Dragon's Asshole. If you can think of an asshole as being about 8'x8', you've got a picture of the Dragon's. The walls, like most of the walls in the barracks over it, were lined with Styrofoam ammunition case insulators. They looked good on the walls, provided a certain amount of stability and insulation, and were available in any quantity you might ever be able to use, just for the taking.



Harold Butler is catching some rays directly in front of his U.S.M.C. barracks in Chu Li. The barracks sits atop the Devil's Asshole. Dated September 1967.

The stereo switched over to Janis Joplin, doing "Me and Bobbie McGee...."

The walls of the Dragon's Asshole, over the Styrofoam "bricks," were decorated with posters from rock albums: The Stones, The Supremes, The Doors...Gracie Slick, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix...Morrison, Morrison, Morrison. And, best of all, political cartoons by Ron Cobb cut out of each eagerly, totally devoured issue of the Los Angeles Free Press, the fabled Freep that was every real man real killer's favorite anti-administration brain saver throughout most of those awful killing years.



Heavenly hashish.

[I was traveling as the official foreign correspondent to Vietnam of the Los Angeles Free Press, complete with ID cards and everything to make it real. I have written of this in detail in "Shrink, I Wanna Kill," elsewhere in this issue of e/.]

A couple of cots had been liberated from somewhere and served as the major Asshole conveniences, along with a couple of shelves to house the stash...kilos of hashish, grass, and Thai sticks [from next door Thailand, part of that delightful "Golden Triangle"] labeled and judged and evaluated as to taste and potency...an aged and dying reel-to-reel tape-recorder with lots of Beatles tapes, the Doors...Hendrix...and a Styrofoam ice chest that, very rarely indeed, would contain beer which, like drugs, was everywhere in cheap-to-free quantities.

The Asshole was everyone's Asshole who worked on making it or anyone's who wanted to use it, at any rate. Even the sergeant had spaced-out through the Asshole on numerous occasions. The lieutenant even sneaked in a time or two, it was rumored, but everyone kept real quiet about that.

Whenever there was nothing else to do, after the motor division of unhorsed Calvary had bagged all the bodies and stacked them up to store, like soiled laundry, for the next available outbound cargo space, they'd have free time on their hands.

Then the stereo would wail and the bong send up clouds of recognition in simple thanks for having made it through one more day....

- - -

*In memory of Harold Butler and the crew who lived over the Asshole in Chu Li. Dated 1994.



Thai sticks.

If we're sending people to die in a war, shouldn't the standard of proof be more than "we're not sure if we're right?"

--Jon Stewart, 6/21/04

The Year of the Phoenix*

By Earl Kemp

She had the whole day to herself, a luxury Suzy hadn't really expected. Her supervisor arranged it and made her promise to keep it quiet, so the other girls at work wouldn't be upset about Suzy's good luck. Then, of course, she was faced with the problem of filling a whole free day away from the plant. She slept as late as she dared, but even that was difficult in her over-crowded building. It did mean she could relax a bit in the bathroom and, wonder of wonders, use the ultimate luxury, the bidet, the one incongruous fixture in the apartment's shared bathroom. Even at that, time slipped by slowly. She fixed herself a light breakfast and ate it before going out into the street.

The chatter of happy children going through some exercise routine in the grade school yard across the way cut into her thoughts, reminding her of her own nonchild. Suzy had been pregnant a year and a half earlier. Sadness flashed like real pain through her thoughts and, along with it, total recall of that horrible explosion when she had been jerked off her feet and blown down the sidewalk and slammed against the heavy glass door of the Bank of America...and she lost the child.

She often thought she had lost Hank at the same time. She was hardly out of the military hospital and back home, it seemed, before he told her that he was going away. He did promise to send for her, but that was all. He never did. She could still see herself standing behind the big glass windows in the airport, watching him last-minute dash out to the big United 707, then flying out of her life forever.

If she had their child, things would be different, because then she would still have Hank, too.

She cursed him silently as she stopped at the corner under the big Coca-Cola sign and looked up at the fading paint. Goddamn you to hell, Hank, she thought, trying to shake him out of her head again, as she had done countless times during the last Hankless year. The light changed and she looked across the street toward the bicycle repair shop. Quickly she crossed over and headed downtown past the old Texaco station on the next corner, letting her mind tick off unconnected things she saw enroute.

There was the long black Mercedes limousine, "Smoke Marlboros," the "genuine replacement parts," Xerox, and the big General Motors Service center. There was the funny looking Citroen and the newspaper stand ("Inflation, prices still going up on everything.") and an empty Carlings Black Label can that she kicked into the gutter.

Everything was just the same to Suzy. It had been weeks since she had known the random luxury of free time, yet nothing had changed. Looking about her she could tell that the streets were a little cleaner, but then there were more men available to help clear away the accumulated debris. Rubble, she thought, and her mind took her right back to Hank again and the entire catastrophe that seemed to evolve around his leaving her. Her whole world tumbled down around her feet, the buildings, the people she knew, everything. Nothing had any meaning any more. All her life she had known the security of her family until, at sixteen, Hank took her under his wing and protected her and taught her how to make love, and lavished all things good on her, and left her when she needed him the most.

Then nothing was the same any more, nothing could be, yet everything was. It always had been, regardless of who was running things, and it always would be, but those were concepts that Suzy had

no time for in the agony of her abandonment.

Sing a song, she thought. *Block the thoughts. Drown them out. "...the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air..." Christ, NO! Not that. The images are still too sharp for patriotism.*

Loud noises crashing through her head, booms of recrimination and shrieks of pain, hers and everyone else's intermingled. They never promised her a rose garden and everyone told her it was hell, though none of them knew it quite as thoroughly as Suzy herself.

How hard it was for her to bring an appearance of rationality back into her everyday life, struggling not only to forget Hank but to combat ferocious inflation and to fight for good before finally surrendering to the new order that was to fill all her tomorrows.

She reached the park and turned into it, past old men on benches playing checkers with Pepsi bottle caps on hand-drawn boards, past a man pushing a lawnmower and another one manicuring a flower bed, before she found a quiet bench in a shady spot and sat down alone.

The gloom was heavy in her head and nothing she could do seemed to change it.

Some foreigners conversing in a language she couldn't recognize passed by her bench. One of them smiled at her and, as they walked on down the walkway, crumbled up some bread and tossed the pieces onto the lush green grass.

Immediately a flock of chattering birds landed and began devouring the crumbs. It was almost as if that lifted Suzy's spirits. For the first time in ages she allowed her mind to notice the birds. When she tired, she could even hear other birds chirping and singing in the trees all around her. Looking, she saw blossoms on the bushes and fresh new flower stalks poking their way upward from the rich park soil. Buds of stark new greenness dotted some overhanging branches and, up above that, the sky was brilliantly clear and blue, streaked here and there with cumulus and, try as hard as she could, she couldn't spot one single ugly colored helicopter.

