

THE PDF DRAGON #6



*Access A World Perhaps Strange To You,
Where Much That Is Unusual May Be Seen*

This is the 6th Issue of The Pdf Dragon, done in the summer of the year 2016 and in the month of July, and is the work of John Thiel, kinethiel@comcast.net , at which mailing address the Dragon may be reached by those with LoCs, or messages if you prefer to call them that, and care what ye-editor thinks of what you've called them. And now that you know aught of the publication, let you proceed into its workings.



Big Brother didn't know it, but it was actually the Dragon's Eye that was watching the populace.

Editorial Notes

This fanzine is devoted to the conflict of wargames and has a somewhat medieval approach. The editor was connected with two local societies of this type, Purdue University's Society for Creative Anachronism and the Purdue science fiction group, the S.S. Voyager Society, who sponsored the Wabashcon at

Purdue during the 90s. Another local science fiction activity, of which I was the organizer and to which I belonged, was the Lafayette Interstellar Society. Our fanzine was called VOR-ZAP. These local organizations no longer exist. There is rapid changeover here due to the university matriculations and except for the Science Fiction Brotherhood and possibly the Skulls, there are no similar groups in town (Lafayette, Indiana) at this time. It's not really unusual that they are gone, as they were decades back; you don't expect things to last that long, as interests change and life goes on. Since that time I have been at numerous conventions, meeting people like Baron Dave Romm and Mark McGarry, and pros like Fredrick Pohl. Also I have been in the Indiana Science Fiction Association, where I knew two pros, Robert and Juanita Coulson, among the others in the membership. I was a member of APA-H and for a time its OE, of FAPA where I produced Shadow Fapa and The FAPA Flappah, of the National Fantasy Fan Federation where I was the manager of the Fan/Pro Coordinating Activity and published Ionosphere for the activity and Rocket Fuel for the N3F's apa, NAPA. At present I have rejoined the NFFF and FAPA as an associated member. I have a Facebook group called SF FANDOM and visit at several Facebook science fiction groups. I have a paper zine called Pablo Lennis and a netzine called Surprising Stories, which may be found here at efanazines, as well as at its own URL. Now check this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T8u-t4DmUs>

for the Eye of the Tiger. And onward to LoCs.

Comment Allez-Vous?

JOHN PURCELL: You know, I have been meaning to write a letter of comment on one of your zines for a long time, John, and your latest PDF DRAGON had a couple of items that caught my interest, so here you go.

If I remember correctly, you're about seven or eight years older than me and discovered science fiction fandom in the mid or late 1960s, so you probably met a bunch more of the great fans from yesteryear than I did. That's why your "SF Archaeology" article bothered me a little bit. Now, I realize this was not meant to be an in-depth, researched treatise on science-fiction fandom's history—after all, there are many books about this subject already—but I was really surprised that when you mentioned names as key fannish figures (Rick Snery, Richard Geis, Francis Towner Laney) you didn't talk about Bob Tucker—a major fan from Bloomington, Indiana—or Forrest J. Ackerman, or any other gigantic figures. But since this article appeared to be a mere overview of the genre's magazines, writers, and fans, it makes sense that you would abbreviate it for space considerations. For example, fans have always feuded, going back to the mid-1930s when sf fandom was much more serconish in nature, focusing on sciences, technology, politics, and organizing fandom under one big umbrella (like the N3F). We still do it, too; witness Gamergate and Puppygate in recent years. Fans will be fans. The more things change...

Say, those brief fanzine reviews remind me to add your email and regular mailing addresses to my contact list so I can send my two zines, Askance and Askew, to you. The former, as you know, is my online genzine, and the other is a much shorter (usually only ten pages in length) paper-only fanzine. Yes, a dead tree zine! Some of us still produce them, although it is a dying breed. Cost of production and postage costs have pretty much driven fanzines into the electronic medium, which is fine by me; it is definitely more affordable and response time can be fairly immediate. Fannish blogs, podcasts, and websites are proliferating, too, so much so that it is danged hard to keep up on everything. Science fiction fandom is quite the behemoth now.

