

# *The PDF DRAGON*

#5



**With Many Good Things To Share**

Edition is edited by John Thiel, for efanazines exclusively, the email address for said editor is [kinethiel@comcast.net](mailto:kinethiel@comcast.net) and any letters of comment readers of it are kind enough to write may be sent to that address.

Speaking of letters of comment, I have but one, though I did hear from Taral asking some questions about copying the last issue out. Dave Haren writes: “Highly enjoyable fictions full of thinly-veiled commentary on our benighted human existence.” To which I assume the italic mode to reply: *Yes, I find full symbolism and allegory enjoyable, and think the stories I have had here thus far have been well in tune with some of the problems of our present age. It’s what we do.*

Returning to regular type, I find fandom to be a hard world to get into with ease, without suffering initiation and doing a little selling and buying, but it has been my project for as long as I have been with fandom to try to find a place in it, and I am no more successful in it than a scientist in a Dell science fiction story is in making a breakthrough and getting his Noble Prize, but that means there is some success or there is no story, and generally your scientist comes up with some result, just not what he had expected or intended, and then he deals with it as professionally as is expected in the writers guidelines, reaching his outcome traditionally alive. Exceptions occur when the lack of success is the essence of the story. So be it here with this fandom project, of which I’ll say: “It’s what science fiction is about.”

Fu’ righteous were his terms of quest.

*I have here an article which will doubtless make me popular.*

## **SF ARCHAEOLOGY**

Early in the history of SF, to the point of probably being the first of its kind, there was **Amazing Stories**, which developed a semi-fantasy partner, **Fantastic Adventures**. Also at this time there was a fantasy magazine called **Weird Tales**. Other magazines came along until there were many of them in the mid-1950s—**IF, Imagination, Infinity** were three of the titles. Better known by their survival into the 1960s were **F&SF, Future, Astounding/Analog**, and others. Sure, IF made it there too, but amalgamated part way out of existence. Back when, a field of appreciators developed, called “fandom” after a time. There came into being fandom organizations, such as the National Fantasy Fan Federation, and societies like FAPA. An example of early fandom was Rick Sneary. Later there was Richard Geis. Frances T. Laney was an early fan, too, but he abjured fandom and quit.

Noted among science fiction writers are Fredrick Brown, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Doc Smith, David Keller M.D., Walter M. Miller, Jr., and Kimball Kinneson, though some think the latter was a character rather than an author. Anyway he had what his name implied. Favorite fantasy writers include Mervyn Peake, Shirley Jackson, and Kai Lung. Artists include J. Allen St. John, Lawrence, Milton Peacock, Bill Terry, and Emsh.

Conventions developed among the appreciators of this form of writing, gatherings at which they met. There was the first convention, and they would maintain them yearly. For example in Chitown there was a convention in 1952, and later a Windycon, and a Bubiconicon somewhere, where science fiction of the time was discussed. The year that had passed was much thought about at each of these conventions.

Television and the film industry presented some science fiction, such as Captain Video, Tales of Tomorrow and Science Fiction Theater on TV, and in the movies Flash Gordon, War of the Worlds, and Nineteen Eighty Four. Fantasy of the Genre Mode came into being on television with the Twilight Zone and the Outer Limits. Science Fiction merged with government some time after Sputnik went up, and the Space Program was launched.

This remote speck in culture was noted when the scientists involved claimed to predict. Since then it has been watched with some attention. Comes out in the end they produce a Fabulous Fandom or something. They might disappear, too. That would be as it is in their literature, which has gloomy outlooks on the chances of man.

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I could add to the above article, though it would not be in its form and context if I did so, that there was an introspective fandom around the turning of the seasons that would perhaps have attributed the gloomy outlooks on man's chances to the inability to manage to get a date with a girl, this form of interpretation being especially noticeable in the N3F. Quite a lot of criticism of how fans were was occurring around that time of which I speak, aimed at the younger ones and partaking of the notion that they were less than professional writers. It was similarly noticed in the N3F that feuding was on the rise in fandom. Claude Deglar's Super Fandom was causing a stir, and people were already saying that fans weren't so special; as they were saying it in fandom there were people wondering if they were actual science fiction fans. Many of them were not but were just reading fanzines. At any rate, they were recommending THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING, albeit facetiously, little realizing that this power is an actual one and may be harnessed in the winning of friends and influencing of people. Possibly these books would be effective in countering the effects of "nihilism" in these, shall we speculate, "latter days"?

I was always interested in science fiction because it was an apocalyptic literature, well worthy of the century it was in, though it may be falling short in the present century, where what we are wondering is "what's next" and the answers of the doomsayers are cloudy ones.