Perhaps after all, she thought, things really are clearing up. Breathing deeply she could detect the pleasing fragrance of several different flowers blending together to form a bouquet of reawakening Nature.

I will, I will, she thought. I'll force Hank out of my head. After all, I still have my life to live. Maybe for the very first time I can find out who I am. I'll work at it, I'll make myself happy and I'll enjoy my work and I'll love living. It's time for my reawakening. Like the flowers, I'll make the best of my new life. Perhaps for everything it'll be a great new spring in Saigon.

*Dated Terminal Island 1976.

Historians used to say, "Civilized war is the kind we fight against *them*, whereas savage war is the atrocious kind that they fight against *us*."

--James W. Loewen,

"Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong"

[In 1994 I began writing an aborted novel with the working title of "Balls." It was to be a contemporary-time love story in which every significant character in the book was somehow in love with every other significant character. Naturally this included the required amount of onstage sex dictated for 1994. And, at the same time, it was to incorporate many of my personal Vietnam memories portrayed in flashback through one of the two central characters.

I have gone through the existing portion of that manuscript and excerpted the Vietnam bits and tried to put them into chronological order. Vietnam was heavy on my mind then and still, particularly now that the US Administration is running a similar ruse for personal profit in Iraq and Afghanistan. For all purposes, nothing seems to have changed except the overlords are now much more diligent in their web of lies. As evil as Richard Nixon was, he couldn't even hold a candle to Bush's God-driven malfeasances.

The love story concerned the pampered son (Richard) of an extremely powerful Indiana Jones type adventurer who could command the Mafia and the USA Administration with equal casualness...and his son was following exactly in his footsteps, in and out of every tomb, every historical excavation in the whole world. Only the Vietnam War interfered and Richard was drafted and thrown together with a fellow Marine named Duncan.

The two of them bonded...intensely so...because of the wartime situations and the extreme intimacies they grew to share over time.

By book's end, Richard has died and his son married Duncan's daughter, and Duncan has married Elizabeth, Richard's widow, only you will not find any of that included in their Vietnam memories.

#

Everything in the novel regarding Vietnam is based solidly on my own personal experiences of having been there, done that, plus additional personal input from some of my grunt buddies from Chu Li. The music is the same, the barracks, the Dragon's Asshole, the overwhelming presence of drugs and alcohol, the eagerly available prostitutes, the teenage hookers at Lotus Bud's bordello, the suave sophistication and haute cuisine of Saigon, the bicycles, the CIA apartment, the USA embassy, the boa, all the terrible wrongdoing that went on during those awful killing years, the blood everywhere...true, all true, I tell you, every word of it. -Earl Kemp}

Hot Damn, Vietnam!*

By Earl Kemp

By the end of 1967, 475,000 U.S. troops were vacationing in Vietnam. Lyndon Baines Johnson was president then. He was okay as those things go, swimming bareass in the White House pool and tossing his empty beer cans out his car windows onto the highway just like regular people. It was Johnson's war then...he won it fair and square in Dallas when the world stopped with a little off-side, off-record help from covert operations...the blood and the deaths were all on his hands...weren't they?

The war kept accelerating and the blood kept flowing and the marching morons took more and more notice, wondering louder and louder *What's going on here now goddamnit, you tell me! I want out of here. I'm not supposed to be here at all, you never told me there'd be any of this stuff in my world.*

"Hell no, we won't go!"

Then, in March of 1968, on the 16th--*beware the Ides*--it happened again.

Girl, we couldn't get much higher....

In a peaceful little farming village named My Lai in Vietnam very much like all the other peaceful little farming villages in Vietnam, Lt. William L. Calley, Jr., ordered his men to round up the defenseless, unarmed villagers and slaughter them all. His men opened fire with automatic weapons and, when they stopped shooting, they had massacred almost 500 innocent men, women, and children, using them to etch indelibly another battle ribbon of meritorious honor on the conscience of world-savers everywhere.

A full-metal jacket asshole hero for full-metal jacket asshole hero types. A perfect prototype Oliver North.

Cornelius, Richard's father, never stopped to wonder how his morality had brought him to his realizations, he only knew that he didn't like the killing. All he knew was that each newscast he saw made him more ashamed to be an American because of the things he thought were being done in his name that were incredibly wrong. It got to the point where he found himself, totally outside his knowledge or control, doing things like screaming and shaking his fist whenever he would even see a military vehicle. The sight of camouflage alone caused his stomach to flop and his gag reflexes to seize, almost doubling him over. A genuine physical thing, no longer merely a mental concept. He was obsessive about valuing the people of the country over the people who run it...and could see no one doing anything good at the top, especially Richard Nixon, who hated him mightily because of his prominence and his vocalness.

Thanks a lot, Milhouse!

Come on, baby, light my fire....

#

Problems surrounding gods come from unexpected directions. It just isn't possible for any god to keep tabs on everything, however much a control freak they might be.

Ask Richard Nixon about that; a truer dick never lived. He was still kingdogshit in 1970, had the world by its tail and was hell-bent on doing what he thought was right, however wrong that was. With the power to control the press--rapidly disintegrating despite his best efforts to repress what was really going on--at his fingertips, little wonder it corrupted him. There are those, however, who will tell you that it's not possible to be in politics without having acquired a corrupt pre-disposition.

The Rasputin of San Clemente, however, knew full well in 1970 that history would never adequately record his crimes nor the extent to which he personally damaged every man, woman, and child "born in the U.S.A." from 1960 to...forever. *Not me, surely you can't mean me? These things don't happen to me. I don't do these things.*

"Reelect the President." My ass! Give him another chance to grab off more and pour it through the incredible funnel. Everyone above the level of I.Q. 69 knew all about the payoff from Hoffa to get him out being only part of a plan to lose him. Applenof fronts and Rebozo--before Ronnie Raygun was a mindless Bozo--and all kinds of convenient offshore bank accounts and the impossibly staggering amounts of secret stash millions in fucking DC closets.

And the law breaking. "Lordy, Lord," Richard's great grandfather used to tell him, "You always got to watch out for the men with the power, son. It ruins them; before you know it, like policemen, they're the criminals and their biggest job is hiding that from decent folks."

"Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Not just for Nixon, but for everyone in the thinking world, 1970 was a fast-running muddy-track year where everything just flashed by so quickly you didn't even have time to think about it, you were so occupied.

Unless you were dead.

Like all those thousands and thousands of innocent youngsters who didn't know what the fuck was going on when they were unceremoniously jerked away from their classrooms or jobs, painted with bulls eyes, given guns, and ordered to kill those thousands of innocent youngsters who didn't know what the fuck was going on. And women and children and infants and tottering old geriatrics and... anything that moved.