The rest of this issue was interesting, but I'm not much into fan-produced fiction, although that is how many professional authors

started out, so who am I to judge? Don Thompson's piece confused me—is this part of a series?—and I can't tell if "Meet de Boys on the Battle Front" is a game review or fiction. Timothy Scott's story "The Questing Beast" was well done, as was "Coming of the Dragon" by Michael Fuller. Those two stories were entertaining. Nothing wrong with that.

Overall, an interesting issue, and I thank you for posting it on efanazines. Feel free to peruse Askance on efanazines. At the moment I am working on the 37th issue, and hope to get that completed in the next week. Looking good so far.

The LoC's appreciated. I was merely pointing out names rather than identifying great contributions. I had an article by Ackerman in one of my zines, a good issue which also had Marian Zimmer Bradley and Dan Adkins in it. Tucker I saw less of; he seemed to regard me as living in the danger zone. He lived in Bloomington, Illinois, not Bloomington, Indiana, though there is a Bloomington, Indiana, which has Indiana University in it, but Bloomington, Illinois has Illinois Wesleyan University, and Illinois State Normal University in nearby Normal, Illinois.##Sure, feuds go way back, reading "You Bastard, Said Al Ashley" talks about Laney's reaction to Al calling him that...that article's in an early fanhistory archive.##Thompson's piece isn't part of a series, though he's done other writing that resembles it.##The game, "Eye of the Tiger", is my own invention and of course it has a story going along with the game.

JUSTJOEGUY: I'll write a LoC to Dragon #6 when you pub it, old friend. 5? Well, the fiction didn't do anything for me. It's unremarkable. Felt no reaction. Oddly enough it seemed to be the case that even the authors weren't interested in what they were writing about? I don't want to be overly hard on anyone, just being up front.

A perceptive comment. Stay with it, Joe.

Now we're on to the wargame

Pack Yore Rifles—and Leave Them Behind



Few further moves in the wargame. The whole thing has turned into a gigantic stalemate. Apparently the Cease and Desist was taken seriously. Westphalia is being forced out of action and Moravia (this is an alternate reality, you understand) has been conquered and put out of action, receiving word of the expansion of Shiloh throughout Seoul without there being any further expansion of troops. In fact, there's a total withdrawal, with Moravian troops being sent back from Shiloh and Shilonian troops being gotten out of Moravia. This results in action getting close to Xanadu, where it can be dealt with. The War in Space has not abated substantially, and this is the one we're gaming, full of superheroes and supervillains, but it has been tamed somewhat by the war being terminated at its source. Look for further interpretations of the combat, an ye will. Nothing will suit those aware of the war but a postwar aftermath, in which, as the experienced know, there is still plenty of action. Kind of a riff taking down the superheroes.

There it is, the big wargame picture, in which you imagine that the Marvel action is real. Further developments are discussable.

The Eye of the Tiger merged into civilian activities—these were onlookers to the space battle. It's still very strange territory. Leng is among those areas still battling oppression.



Fold your manila programs lengwise (wouldn't be surprised if my spell-check capitalized that) and turn the top quarter to the left, like so. Poetry, no one?

RESURRECTION CITY by Dr. Mel Waldman

Above and below the City of Ruins, the flowing Void rotates on an axis of nonbeing,
yet it is, although it is not.
a revolving force of raw nothingness; an abyss in search of boundaries and endings;
a net for nonbeings; a web for broken time, fractured space; and a noose that
smooths even death;
the flowing Void is a graveyard for all creatures and things that have gone away and
crossed over to a chimerical plane of nonexistence;
now, above and below the City of Ruins, I watch the nothingness that is all;
a phantom, I SEE dead clocks, flowers, and trees dissolving in the Void; and still, I
WITNESS a cornucopia of corpses rising suddenly from the Void;
I do not exist; yet I am, although I am not. The nothingness gives birth to all.