I forgot to say, "gonna sermonize, me!" which is somewhat *de rigeur* for these times and circumstances, if we indeed are in time and if we have any circumstances about us. Where science fiction is going now seems to be striking out for infinity and searching for eternity, after a rough and rocky

road into any form of new mode. I got books I could point to, if anybody were to get up a conversation about this contention.

## Comments on Zines

Rob Jackson, **Inca**: Nice Stiles work on the Easter Island set. The most recent F&SF has a story about such an event, “The Stone War”. I considered the Easter Island heads to be an influence on this story, a parable of war.

Regarding Kevin Williams’ article, I’d say, don’t let the paucity of life possibilities on other planets kill off SF. I’d say if life on planets is an oddity, that’s just what SF is into, oddities. I liked Williams’ going over of the topic and his statement of logical conclusions. He uses what he’s got.

To Frank Lunney’s letter: Hear about the guy who wanted to seem casual to his friends, so he got himself an iPhone?

Shelby, **Planetary Stories**, still an outstanding #1.

Michael Dobson, **Random Jottings**: Nice cover. Only place I’ve ever read about something like that was STARMAN JONES—he knew how to duck it. Good thing that guy in James’ police story didn’t fight back. They’d’ve killed him.

McCutcheon came from where I live. He helped shape the public consciousness here with his cartoons.

Graham Charnock, **Vibrator**: Here’s a fannish fanzine for the guy who thinks those are disappearing (Rob Jackson). I remember Earl Kemp’s **Peon**—does it remember me? (Now people will tell me that I have the name of his zine wrong, if they say anything at all.) Lichtman: Barker’s cartoon is funny in the sense of not being very viewer-friendly, though I suppose that would be challenged. Graham: A punk’s someone not familiar with the business he’s forced his way into. White just wanted to define it the way he did. Strange new vibrations this issue. Last line seems to refer to Poe’s “Haunted Palace”.

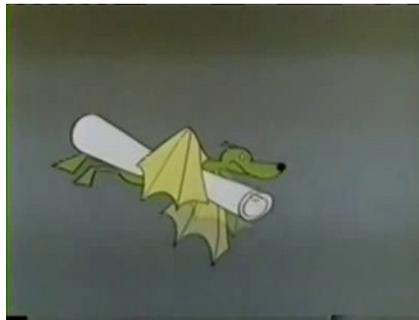
The Three, **Chunga**: Very good pieces of modern art by Ms. Gomoll. The fanzine reminded me a bit of **Hyphen**.

Dan Steffan, **Fugghead**: If everyone including Burbee was unable to remember the watermelon story, it becomes possible to write whatever one wants and claim it is the watermelon story. The story concerns taking a watermelon to a group meeting. The rest is what was said and done about it. Your zine comes across well if looked at from a certain angle in a certain way. This could be said of some of the other zines too.

Guy Lillian, **The Zine Dump**: Nice to see a review of the Dragon in there.

Bill Plott, **Sporadic**: This reminds me that we now have a solution to a problem FAPA had. Mimeos would only print about the number of copies necessary for the FAPA disty, so their masterworks were not otherwise visible in fandom. Here you get any number of readers. That's good disty, man. Yeah, and I think it was sweet of the witch to tend to him when he was caught in the bear trap.

Robert Jennings, **Fadeaway**: Nice stefnal cover.



All in all, the zines were pleasant and pleasurable reading. But I didn't have comments to make on all the zines that were new since the last Dragon was put online here at efanazines.

Now it is time to move along, and get back to the wargame I have been building. I am not, of course, trying to get anyone to get involved in this game, just showing it around as something that might be a matter of interest.

Dragon above was sent by Dave Haran.



## **Meet de Boys on the Battle Front**

The picture might well stand as a portrayal of the grim battle taking place in “The Eye of the Tiger”, where it’s every man for himself unless he is of a gestalt, every move is ultimate, some quarter is shown just to see what the reaction will be, and everyone’s going for worst. “End” of battle is also just plain “end”. Take care ere you venture to enter there.

The basic battle is taking place in Westphalia, which is being entered by a surplusage of people migrating there and is in conflict with the rest of the territory around them. It is impinging upon the Earth and has been for a number of years, getting a crossover. Minraud chose what appeared to

be a “moment” of confusion to strike, and the strike was eyed and then reacted to with a warfare that soon became total war. Minraud impinges on Shiloh and is dedicated to battling with it. With this war going, everything else that might be going to happen came in on top of it, with extreme warfare also in mind. The resultant battles are pretty much what’s shown in action comic books, with everyone using



everything he or she has and seeing what it will all come to. The complaints there have been about warfare are all in place here. As mentioned, the end of the war has been decreed and the war is presently aftermath, which differs somewhat from actual warfare. Those involved have no use for heroes. Shine your light in and depart. If you would be a player in this super war game.