Something about the drug trade and the necessity of getting it out of private hands. A "Golden Triangle" where the best fucking pot in the world stretched out before you like God intended it to do. Much too dangerous a commodity for free. Only the CIA could turn it into what it should be...manna for professional politician's heaven. Shit, who else had all those transports at its command? USAid, my ass. Just convert it and get it out of the country as fast as possible. Green is green like pussy is pussy...get it while you can.

Richard's father had always pulled as many strings for his son as he could command; he was a little Nixon too. There's a little Nixon in all of us, that secret master-criminal type who thinks nothing about sticking that pencil or that lighter unconsciously into our pockets, or purses. That's how Professor Cornelius Richard Stonehouse, chair of the Department of Archaeology, University of Chicago, was able to get Richard into the department in the first place, not favoritism. Not nepotism. It was also how he managed to keep Richard deferred from the draft for so long.

It was Richard's own pre-conditioning, his lifetime of being surrounded and submerged in digging and cleaning and fondling and cherishing all those old things that are the garbage of humanity, wherever and whoever they might be, that sped him through the program faster than anyone had ever done it before. Jumped ahead of most of his classmates, skipping whole sections of the course program because he knew more about the subject first hand than the instructors trying to teach it to him.

[Drafted....]

#

On May 4 Richard left Chicago for San Diego and the U.S. Marine Corps Recruit Depot. A half a day passed before he heard about the Kent State University massacre in Ohio where the National Guardsmen moved in, automatic rifles blazing, to protect ...Kent? Ohio? You? *Not me*...well, someone...from those peaceful youngsters trying to do nothing more than to say they didn't think it was right.

The wounded ones knew instantly they had done something wrong. The four dead ones didn't think at all...they'd never ever have another chance to wonder what "freedom of speech" meant.

In late July, flying first class in a military chartered United Air Lines Boeing 707, Richard took off from El Toro, in California, for Tan Son Nhat, the Saigon international airport, and stepped off the plane into a sultry, sweltering, drug-induced neverland awash in sweat and insects and pre-teen whores and unfathomable intimacies of flesh and blood...*Christ, the blood*...making each day just a little more

nightmarish, a little more ethereal...a little further away from humanness.

Dunc was one of the people who saved his life. Not in any literal sense, but in reality. [Assigned to the same Marine unit] Their companionship allowed them to step aside from daily insanities now and then to dabble a little in exploring the world for a reality they hoped wasn't all their personal insanities but existed somewhere in time or space.

A world called "home," only this one was a real world, not the one you were expected to pretend was there but one where you didn't have to pretend. Where what you read in the newspapers or saw on television that wasn't labeled fantasy or entertainment in some manner reflected what was really going on. Where double-think and politically correct were never allowed to exist and we the people had something going other than being part of a natural-resource reservoir of expendability for their whim or profit.

A world where their innocent fantasies helped get them through the insane fantasies of power elitists. Where Oaxiza and Don Ricardo romped through imaginations and mountains of gold and gems, and really valuable shit was just out there waiting for two righteous dudes to discover so the babes would flock to them and they'd have all the pussy they could eat all the way down that long, overlapping endless Las Vegas buffet line separating nerds and dorks and queers and undecideds who would never know what it was like being real men.

The awful killing year of 1969 which, ordinarily and when it involved the right two horny people who are almost any two people who know what they're doing and why, led directly into the awful killing year of 1970 which started unraveling Nixon's criminal domain and slipped, almost unnoticed into the awful killing year of 1971.

Charlie Manson, along with a bunch of his groupies, was convicted of the 1969 Sharon Tate murders that somehow in the public's opinion represented the start of that string of awful killing years.

#

It was a real killing year, with deaths all over the place and no one giving a damn about it. In Vietnam, for instance, you always shot first and let someone else cliché-fashion sort out the bodies. It was axiomatic that if you killed someone, they were a Commie; if you allowed someone to live, they were on our side...no other requirements or qualifications were necessary. And to help out, the Coremen would dispense, on request, all the reds, Darvon, or other mind-fucking pure pharmaceutical downers any zombie army might ever consume.

Go ask Alice, when she's ten feet tall....

Opium and hashish and one-toke-zinger grass had to be pushed aside around the barracks, the battlefields, and the supply depots, just so you could move around. It fell from heaven as nearly free as free could be.

If you keep them fucked-up all the time they'll never even know they're running around with a "kill me" target stuck on their backs and not have any time to wonder what "thou shalt not" means.

"It's not a war, you know," Richard used to tell everyone who would listen. "Nobody attacked nobody and no one's trying to take anything away from no one and there's no way in hell it involves any one of us."

As time in the 'Nam passed for Richard, like most of his contemporaries there, his uniform seemed to evolve into something not quite regulation or militaryish, and a great deal more personal statementish. Dunc's changed as well. Sleeves and in some cases pants legs somehow got cut off, the edges fraying. Peace symbols turned up painted on Richard's helmet and here and there around their barracks. A big heavy silver Ankh plus an even heavier peace symbol hung around his neck along with his dogtags.

"I know all that shit, man," Dunc, his killing buddy said. "Still, if they could just call it a war and declare one, I'd feel a lot better about it. Police action shit ought to be left to traffic cops."

In February, the administration received a severe blow when they were unable to crush the Chicago 7, a jury finding them innocent of the charge of inciting riots during the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention, that insignificant point in time where massive quantities of citizens of the country started noticing how much the people charged with doing things for them were actually doing things to them.

And for Washington, DC, things would never be the same again.

On Earth Day, in April, millions of citizens all over the country marched in protest against Nixon, pollution...and unconscionable hypocritical attempts at mind control.

Later the same month, legalities and treaties and God's deliberate rightness like other things that the administration felt were beyond consideration of their expendables, was blatantly flaunted again as orders to invade the sovereignty of Cambodia were given and, for no reason at all, one more nation was added to the growing list of ones our country, the peace-keepers of the world...the biggest war machine ever...supplier of death for all nations....

"What's next, for God's sakes? Laos? Nicaragua? Panama? Granada? Wasn't the bait-and-trap pulled on the Japanese at Pearl Harbor enough? How fucking many people are there out there who're a threat to us that we don't even know about to the extent that we just have to plain out erase them before they can think up something bad to do to us. Keep the world free from aggression and dictators and Hitlers....

"Nixons. Thank God for Gertrude Stein; if it smells like a rose it must be a rose," Duncan said, always delving into literary obscurities.

#

In February all the grunts could talk about was how wonderful that the U.S. of A. had violated yet another nation's sovereignty and invaded Laos with flaming fucking determination. It made the grunts at Chu Li damned proud for some reason; the rockets red glare and all that so cleverly disguised with double-think names like Agent Orange wipe out half a forest on one pass. Thank God for Dow Chemical and all that better living through chemistry falderal.

In May the barracks resounded with dissention and grumblings of guilt and questions about morality were once again renewed and one expression, "What are we doing here, really?" was heard endlessly from every direction. It had happened again and the administration's fabric wore yet thinner and frayed easier. Lt. William L. Calley, Jr. was convicted of having ordered the massacre at My Lai of almost 500 people and of personally killing 22 innocent Vietnamese in that bloodbath in March of 1968.

"Can you imagine what would happen if they put every one of us in jail who killed 22 innocent gooks?" Dunc asked, it seeming like a reasonable question to him and one that would plague him for decades to come.

"Fuck that shit, man," Richard said, reaching over to turn the volume up on the stereo, increasing the already mind-numbing sound.

"Twenty years ago today...." roared into their ears. Sgt. Pepper had been one of the major subversives hacking away at the status quo, at the administration that had them there for reasons no one outside Washington, DC, could fathom. Especially John Lennon would be singled out by the DC boys for much undeserved and very highly illegal attention, directed again by Tricky Dickless Nixon. He did everything within his considerable power, personally, to annihilate the single Beatle responsible for the peace image...dogging him unmercifully and his wife as well wherever he went under intense, full-time federal surveillance, digging up all manner of nonexistent or unrelated dirt on him, taxing and auditing him again and again, warning, threatening...all the things that, later, John Hinckley would do by insane accident that Nixon so desperately wanted to do himself.

Dunc took another drag off the joint and, holding it tight, pressing his lungs inward, handed it over to Richard.

"Fuck, I love this Indica," Richard said, savoring the uniquely delicious flavor as it rolled across his palate orgasmically and fluttered downward to fill him with temporary contentment. Most of the time he liked hash better. The stuff that was coming over from Laos by the cargo-container load was the best short of the really rare trip in from Afghanistan...now that's hash, Richard thought.

At least once a week the Communist transport ships would come in from China and dock at Chu Li harbor, bringing the fresh meat and produce the grunts would be eating until the next shipment. And all the opium they'd need as well. China? The same fucking "Red" China we the people were forbidden to visit or to buy products originating in. We were supposed to be in Vietnam killing gooks to keep them from falling into the hands of that same "Red" China, the evil, sinister, slant-eyed yellow devil menace Chinese dudes who were the scourge of the world and, along with the USSR, "The" Communist mega-threat that was on the verge of "getting us" each and every slow fucking plodding day of our ever loving entire natural over-taxed lives? China, greengrocer and produce purveyor for the noble dumbass kidtarget American assurors of world peace?

Nah! No way, man.

#

Whenever there was nothing else to do, after the motor division of unhorsed Calvary had bagged all the bodies and picked them up to store like soiled laundry for the next available outbound cargo space, they'd have free time on their hands.

Sometimes they went down the trail a bit to Lotus Bud's place. She was a shriveled crone who had never ever looked anything remotely like a lotus bud. She ran the local whorehouse, a grass-thatched-roof cabana not much bigger than their barracks that pretended to be a bar, quick-lunch, long-fuck operation. Three underfed 15 year olds known as Louie, Dewie, and Huey, dressed in abbreviated hotpants and pull-over peasant blouses, supplied the pussy; Lotus Bud opened the beer and pretended to stir a bottomless pot of stew every hour or so, the only quick lunch ever served there.

There were only so many times that balling 15 year olds seems attractive after you get used to it...

nothing left but to expand on that a bit and get into threesomes...foursomes.

It's not like being queer or anything, you know.

"Do you ever wonder about...well, about us?" Richard asked one time when just he and Dunc were in the Dragon's Asshole and well enroute to Nirvana.

"I mean...are we like *normal*?"



This photograph of the gang above the Dragon's Asshole shows the ravages of time. Dated September 1967.

"I sure as shit am,"

Dunc answered, reaching for the hash pipe and watching the white smoke drift off, wasting some of it. You could smell it from outside, of course. Walking anywhere through the whole compound you could smell it. Not just from the Dragon's Asshole but from every other Dragon's Asshole along the rows of identical barracks, and there were lots of them regardless of what they were named. A haze of cannabis smoke floated just above the surface of Vietnam day after day after day. "I don't know about you, though."

"You know what I mean, Dunc," Richard said. "I never ever thought about it before, back home. I had lots of friends, guys...we played ball and chased pussy and killed varmints. Only I never had a friend like you, Dunc."

"Me, too, sport," he answered. "Part of the times, I guess. We just grew...like Topsy. It wasn't a plan, certainly not mine anyway."

"There was one day back there, almost a year ago, Dunc," Richard said. "We were in the shower and I was soaping up when I suddenly realized I was damned near as familiar with your body...your farts even...as I am with mine."

"Gives asshole buddy a whole new meaning, don't it?" Dunc said.

The showers themselves, all the time they were stationed in Chu Li, were beset and plagued by a Phantom Shitter...one of their number...who did his very best, secretly, to torment all his buddies by sneaking into the showers at odd times and unexpected hours and laying a dump right in the middle of the shower-room floor. They went so far as to set up a Phantom Shitter watch and sneak patrol, but all their efforts never uncovered the identity of the highly productive manure maker.

"Not just that, but inside too," Richard said. "We've grown so...so...."

"Homogenized," Dunc said, "which definitely ain't homo."

"Still, Dunc," Richard said, "I didn't have to think twice before we got into that three-way with Juicy



Lucy--Dewie--down at the Lotus Bud. We were bareass and plugging it six ways from Sunday just like...like...."

"Just like we'd always been doing it that way," Dunc said. "It didn't feel wrong to me, none of it. I'm a man and I know I'm a man and no little amount of body contact can ever change that."

"Yeah, but you went down on me, man."

"Only to prove to you that I could," Dunc said. "And to myself. Christ, wild fucking, buddy, wonderful."

"The next time was a lot easier," Richard said, "because we planned it and talked about how we'd do a double with Dewey ahead of time."

Dunc lighted the hashish pipe--Moroccan; Mohammed had sent it via diplomatic courier--again and took a deep drag, filling his lungs to capacity and hoping he wouldn't cough and waste the precious shit, drifting back into his head, feeling the excitement again like back then at Lotus Bud's with Juicy Lucy and Richard, naked and writing on the bed, switching dicks in mid series like Elizabeth Montgomery in Bewitched and double balling her--front and rear--and watching each other real close up, head in crotch with a flashlight, seeing it slip and slide... His scrotum flapping against Dunc's face and minute dribblets of mingling juices splattering out, leaving their coppery aroma on Dunc's whiskered, sunburned cheeks.