As with the Lemurians in old times, Shilohans are now allowed to advance in battle.

## A REVIEW OF THE SITUATION



by Don Thompson

**The extreme poverty of the little state had given rise, in the first year of its independence after the Second World War, to a rueful and laconic joke: “We are so poor that we were made in Japan.” Among the numerous ironies that typified the state’s future development, the reference to that particular country, an island nation and the Land of the Rising Sun, would assume a significance that was even more darkly humorous than the *Volkswitz* itself.**

**Until only a few weeks ago, the contemporary world, on those occasions when it deigned to be reminded of the state’s existence, identified it as a benighted oligarchy, the primitive fiefdom of a small group of families whose entitlement to power rested on their joint possession of the set of keys**

**controlling the operation of the capitol city's electrical power station. A recently commissioned poll reveals that only one person in fifty-six thousand and can recall that for twenty-five years following its independence and before the advent of the Ruling Families, the state was a stable if by no means enlightened monarchy.**

**Now that the country has become the first articulated nation in history to be ruled according to the principles of animism—popularly defined as “the worship of spirits that reside in all things”—I thought it might be helpful to review the background of the state's phenomenal evolution.**

**King Susu, though an unlettered savage (and not even the most astute of those put forward), had been instilled with one lesson assiduously by his former colonial masters: Don't flaunt your wealth. (It makes you too conspicuous a target for the disenchanting.) Susu was lavishly reimbursed to make sure that the people of the country were aware of suffering nothing more provocative than a sense of reverence for the ex-Colonial Power, and that they found satisfaction in the quality of life obtaining in the state since independence. So successfully did the king conceal his riches that the entire wealth of the nation found its way in**

**regular shipments to a quaintly picturesque land of Europe, a mountain fastness honeycombed with bank vaults, with the result that after it finished paying off, the Colonial Power, itself practically obliterated by the War it fought to Save Civilization, had no funds remaining to sustain the populace. The quality of life within the state would have continued below subsistence level had not the Superpower of the Western Hemisphere, graciously assuming the mantle of destiny's handmaiden, subsidized it to prevent its falling into the death-dealing clutches of the Superpower of the Eastern Hemisphere.**

***Two breeds of fish swim in our river. But the fish don't bite, and we are drowning in the river's dust.***

**Thus sang the Native Poet of the state, Obapu, before his lyrical activities were curtailed. Coincidentally, Obapu merits the further distinction of being the only literate inhabitant of the country, having taught himself the art of reading, as a battle-orphaned scrabbling child, by the perusal of ammunition canisters, Hershey Bar wrappers, and petroleum drums abandoned during the late Conflict by the contending forces.**

**Susu died without dynastic issue, his sons**

**having destroyed each other in their jockeying for possession of the crown and scepter; there was never any question of the regal daughters inheriting power, for that was not within the folkways of the state. So that at his death, the majesty of the nation devolved upon that tiny group of people known, until very recently, as the Ruling Families. The mechanics by which the power to govern was transmitted, as described in Obapu's latest dispatches, possesses a certain fascination for students of the subject.**

**On being informed of his approaching demise, due to the final stages of a disease deriving from the profligacy of his early years upon the Lucite Throne, Sisu convoked a gathering of the elders of his tribe.**

**"I am giving you the keys to my power station and half my treasure," he proclaimed, "and the only thing I ask from you in return is that you shelter the surviving members of my family from the unnatural impulses of the people, who are stupid and filthy." Solemnly the tribal elders assented to this condition, promising in language marked by flowery hyperbole to serve as guardians of their monarch's spiritual memory as well, and to maintain the attitude of slumberous inattention to the state's affairs which Sisu had striven so**

**effectively to embody. The king effulgently expired, having prepared these arrangements. His glowing corpse was dumped without ceremony into the River of Dust and his entire extended family perished in the Slaughter Time perpetrated by the Ruling Families after they had ferociously extorted the code numbers of the Royal Relatives' individual bank accounts. In this way the bustling nascent oligarchy performed the task that is the first obligation of a governmental body: it laid to rest the instability of the circumstances surrounding its rise to power.**

***The king is dead, sang Obapu. And so are we.***

**It was to be his final song. The Ruling Families are probably unique among the world's governing entities in having survived for more than a decade on the strength of only two decrees (referred to as the Acts of the Elders), and the first of these concerned the poet. Obapu was given a choice that was unambiguous. "Either you shut your mouth, or we will kill you."**

**The poet's unquenchable love of life prohibited him from espousing the second of these alternatives, but on the other hand, Obapu is irrepressibly cunning, and he soon derived a fresh outlet for his talents. He became**