"Next time, buddy," Dunc said, "let's double-dick her...side by side. Let's fill Dewie's expectations all the way."

"And you'll be a man, my son...."

#

I'll be seeing you in all those old familiar places....

Lotus Bud learned the awful truth about herself long before the French army came and started blowing people away...long before the Yankees took up the unspoken challenge. The undeniable fact that she was a sexual voyeur of the first order. That's how she found herself playing madam to every child whore she could talk into spreading their legs. Lotus Bud had actually rather watch more than participate. Besides, it was a lot less messy that way, so much less to clean up.

Her place could be easily reached by all those hunky young well-hung boys in olive drab with perpetual erections, and it was a place that wasn't completely and officially off-limits, as if that would have made any difference any way. If you're going to die tomorrow, what the hell did it matter who you screwed tonight?

She had picked up on the two exhibition studs almost right away, Richard and Dunc, and saw how much each got off just watching the other get off. At times she would hide around the corner where they couldn't see her and watch them groveling down there, their faces almost rammed right into Dewie's--even Lotus Bud had taken to calling her that just like her guys--dew-filled and filled up moneymaker, sniffing at the scents and licking up the results, tasting of love unfolding.

Certainly Lotus Bud was ready, having carefully arranged her big stuffed chair there just inside the door where, seated in comfort, she could watch to her heart's content now that her boys--she called

them, "Oh, you guys!"--were openly allowing her to watch and getting off just a bit at the same time by performing for her benefit.

The corpse cruiser arrived loaded with bodies and came to a dust-billowing halt right outside Lotus Bud's front door, if she had a front door at least, some of the dust blowing inside and pissing her off. It was two o'clock in the afternoon and, as always, Lotus Bud couldn't imagine how they could find so much time away from the awful killing, especially right in the middle of the work day like this, but here they were, her favorite duo Richard and Dunc, with four other Marines, some of them already known to Lotus Bud from previous encounters with her nieces, better known far and wide as the fucking Disney ducks.

Seated like a maharani on a throne in her big easy chair just there inside the door, clucking and jabbering instructions and stage direction in Vietnamese that no one heard except Dewie who was far too occupied, in every manner possible, to follow her aunt's instructions.

She had two big mattresses side by side in the middle of the dirt floor so they would have all kinds of maneuvering room. There were covered with black silk sheets, Lotus Bud's final luxury and, coming as the sheets were from her very own unused dowry, she was enormously proud of them. She settled deeper into her chair and lit up her favorite pipe, inhaling deeply. It was opium, just up from Hong Kong on the previous Tuesday's run for Command Section. The unmistakable acrid smoke curled around her head heavily like a sinister, evil fog, bringing her bliss and vicarious orgasms.

All six of her guys were as naked as jaybirds and standing in a makeshift circle atop the two mattresses. The excitement of the main event already getting to them, or at least something was, because they were visibly excited.

Dewie, looking like the first breath of spring just easing up over the Himalayas, flushed with excitement, her tiny little 15-year-old breasts bobbing and her little pointy nipples throbbing, and her almost hairless groin already twitching in anticipation.

Without a word the six men closed in around Dewie...warmly, considerately, desiringly, enfolding her inside their waiting muscular arms, their waiting man hairy legs. As if she was the most precious thing in the world, they kissed her and embraced her...and each other. Suddenly it was hard to tell who was doing what to who and whose hand stroked whose what and whose fingers slipped inside whose where....

And standing like that, the miracle began unfolding for Lotus Bud's edification alone....

Dewie kept them suspended like that, hanging right on the edge of an orgasm for well over half an hour during which she had wave after wave of rippling orgasmic lust throughout her entire body, feeling finally like the perfect whore. *More, more*, she thought. *How many can I really do at the same time?*

Only she couldn't handle any more and neither could they. Already it was a miracle that they had held out as long as they had. Altogether it was the single most exciting thing any one of them had ever seen or participated in. Just the routinely forbidden sight of their best buddies, however divergent and however melded by the fortunes of war, naked and with raging erections and, one way or another, getting off...getting off...did it to them. The feelings running through their flesh and into their nerves and through

their hearts and their minds were all secondary to the incredible realization of just what they were really doing and just how they were doing it and just how well they were doing it and how incredibly wonderful it all felt.

Thanks to 15-year-old Dewie, Donald duck's talented nephew who, unable to hold off her own ecstasy any longer, moved into a torturous, twisting frenzy of clutching muscles and squeezing fingers and soul-sucking mouth and....

Six bachelors and their bride....

All eight of them blasted off together.

The eighth one was Lotus Bud, whose opium pipe had long since smothered itself out and her flailing, twisting fingers brought her once again to the Celestial Pagoda of the 3 Duck Nephews where, it is falsely rumored, even the egg-drop soup itself contains just the right amount of savory semen....

...the carousel, the wishing well....

#

Oh, they say in France, that the women wear no pants....

There were many who knew Saigon well, back then, and loved her for what she was, an out-of-existence other-world, afloat in some costumed musical operetta by Gilbert and Sullivan. A bastion of elegance and sophistication clothed in designer ware and reeking of continental culture. Paris, in miniature, so you would never feel too far away from home.



This is one of the better photographs of me from Saigon that managed to survive until now. Even it is rapidly fading. Dated September 1967.

van seemed to have deliberately picked a route where most things looked very Statesideish, except of course



Strolling down the *Champs Elysees* your feet step on the same pavement in the same design set-in the same way. The same manhole covers. The same delectable haute cuisine. And, most wonderful of all, in each bathroom the ultra-useful Parisian fixture, a bidet. *Ah, Saigon, or who's ever Ho Chi Mien you happen to be. I miss you so.*

The huge flying guppy, a C5A, had been on the runway at Tan Son Nhat for only five minutes, its drop-hatch asshole gaping wide open, but the entire load of passengers had already pushed their way into the terminal building and out to the street.

A noisy old Volkswagen van was the limousine into town. It was impossible not to be struck by the familiarity of most of it all, everything you saw, ever direction you looked was somehow much like home. The driver of the Volkswagen

for the very beautiful Vietnamese people and all the bicycles spread out along the road like a sea of rolling humanity.

The van passed the General Motors Service Center and went on beyond it to the big Texaco sign before turning left onto a broader boulevard. Just down the way was Xerox, the post office, the bus station, Citibank. Two blocks more to the Bank of America. *Why am I here? Why are any of these soldiers here? The CIA? The Mafia? It all makes about as much sense as invading Chicago.* In the far distance was the Caravel Hotel, where the van made its first stop.

Outside the van windows the rolling sea of drab-colored bicycles flowed on uninterrupted and you couldn't count the bicycles that passed in different directions at the same time, some of the bikes with three or four adults on them.

Small people, and delicate and fragile and quite beautiful. True patriots all, much like our alleged forefathers, knowing and loving and respecting their country enough to give up absolutely everything for it no matter what including every last one of their lives, devoted to doing one thing only, repelling from what is theirs a devoutly undesired intruder.

Loose, flowing, floor-length dresses, billowing out from their bodies where the air circulates, cooling their bodies like walking inside a movable air conditioner. Petite almonds...so delightful to hold, to taste, to love.

"I fuck you real long time, Charlie. I suckie you dick. Okay?"

Just like that, to hold and to have and to fuck. A toy. A fuck toy. How unlike a person...a woman.... You can't really talk to them. You have nothing in common with them. You can't do anything with them....

So, fuck them.

You can hold them up off you at arm's length while you get flat on your back on the bed or the floor and hold them up there and not get tired. No matter how hard your prick is. You can spin them around on it and zoom them through the air like you used to do with toluene-laced balsa-wood airplanes between beat-off sessions when you were just a kid. You can ease her down slowly until the fit is better than it has ever been before and, still holding her entire body in your hands, make whatever movements you can think up or your flesh can tolerate.

The spinning top. The buckin' bull. The Korean clam. The bobbin' bouncer.

Then, when they finally start popping that string of beads out of your asshole, you're going to....

"Come on, man," Dunc said, tugging at Richard. "We're here already and you're spaced out."

The Volkswagen van was parked in front of the Caravel where Richard was to pick up keys for his father's friend's apartment, some guy from Washington who was rumored to be a CIA operative. The keys were waiting as promised, in a hotel envelope with "Richard Stonehouse" written on it. The desk clerk gave them directions to the apartment and sent them on their way.

"Number One Mack Din Che, please," Richard said, sounding rather urbane as he commanded the taxi driver while still at the Caravel.

"Just across the street from the American Embassy," Richard said. "Nothing like keeping close to the vortex, wouldn't you say?"

Inside, the apartment was large, sprawling Parislike and very French upper middle class outfitted. There were two bedrooms, two baths both with bidets and with room for six in the showers. A roomy kitchen with cabinets and all the usual, furnished in nice quality from the James Bond Spy Fixture Store. The view from the windows on the third floor overlooked directly the main entrance of the United States Embassy across the street.

The apartment could have easily accommodated an entire family in luxury and comfort, not just a single person.

Richard and Dunc were only there for two nights, but both nights at 1 a.m. they happened to be looking out the window and both nights they watched the same four Vietnamese men stop and piss on the embassy wall at the same place, expressing their genuine appreciation for all their peacekeeping efforts. Richard would eventually encounter this same ritual being performed elsewhere.

After figuring out which bedroom was the guest room and which one might cause some problems if you believe in spies, they took quick showers, put on clean uniforms, and headed back downtown where most of the hot action happened.

Richard went to the Bank of America and was surprised to find that he could withdraw money from his Stateside account. They walked around the streets for a while checking everything out as evening slowly crept up on them. So much to see after not having seen anything but each other's ugly faces for months already. Girls everywhere. Good girls and bad girls. Free girls and expensive girls. Cheap jewelry. Lots of sidewalk stands with odd stuff on sale ripped off from somewhere. Cans of food. Cigarettes. Sunglasses. Soap. Hershey bars.

Bars. B girls. Girls coming at you from every direction, each first stroking your dick and cupping your balls warmly before saying, "You buy me a drink, Charlie...I play your dick one fine long time."

"We gonna fuck before dinner or after?" Dunc asked.

"Let's eat," Richard said. "Sure looks like you can fuck around here any time you want to. They'll be here later."

Off to Maxim's, the penthouse one, so essentially French in decor and service--a touch on the snide--so fucking Pernodish. So goddamned Ricardish. So j'ne se qua. Sit outside at a table overlooking the city and fall in love with Saigon all over again. The Mekong River, that old man, dirty and muddy, just rolling right along down the way a bit.

"Goddamn, the French really know how to live," Richard said, "even if they don't know much about fancy fucking."



This is the U.S. embassy compound in Saigon photographed from Dick Eney's apartment building directly across the street. Photo by Earl Kemp dated September 1967.

"Toast, buddy," Dunc said, raising his glass and waiting for Richard to clink his glass against it. Overhead, three Chinooks rumbled past noisily.

"To...I know...to Jane Fonda," Richard said, "because she just might be right."

They had been drinking Crown Royal, neat, since arriving at Maxim's. This was number three sliding firelike down their throats. Because he was five years older than Dunc, Richard always tried to impress him, flaunting some of the freebies like world traveling he'd picked up from his father. Crown Royal was one of them. And drinking it neat another. Richard had come a long way from the time when he was a teenager and used to turn down beer whenever his father would offer it to him.

Besides, Richard felt so terribly at home in Saigon that it hurt him, deep inside, because he had to constantly try to put aside the fact that he was a jarhead and he was there allegedly to kill and to do his part to prolong those awful killing years. When all he really wanted to do was to let down much as he would do at home in Chicago on his days off, where he also felt at home, to stroll through the park and stop at the corner drug store and have at least a Coca-Cola in that old familiar glass if not a root beer float just like he could do in Saigon...just anything that was All American and completely removed from blood and death and stinking, rotting dead friends and contemporaries.

They went back inside to the dining room and ate the full treatment, ordered by Richard in adequate French, from pottage to fromage with everything between. They had sauces and garnishes, sides and reorders.

One full bottle of '69--a very good year--Burgundy and more than half a bottle of '70--owe you one--Sauvignon, both very French of course, and after dinner, Drambouies.

Their taxi as a whirling dervish, twisting and turning and spinning while it bobbed up and down in hesitant jerks like a runaway from Walt DisneyWorld. Neither of them could see beyond the windshield of the taxi and their words were slurred off the map.

There would be no cock-caressing B girls this night. It was all they could do to get up the stairs and inside the apartment. It was a hassle getting out of their clothes and passing out on the bed.

It was a bigger hassle, moaning and groaning and writhing and snorting, just to get out of bed and take a piss with it hurting so and the back-up pressurizing and hanging low and heavy and just goddamned pissing forever half a dozen times if not more.

That and some flashes of true grit fantasies and familiar flesh and blackout....

#

Richard found himself on the bathroom floor. It was a real struggle just to try to sit up. He didn't know if he had been there for half a second or for a week. He knew he had to piss in the worst way, so he leaned over the toilet, palms ahead and flat against the wall, trying to keep from passing out while he pissed a river.

His eyes cleared a bit and he saw Richard in the mirror, trying to recognize who he was. It wasn't so much the redness here and there, and what couldn't be a hickey that bothered him as it was the dried, sticky smear across his belly, through his pubic hair, and down across his left thigh and up around his buttocks. That unmistakable little life-giving semen track....