**the country's journalist. Since the state lacked a newspaper to employ him—it will be recalled that the populace couldn't read—he set himself up in the marketplace, where he instantly became the primary attraction, given that the food stalls were empty. On two occasions every day, morning and evening, he broadcast the news to an expectant, emaciated multitude. At each session a machine gun was held against the former bard's head by the unblinking overfed individual who bore the title of the Armed Forces of the State. The permanent duty of this official was to ensure that the Journalist selected his words wisely and resisted the urge to burst out in verse.**

**The second and ultimate Act of the Elders established the Committee for the Preservation of the Gift, charged with overseeing the maintenance and security of the national shrine. The shrine had been erected to display, for the edification of the scabrous rabble, Susu's dying present to the country. This was a substantial fragment of the moon rock that had generously been bestowed, two years prior to the monarch's death, by a touring delegation of astronauts sent out from the Western Superpower, actuated by the desire to keep its presence favorably alive in all the countries of the Contin-**

**ent. Countermeasures quickly employed by its opponent led the same Superpower to augment its charity, and soon a number of straight-faced gentlemen dressed in striped pants and morning coats descended from a machine resembling a locust that possessed, in fact, the insect's ability to inhabit the sky. The look-alike, imposingly clad emissaries informed the Elders (in words uncannily echoing the terms the Elders had themselves extended to Obapu) that as long as they refrained from driving the populace, through the alienating harshness of their rule, into the arms of the Eastern Superpower, they, which is to say the Western Superpower, would magnanimously increase the amount of grain the state received. This second donation was naturally accepted by the Ruling Families with gratitude, but it was certainly not, as the first donation had been, enshrined for the bemusement of the people. The Elders reasoned that a sufficiently fed citizen was one who might well begin to think about something besides acquiring his next scrap of food. Accordingly they diverted the vessels containing the new supplies of wheat to ports from which the proceeds of the sale of said supplies were instantaneously transferred to**

**their own coffers in the landlocked, snow-bemantled European country. The Ruling Families gave the people Obapu instead of something to eat.**

**The Shrine of the Rock had cleverly been constructed out of whitewashed cinderblocks as an annex to the Power Station, both for the obvious associations (the Station being the Ruling Families' source of power, political as well as electric) and in order that the Power Station's janitor (referred to in government circles as the Administrative Bureaucracy) could sweep it out each afternoon and dust the Plexiglass case housing the precious Rock itself. *The forces of the universe are dwelling in our stone*, the poet hymned before his wings were clipped, in what is surely his finest composition. *Worship it!* The people took the exhortation to heart, investing the Rock with a mystical essence that Obapu interpreted as the product of appetites and frustrations they were too benighted to grasp consciously that they even possessed. But the power of the Rock was all the stronger for being instinctually apprehended. The Ruling Families knew it best of all. Which is why the families felt the need to set up the Committee for its preservation.**

**Following the unusual (and surprisingly**

**seldom cited) binomial mode of the state's development exhibited prior to the institution of animism—two successive dynasties, two sorts of governing bodies, two news briefs per day, and so forth—the Committee for the Preservation of the Gift convened on only two occasions during the course of its existence, both times to combat insidious events revolving around the sacred national treasures.**

**In the mid-1970s a Japanese camera salesman visited the country. His original destination had been the state's much larger neighbor to the West, but as that country had become embroiled in a convulsive revolution, the camera salesman decided to take advantage of his next-best opportunity—he ambled into the state one day and was agreeably surprised to learn that not a single inhabitant possessed an instrument capable of recording photographic images. The salesman had secreted a quartet of sample cameras in his luggage, and he presented these as tokens of esteem and homage to the presiding elders of each state's tribes, excepting only the tribes whose elders ruled it. (They had collectively refused to see him, preferring as a matter of policy to ignore the existence, outside of their borders, of any power except the former Colonial Power and the Superpower of the West-**

**ern Hemisphere.) Of course, none of his potential customers had any money, nor even any worthwhile barter items to pay for the cameras. But Dai Nippon did not become the Emergent Superpower of the Orient by being shortsighted. The salesman took the view that, by simply giving his cameras away, he was contributing to the creation of a demand which eventually, when the state evolved some kind of an economy, would repay his investment many times over.**

**Though he'd brought in only a limited number of instruments, the salesman's supply of film was practically inexhaustible, and taking pictures became a great rage among the unkempt, excitable people of the state. As the disastrous revolution in the neighboring country continued towards its cataclysmic climax, the salesman hung around, and he not only fueled the people's lust for photographs with his little green-and-white boxes of film, but installed a professionally-equipped darkroom in the marketplace, where he'd quickly identified Obapu as a man of parts. Indeed, the salesman appointed him as his company's business agent, and he trained the erstwhile poet—now evolving into the country's first merchant—in the arcane techno-**