This excellent cover painting was done by Darrel Millsap.

Oh, shit, Richard thought. *What the fuck? Did...?*

Back in the bedroom Dunc still slept soundly, spread eagled face down and taking up the entire bed. The sheets were all twisted up and half of them were on the floor. Dunc was naked and the same dried sticky tracks that decorated Richard's front decorated Dunc's back. And front. And most of the bed.

And splattered on the rug, and on the curtains....

#

They sat in the kitchen drinking coffee. Richard had started the pot before taking his shower, then he popped Dunc's ass with his wet towel until Dunc was awake enough to wobble into the bathroom. Richard, dressing in underwear and pants, went to wait in the kitchen for the coffee to finish percolating.

The first taste was wonderful, almost double strength, and just what he needed to sort things out in his head. Dunc walked in then, naked, dripping from the shower, riding his CIA spy towel back and forth between his legs like it was a stick horse. He dropped the towel and snaked a pair of brand new white Jockeys up his legs and over it. "Thanks," he said, taking the cup of Colombian coffee Richard pushed toward him; they both drank it black. "I needed that."

"You know, Dunc," Richard said, hesitantly, unsure of how to say it. "I think maybe, last night...uh, you and me...."

"Sure as shit looks like it to me, too," Dunc said. He rubbed his ass. "I even think you might've fucked me."

"Shit, Dunc," Richard said. "You know, I never.... Uh, this isn't what I...I mean...."

"Yeah, okay," Dunc said. "Don't see no reason to make a federal case out of it. It's not like we don't know each other. Shit, man you're the best friend I ever had, and...."

"That's just it, Dunc," Richard said. "I know I love you. But it's sort of like I like me...love myself."

"You know I love you too, buddy," Dunc said. "Only knowing's a part of not having to say it like some dumbass *Love Story*. It ain't like we're in love. We're not getting married or something. You ain't going to have my baby."

"But shit, Dunc," Richard said. "I don't want to be a queer. My old man hates fags. You should hear him get off on it.... A man's man all the way. And if we...did...that...."

"I ain't no fag," Dunc said normally, no emphasis, naturally. "And you ain't one either. This isn't the first time we've swapped a load and it probably won't be the last time. It's no big deal."

"The way I look at it is, you aren't a fag unless it's what you want most. If you plan for it or dwell on it or make it happen, then maybe. But you and me, shit. If it makes you feel any better just think of it as an

accident. You don't remember it. I don't remember it. All I know is we did it and I'm going to respect you tomorrow as much as I did yesterday, asshole. A little cocksucking never hurt nobody."

"Only I'm not sure. What if I enjoyed it?" Richard asked.

"Well, you should have. You don't get a crack at an ass like this one every day." He did a quick tit-bar back-flip-and-freeze tease. "Be thankful for small favors. Just shut the fuck up about it, I didn't bite you or anything and I'm not marked up by the awful curse of your lust...."

"Don Ricardo was like that, I think," Richard said. "'Never let a good fuck ruin a better friendship' seemed to be part of his credo."

...and the men go 'round with their lalas hanging down....

#

Rudolph the red dicked reindeer....

Nothing in Vietnam looked like Christmas, that's for sure. Yet here it was, another December, this one the 1971st, and the nights were still filled with booms and explosions, the skies streaked with flames or tracer bullets, the inescapable knowledge that there is some awful killing years going on out there somewhere. Christmas carols turning up on the Armed Forces radio. Early Bird packages arriving from home.

Dunc was the driver and Richard the helper that day. Nothing any different about it at all. Same old same old. Same old find the body, gag as you bag it, and haul it back. Three black-plastic-garbed lumps were already rolling around in the back of the truck like routine refuse, looking for number four which should be just up ahead a piece....

...and if you ever saw it....

"Lotus Bud's joint would feel pretty good to my joint about right now," Dunc said, shifting from side to side, trying to rearrange the scrunched up condition of his balls.

"Wouldn't be the first time we scored cooze in the middle of the day," Richard said. "I could get a hard-on."

Dewie was getting to the point where she thought she liked it that way, with both of them at the same time. She certainly never failed to drop whatever it was she was doing and get ready for the Siamese cock, the two-dicked wonder that just almost filled her ultimate desires.

...you would even say it glows....

#

War!...what is it good for...?

"A quick fuck now and then sure does wonders for you, don't it?" Richard asked, thinking back to the six-way cluster jumble they had had at Lotus Bud's, "How many's that now, the last one we picked up?"

"We got six now," Dunc said. "I count that as a full load. We'll go back a little early and grease up the Dragon's Asshole."

"Hot damn, Vietnam," Richard said, singing it in his very best Country Joe voice....

Dunc's foot jammed on the brakes and the truck abruptly jerked to one side, the tires spinning on the dusty road, sending up fantails of faint brown dirt high into the air like clouds of expando-rooney pot smoke.

Looking around, Richard saw that they were about halfway back to base, just where the creaky old bridge crosses the stream that, later, carries most of the jarhead shit down-elevation from the base and out into Chu Li harbor. There were a few trees there supported by the water, and lots of big-leaf underbrush.

"Look at the size of that motherfucker," Dunc said, pointing straight ahead.

"What? What?" Richard screamed. "I don't see anything...."

"The snake," Dunc said. "The goddamned fucking snake there right in front of your ugly face...."

Richard found it then, its last few feet slithering down the trunk of a tree at the edge of the stream, one of the biggest, most monstrous looking, motherfucking boas in the whole wide world.

"Hey," Richard said, coming instantly to life and jerking the parked truck's door open. "I want that sonofabitch."

Richard took three strides in the direction of the snake before he could see all of it, the strength and the power within those massive unfurling coils...fourteen fucking feet maybe, Richard thought. *God, I can't handle that....*

Too late to change his mind, his forward momentum already beyond recall, Richard's canvas-topped jungle boot snagged on a limb just at the water's edge and Richard, screaming "Oh, shit!" like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, pitched ass over head into the water right on top of the boa, considerably annoying it for interrupting its afternoon swim.

The coils were around Richard instantly and squeezing tighter all the time, tighter than the embrace of any lover, however intense their passion. Rolling him over and over in the water, tossing him up and thomping him down and squeezing, squeezing the living shit out of him. The boa pulled him down into the deepest part of the stream, holding him under the stinking, almost stagnant water where every manner of creepy crawly slinky thing was just lurking, ready to snatch onto you and eat your feet or your dick or your balls.

Richard was drowning. He couldn't breathe. It hurt so much, his chest, screaming and crying out under the water, bubbles all around everywhere like a wide-screen underwater movie. Hurt! Gasp! Die!

Ahhhh! his mind and maybe his voice through the water said it all in one piercing scream as an incredible pain rippled through his leg, leaving the water real-man red there, not muddy at all.



The boa pulled at him again, trying to take him back under the water for the final time, and pulled and....

Richard's head broke free of the water and he gasped for breath, splurting out bile and icky green water and coughing uncontrollably. It was Dunc who had pulled him up and was still holding him up, in fact, moving him toward the bank, not the boa trying to pull him down.

"You shot me, you bastard," Richard said, hobbling out of the water just ahead of Dunc. "I thought we're buddies...."

"Yeah, didn't I," Dunc said. "We're not? Not buddies? Kiss my rusty ass. If you'll get your head out of your puny little-dick injury long enough, you'll see I shot the fucking snake, man, not you.

"The same bullet just happened to get you, too. What luck, old buddy," Dunc said. "You know, there's a good chance the bullet that killed that snake just might get you a free ride out of here."

It did, of course, along with a Purple Heart and two extra battle ribbons and an almost noticeable bonus.

Only not before both of them had a great deal of fun imagining how it could have been and making up a reasonable sounding story to tell over and over again, mostly for the benefit of their barracks mates, until it was so polished even the brass bought it. All about how they had been ambushed by a bunch of filthy Commie pinkos, all big strong men with automatic rifles of Chinese manufacture...none of those usual women-and-children brigades that more often than not received the most attention. And how, due only to Dunc and Richard's extreme bravery under fire, they were able, only four-handedly, to fight them off and to escape from their evil, world-conquering, domino-effect grasp.

Fortunately, none of the brass on hearing their version of what happened out there in the jungle when Richard suffered his leg wound ever get around to asking why none of the gooks were killed. In fact, they made up their own body count, as was rapidly becoming customary, and Dunc and Richard never discovered that they had, between the two of them, wiped out a company of 22, the extra two being officers.

Just after Christmas--**Away in a bordello, no....**--his wound and bandages in good enough condition for him to travel, Richard packed his things and, with Dunc trying to help make it look like Richard wasn't limping, headed off to snag a transport into Saigon, taking the first step of the last step forever.

#

Good morning, Vietnam!

Only there was nothing good about it as far as Conrad Richard Stonehouse was concerned. The only thing that was happening was that he was leaving all that awful killing years shit behind.

And leaving Dunc, the other half of himself.

Lieutenant Kendrick had all along watched them grow into some kind of Gestalt he didn't quite understand, or want to understand. All he knew was they were getting to be so fucking alike they even walked the same way and farted the same way and smelled the same way. Wasn't no sweat off his balls, the lieutenant's, to slip Dunc that overnighter so he could go down to Saigon with Stonehouse

and say good-bye to him there.

It was another luck of the draw that the CIA spook was, as always, off doing some research for John LeClaire somewhere and bugging phones for Interpol or the Mafia, and his apartment was waiting empty for Professor Stonehouse's injured little boy's pleasure.

They climbed the stairs up to the third floor in that walk-up facing the U.S. Embassy compound and threw open the windows, looking across and watching the activity droning on at an ant's pace while, a few miles away, set-decorated in jungle greenery, the awful killing years continued apace.

Richard's leg throbbed and hurt him still, much more than he wanted anyone to know. There was nothing he could think of that could be allowed to happen to make him have to stay there with all that killing and body bagging going on. I want out of here...now.... He flopped down quickly in the big overstuffed spy chair facing the sofa and heaved a big sigh of relief.

Dunc sat down facing his buddy directly and just across the big glass-topped coffee table that reflected an upside down head of each back toward the other. Neither of them took the time to check for CIA bugging devices despite all Professor Cornelius's insisting that they...Richard at least...do just that.

"You really look beat, buddy," Dunc said. "Your leg hurting?"

"Nah," Richard said, lying. "Not too much...just the stairs...."

"Yeah," Dunc said, "the stairs...." He reached into his uniform shirt pocket and two-fingered a pre-rolled joint out of it. Real nice Afghani stuff, the season's first pickings just in and rushed toward the grunts, the best buds of the crop already being processed into yellow packed heavenly hash like one of Baskin and Robbins's very best 33 flavors.

They sat there in silence and smoked four of those bombers, usually an impressive amount, slipping further and further into themselves and into thoughts of the past, clinging as tightly as they both could to just the good stuff, filtering out the dead bodies and stinking buddy corpses. They had shared so much and had so much to share and done so many absolutely soul-blending unseparating things that words weren't of any use and tomorrows never come and....



They stripped silently and went to bed together and spent the whole night grasping onto each other with all their strength, not even daring to break contact long enough to take a much-needed piss, it was that important to them both.

Just lying there in bed together naked in each other's arms without an erection in sight anywhere for miles and miles of endless cocks. No irresistible rushes of orgasmic lust. Not one ball-rippling spurt of mingling precious fluids.

Crying, their tears running together and coating the pillows and the sheets and soaking into the mattress cover. Sweating, growing hot and slick and their perspiration gluing their bodies tighter together than superglue could have done.

Their hearts and their breaths coming in perfect unison and in perfect completion and in perfect sadness, proclaiming the approaching of the ultimate loneliness that only one who has shared such

sameness can ever endure, for the rest of their lives, just the awfully unbearable knowledge that never, ever again, will they be completely whole.

...it's over, it's over, it's over....

Their kisses were long and poignant and almost passionless, so filled with exchanges as they were, with the knowledge that each shared the same thought in exactly the same degree and that each was watching, feeling, touching, kissing the single most significant thing in their life evaporate, despite their best effort to the contrary, like the east-facing mirage just outside Bairhan.

Only for them there would be no bright sunshine to replace the missing mirage. That mirage would, forever, glisten in the distance within their torn-apart hearts.

Don't cry for me, Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Did you see me wave?

#

This is the end...my beautiful friend....

Everything Richard was taking home with him had already been repacked into his duffel, and they were out at Tan Son Nhat saying their really last good-byes, trying to brave it out without more of the tears that had been flowing so freely most of the night.

Richard promised to write often, hobbled up the steps and into the airplane, a Continental widebody this time and no first class. From Richard's window seat, it was very hard for him to force himself to look out and see Dunc standing there for the last time. Then the plane took off and winged it all the way back to California before Richard had to change planes for blizzard-bound Chicago.

It was the 26th day of December, the day U.S. bombers began an intensive 5-day barrage of bombing in North Vietnam.

Oh, little town of Bethlehem, how still the....

*Dated 1994

Moore is a genuine populist, but what he can't deal with is the unpleasant possibility that Bush, as people used to say of Nixon, has made a shrewd assessment of the lack of virtue and curiosity in the American public. A lot of Americans still admire the ignorant, smirking, chest-out, crotch-forward triumphalism.

--David Denby, The New Yorker, 6/21/04