**logy of film development, issuing clear-cut direction as to how to notify him if the people ever got together the money to pay for their sensational new habit. Whereupon he rested from his labors and awaited the outcome of the neighboring revolution.**

**Unfortunately for these progressive plans, the people—who are always an incalculable factor in everyone’s considerations—confined their picture-taking to the Shrine of the Rock. They exhibited no interest whatsoever in portraiture or in the antics of the children, much less in nature studies (which is understandable, given the condition of the state’s natural habitations) or in aesthetic compositions featuring texture and the play of light and shadow. Very quickly the irate curiosity of the Families was aroused. They reasoned (with surprising acumen) that if the people kept taking pictures of the Shrine, and then carried their pictures back with them to their pestilential villages, where anyone could see them any time he felt like it, it would not be long before the people stopped visiting the Shrine itself. This would be an undesirable circumstance, since the preservation of the moonstone in close association with the power station was deemed essential to sustaining the mystique surrounding the oligarchy.**

**Consequently, as I have indicated, the Committee met in plenary session and decided on two—there it is again—measures intended to protect its vital charge. For one thing, they ordered the Armed Forces of the State to confiscate the four fearful cameras, to eradicate the darkroom, dumping out all the developer (thus driving Obapu into the country's first bankruptcy) and to escort the Japanese salesman to the border whence it is PRESUMED that he was sped along his way into the apocalyptic maelstrom of the revolution endlessly occurring in the neighboring state. The second decision of the Committee employed reverse psychology and resumed in Administrative Bureaucracy's covering the plexiglass container in which the Rock resided with a sort of wooden capsule, made from the bole of a locally prevalent and otherwise quite valueless tree. It was believed that the removal of the Rock from sight would awaken the people's appetite—jaded by the Japanese cameras—to gaze upon it.**

**If one lingers on the nature of the Elders one must eventually conclude that they took a cynical and malicious pleasure in making Obapu their spokesman for the promulgation of this measure, thereby capitalizing on his credibility. To the assembled people, the poet**

**cum journalist cum business failure announced, the barrel of the machine gun firmly braced against his temple: “The Ruling Families believe the Rock is having its magical power stolen when so many people come to stare at it. Therefore, they have taken steps to insure that the Rock’s power shall not evaporate, but shall be eternally sheltered within the box.”**

**It is a tautology of political observation that those who succeed in achieving power possess an instinctive affinity with those they subjugate. Despite the existence of several hundred photographs of the Rock, and despite the fact that the Rock was itself no longer even visible, the people of the country anxiously flocked to the Shrine in even greater numbers than before, and they remained peering at the blank square sides of the wooden capsule for even longer periods than they had lavished on the Rock itself previously. The power of the Rock was actually enhanced by the Rock’s being hidden from view!**

**Obapu has confessed in the famous “backgrounder” published last month that he was supremely disappointed in the failure of his film-development enterprise, which he had confidently expected to become the foundation of the state’s economy, now nonexistent but regarded as being essential for the betterment**

**of the people. He was tired of being the tenth-class citizen of a world that could justify supporting brutes like the Ruling Family in obscene luxury—for Susu had scintillatingly died before he could pass on the former Colonial Power's secret formula for success. Obapu reasoned correctly he was not the only inhabitant of the state to think in this way; he was merely the only one to be able to articulate his thoughts. And there can be no doubt that the long suppression of his poetic gifts filled him with a mounting frustration all his own.**

**At his little place of business in the market, he began saying things like “I think we have a right, as we don't have anything else, to see our rock again.”**

**So conversational was his approach that the Army—not the most observant primitive to begin with—realized only tardily that Obapu's listeners were starting to show an edgy restlessness as the Journalist, now become a public agitator, inculcated his idea. When Armed Forces repeated these occurrences to the Ruling Families, they told him to keep his eyes open, but not to shoot Obapu, for perhaps, they reasoned, the impossibility of his demands would soon dawn on the people and they would angrily forsake him as a false prophet. “That would be the ideal**

**solution,” one of the Elders commented.**

**But like the proverbial wildfire, Obapu’s message, and the emotional reaction it inspired, spread throughout the country. In village compound after village compound the local headmen waved their tattered photos of the Rock about in front of the rabble, who moaned and wept, shrieking for the Rock itself, whose continuing concealment within the wooden capsule continued to invest it with greater and greater mojo. So enormous was the outcry that the Committee convened again (only with the greatest difficulty do I refrain from underlining the reiterative). It recognized promptly that only immediate action could prevent things from getting out of hand. Accordingly, it sent for the Armed Forces and notified him that he could go ahead and shoot Obapu. To which he replied, “Not me. If I kill him they’ll tear me apart.”**

**Putting their heads together again, the Elders came up with a second decision (I’m scarcely able to believe these fateful twos), the execution of which involved the combined efforts of the Armed Forces and the Administrative Bureaucracy. The following morning Obapu was awakened by a wailing multitude of heartsick wretches who informed him that the Rock was no longer occupying the**

**Shrine. At the head of this excited gaggle Obapu visited the Shrine himself with his own (two) eyes observing the Rock had disappeared. Only Armed Forces and Administrative Bureaucracy were there, standing on either side of the Plexiglass case, and they were grinning sarcastically. "We buried it," Administrative Bureaucracy said in that pedantic tone that had never endeared him to his fellow countrymen.**

**"There I stood," Obapo reported, "in the full knowledge we were at a crossroads. Never again would the people be galvanized to fiercely to assert themselves." He had reservations about his own position as the leader of a frenzied horde of malcontents, and yet he understood that he had only himself to thank for being here, since he had calculatingly aroused them in the first place. If "we didn't act now, we would forever be at the mercy of our rulers. They have stolen our soul. This was much worse than stealing our bodily sustenance, and accordingly I feel compelled to mention this to those who accompanied me."**

**Such is the modesty of the man! Exactly how he "mentioned" his misgivings is not recorded (since we are dependent on Obapu himself for a faithful version of these events) but about the subsequent actions of "those who had**

**accompanied” him, there is absolutely no doubt. They rent Army and A.B. limb from limb, demolished not only the Shrine but the Power Station as well, then marched shrieking to the Palace, where one by one they ferreted out the Elders, literally shredding them into unrecognizability. Obapu, who has cloaked the whole process of renunciatory zealotry into a veil of mythic grandeur, has privately related the last remark of one of the extirpated oligarchs, to wit, “I told you we should have blown the s.o.b.’s head off while we had the chance.”**

***And then I realized, Obapu writes, that I was faced with a situation in which my own decisions would forever affect the fate of the nation. Their revengeful fury spent, the insurrectionists suffered in its aftermath the fear and guilt of having killed their “fathers”, as it were, but this merely attached them all the more securely to their Orphan Saint. He did not forsake them at this crucial juncture. If I acquiesced in the Search for the Rock—for it was assumed that the Rock was buried in the hills around the Capitol—I would be encouraging the people in an enterprise that must result in either failure or disillusionment. Because if they in fact found it, I doubted it would suffice them any longer, after***

***the gargantuan mayhem they had committed, as the vehicle for their hopes and dreams.***

***There was only one thing to do, Obapu observes laconically, not pointing out (did he even realize it?) that with this decision he was furthering, as well as the alteration of the nature of the state, his personal evolution. For he operated now as a Philosopher.***

***I exhorted them as follows: “People! We will never have enough of what we need, and we don’t need to be reminded of that. Forsake your search for the single object and instead, worship everything! In this way your souls will know peace at last, and your bodies will know freedom.”***

***I will not be the first to intimate that as he spoke, Obapu achieved his individual completion by transitioning, at white-hot pitch, from Philosopher to Oracle. By the time he finished his address, the multitude was at his feet, their scrawny arms and necks extended in supplication. The conclusion of Obapu’s reports bears his characteristic, nay, indelibly unique, linkage of pragmatism with astonishing insight.***

***Well, they listened to me, and returned to their hovels. We have sent a message to our Japanese friend, and are momentarily expecting his reply. We shall see what occurs.***



When professor Thomas Pitt awoke that morning, he did not consciously realize that it would be the last day that he would go to the university to teach. He merely awoke with the 7:00 alarm and stared for a time at the empty space next to him on the bed. He had been widowed four years before, and though the marriage had been less than happy, the death of his wife had been a total loss to him. They had had no children.

He showered and fixed himself breakfast: pancakes, butter, syrup, bacon crisp, grapefruit juice (fresh squeezed) and coffee (New Orleans Blend ground in his own grinder). He ate, staring at but not reading his morning newspaper which the paper girl had left in the foyer of the apartment building in which he lived. He was so used to feeling like one of Eliot's hollow men that he no longer felt it. The newspaper told him that there was famine in the Third World. Some man he did not know had been killed in the ghettos. Even worse news was that another Madonna tour was about to commence. Thomas Pitt, Tom to his friends, turned newspaper pages absently.

At his eleven o'clock appointment with an advisee, the professor found that it took a herculean effort of

concentration to listen to the young woman seated before him. She was a junior, approaching, like everyone else at the university, the end of another academic year. Already she was concerned about what she was going to do for her senior paper. She had no idea how to go about selecting a topic, she found so many things so fascinating.

Pitt listened attentively, or at least gave the studied impression of doing so. Then he shared with her how, as a graduate student planning post-graduate studies, he had put off until the proverbial eleventh hour the necessary task of deciding upon a topic for his dissertation, being torn between Faulkner and the Arthurian Cycle. Because he had ultimately decided upon Faulkner, he pointed out to her, was not a reason to think he had abandoned his interest in Arthurian legendry and the Grail Cycle. Then he explained that he had to excuse himself to prepare notes for his graduate course on Arthur that evening before teaching an undergraduate course on Faulkner and southern Gothicism, in, he said, half an hour. After the English major had gathered her books, thoughts and self together to go, Pitts sat staring out the window of his office, down at the campus, such a cool and orderly collection of buildings and

greenery to contrast with the jumbled thoughts playing about inside his head.

“In a sense, it is irrelevant that-” He began a statement about the reality of incest in the book, justifying it as self-created reality. Abruptly he ceased his lecture and suddenly seemed to be staring off at something in the distance. His students were, in general, patient with this—for the first minute or so. But by the time a general restlessness was taking hold in the classroom, Pitt was striding rapidly towards the door. “What the hell?” asked one co-ed of everyone and of no one in particular. Pitt strode rapidly toward the elevator banks, a paperback copy of the annotated *THE SOUND AND THE FURY* clutched in his right hand. With his forefinger he jabbed the down button, and when an elevator did not arrive immediately, he walked to the stairs. He took the steps two at a time until he was in the lobby. There he broke into a run, exiting the building and dashing madly across the campus. When he reached the colonial-style building with inexplicably Grecian pillars which housed the English Department faculty offices, he slowed to a walk. A very fast walk. Up another four flights of stairs and down a corridor to the office of the English

Department Chair, Professor Nancy Elson. The door to her office stood open, and without waiting for an invitation he slid into a seat. She was on the telephone, and looked up in annoyed curiosity at the professor entering and seating himself so abruptly. “Look, Peter,” she said into the mouth piece, “I’ll get back to you , all right?” and hung up. “What is your problem?” she asked the impatient Professor Pitt.

“I’m quitting,” he announced simply.

“In the middle of the term?”

“I’m sorry.”

No discussion of tenure, violation of contract or responsibility to the institution would sway him in his decision. Why, exactly, was he leaving? He eagerly explained that he was going to spend his full time searching for a novel by William Faulkner, printed in a limited edition, very rare, only two or three copies extant. The title was **BATON ROUGE TEARS**, publication date 1963.

She looked at him oddly. Finally she said, “Tom, I’m pretty sure that Faulkner never wrote a novel by that title.”

“Contemporary literature is your field, isn’t it?” he asked pointedly.

“I’ve got a Ph.D. too—and while I may not be a

Faulkner scholar, I am pretty much acquainted with the basic Faulkner canon.”

“Good for you,” Pitt said without sarcasm. Then he turned and walked out.

When the academic dean visited Pitt a couple of days later in his home, he essentially reiterated the perplexity earlier expressed by Elson. Dr. Peter Rathbone had taught English prior to becoming an administrator. He reminded Pitt of this and informed him that the novel Pitt had described was apparently not to be found in any bibliography of Faulkner’s works.

“Almost anything of any kind ever set down on paper by Faulkner is in print, as near as I can make out, Tom. The most obscure of his novels is probably MOSQUITOES, and I can buy a copy of that at any good-sized shopping mall. When was this novel allegedly written?”

“It was completed in August, 1963, and first published in December of that year.”

“Tom,” said the dean carefully, “Faulkner died in 1962.”

“So?”

The dean seemed at a loss to respond to that query, but finally offered, “So the novel you describe can’t possibly

exist.”

“I must still search for it, though,” explained Pitt.

“Makes the best object for search, doesn’t it? Something which can’t possibly be found?”

This question really silenced Dean Rathbone, who frowned mightily into the untouched cup of espresso earlier given to him by his host. The dean finally muttered accommodatingly that graduate students could handle Pitt’s courses for the rest of the term. Then he took his leave.

Mail piled up on the professor’s coffee table. Messages accumulated unanswered on his answering machine.

Various plants in the apartment died lonesome deaths. All that the academic had time for was eating, sleeping, basic hygiene and visiting all of the used bookstores in the city.

When he had exhausted these, he began writing to out-of-city and out-of-state bookstores, seeking the object of his quest. Book research firms would turn down his proffer of assignment after their preliminary research. A few

unscrupulous ones would accept his fee and send him a contract to sign in spite of having no evidence that the book existed. A letter to Pitt from the estate of William Faulkner telling him so did not deter the teacher from his hunt. After

one month, Pitt closed out all of his bank accounts, sold his Oldsmobile Cutlass and bought a plane ticket for Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He would search the used bookstores of the southern United States, one by one. He spent eight days in Baton Rouge, driving out to surrounding communities in a rented Toyota Corolla. Four days in Shreveport, six days in New Orleans.

It was while in New Orleans that he met a man who understood his quest. He met the man one night on Bourbon Street as the man painstakingly searched for some small object in the gutter. Sitting in a French Quarter tavern with the professor, the man explained his own quest. His name was Allen and he had just been released from a state psychiatric facility in Texas, where he had spent eight years of his life. He was now searching for a quarter which he had lost in downtown Dallas before he had been admitted. He would not give up until he found the coin. The professor reached into his pocket and pulled out a shiny new quarter. He balanced it on the tip of his right index finger and offered it to Allen. “No,” Allen said. “It wouldn’t be the same.”

The professor let the coin fall to the floor and reached to hug the other. After wishing him luck, he bought him

another drink and left the bar.

From New Orleans he flew to Jackson, Mississippi, which he had decided he would use as a base to explore the state. On his seventeenth day in Mississippi, he was driving down a gravel road in a rented BMW when he came on a town that wasn't on any map. Yaknapatawpha, population one thousand, three hundred and thirty-six.

He slowed to the fifteen mile per hour speed limit and looked at the buildings on either side of Main Street. A mercantile. A café. A small supermarket. A smaller police station. A library. He parked in front of the library and got out of the car. The building looked dark inside, but the door was unlocked.

He walked into a kingdom ruled by dust. No librarian was behind the desk or came in response to the bell he rang.

Pitt walked slowly up and down the aisles, scanning the shelves. Between AS I LAY DYING and SANCTUARY was a copy of BATON ROUGE TEARS, the book which could not exist. He did not know whether his tears were joy or triumph. He clutched the worn hard-bound book to his chest and dashed from the library. Somehow, he was not surprised to see the huge armor-clad figure blocking his

path.

“Unhand your prize,” said the figure in a tinny, echoing voice.

“No,” he answered with defiant calm. “This is not yours. This is my Grail.”

The figure swung the broadsword which it wielded. The professor stood as straight as possible and closed his eyes. The sword, connecting with his chest, shattered the ribcage, ruptured organs, and lay bare the heart. The knight vanished, leaving the professor lying on his back, dying in the gathering darkness. Softly at first, then gathering into a torrential downpour, the rain started. The book lay open with its impossible pages exposed. Long after the professor died on the sidewalk of a town that did not exist, the rain washed away the words of the book, and swelled the pages with water.

\*

### **Heaven On an Exit Visa**

Exiles flood the routes to Mecca  
on a trip to debt. The slow road  
twists to a belly-dancer's wiggle.  
Bewildered heartbeats in deserts  
entertain pregnant Angel-dunes  
in wadis the starved call overfed.

--Nathan Whiting

# *Coming of the Dragon*



*by Michael Fuller*

The world's last true wizard stepped off the subway at the lower tip of Manhattan and sighed wearily in the hot air of the station house. Behind him the doors of the train were closed and it rumbled off into the darkness of the tunnel.

After all the years of careful practice and preparation, the day that he feared most had finally come: the Day of the Dragon! The metallic beast of flame and death was speeding up on its unerring way to the mighty metropolis of New York and the wizard knew that only he could stop it; and he didn't have time to be standing around in a subway twiddling his thumbs, he thought to himself.

The Dragon was on its way. [If he were really going for it, he'd be looking at the Pdf Dragon.-ed]

Hurrying, he ran out of the station and into Battery Park where he stood at the sea wall and looked out to the harbor and the brackish

water that was in it. That was where the attack would come from—across the sea.

Looking about himself he noticed—not to his surprise—that he was the only one in the park, with the exception of a sleeping beggar, who hadn't been told of the straying dragon. Everyone else, he knew, was trying to escape the unescapable.

It was lucky that the subways were still running, he thought sadly. The city was tearing itself apart in justifiable panic and the subways still ran. He thought that it said something about the people who ran them.

Suddenly he heard the sound of the dragon's coming—a high-pitched whistle in the air that most people couldn't have heard—and turned to face the water again. Slowly he raised his hands and began the spell that he'd trained his entire life for. The spell that he knew would be his last.

A blue glow began to twist itself about the wizard's body as he continued his strange chanting of the spell. Briefly he looked up with a pained expression on his face as the nuclear missile that Russia had accidentally launched became visible on the horizon, speeding towards its target. Then the blue glow shot from the wizard's fingers and covered the dragon and wizard with its pulsing blue light. And suddenly both the wizard and the missile vanished with a soft pop of collapsing air.

A thousand miles into deep space the dragon died amid its own fiery fury. In the cold vacuum of space the world's last true wizard smiled and then passed away. He had won his battle!

\*





No, it's  
**The Book.**