FANZINES IN VIEW * comments *

THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS: Everything Robin Bright has sent me, up past twenty pieces of writing—with the exception of his plays—has lost interest in itself in

favor of Futinarian women, with which topic he seems to be obsessed, and he generally runs it through Biblical days, finding Futinarian women where there are none, unless it's in the Book of Revelations. The "woman who holds the bowl of abominations" sounds like she might be one. I've cut most of this out of such writings of his as I have put in Surprising.

FUGGHEAD: Fannish archaeology, eh? Noting your zine was added on June 21st, and the Pdf Dragon #5 was added on June 8th, I'm wondering if you read my article on SF archaeology therein.

Steffan has an appropriate name for an aficionado, like, STF fan, meaning Scientifiction, as Hugo Gernsback once called it. One is reminded of Steve Fahnstalk, also, who chats about sf and fandom. Wait! I should be warned by your title, I see that is a heading statement on your annals. You must have had the concept first and I was borrowing it subconsciously. Well, we'll both be glorified for actually doing this good work. Well, also this should be in the first paragraph.

Mailer's characters not only say "fugg", there's segments in the book headed "The Time Machine" where retrospects are taken and a character named Gallagher. This must be the basis for one of his books being listed in the catalog of the Science Fiction Book Club.

Oh, hmm, you're Steffan. Should look more carefully at my screen.

TNFF: Saw fit to join the N3F as an associate member with this issue, and I'm already in NAPA, the N3F apa that nobody keeps track of but just likes to have it going on. My NAPA zine's called Synergy.

SPARTACUS: Nice article on Clay, he fought with style. Just looked back at Challenger 39. Great cover, that beast really managed to put John Q. Public and the *hoi polloi* on the run. Monsters of the Metropolis rather than Masters.

ZINE DUMP 37: Nice to see a review of the Pdf Dragon in there. I unsquished the present cover to please you; that elongation was to add a trace of the avant garde,

as well as the ancient, that being characteristic of El Greco's art. Also a nod to John Purcell for a mention of the Dragon:

ASKANCE: Surprising Stories has been posted here at efanazines for several issues now; here I'M surprised that you didn't notice it. You've got the wrong URL for Surprising, the old one. It's now <http://surprisingstories.thiels.us> . People like to call me Thiels, adding an "s" to my name. Pablo Lennis was mimeographed well enough, and had uniform printing. It was in the early 90s that various fonts were used and the format got congested due to my use of reduction equipment, when I started having printers doing the zine. I had been doing it for awhile on the printing machine at the church...the same church where I bought the mimeo on which I did Pablo Lennis. That mimeo broke down, so I used their copy machine, and then bought that from them, but it only lasted a certain length of time after my purchase at a hundred dollars. I bought a new copy machine at Greggs' office equipment and it did a couple of issues and then ceased to function, and surprise, I got all of my money back on it. I've been having it printed since, first at a Copy Mat and then at Instant Copy. The zine wasn't universally trashed by fandom either, to the best of my knowledge, just somewhat ignored. Although my format did have the Barlow Curse from the Nameless Order of R'lyeh.

ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK: I see you're taking good advantage of the available possibilities of the computer-constructed zine.

FANTASTIKA: Nice cover, shows action and good photography. So Bill Burns won a FAAN award, eh? Haven't heard about it from him. He should have a fanac award for efanazines, or is that what he got? Whoa, here it is, best website, that must be efanazines.

Your title got past my spell-check. It was an experience to have that happen.

Another poem and then we will have stories.

DEMENTIA IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE by Gerald Heyder

People think I'm crazy because I see pink elephants with purple polka dots and green stripes. The sun is gray, grass is yellow, and trees are lavender with paisley pastel colored leaves. I'm not crazy because everybody else is. All of you out there live in your sane little world, with crime and corruption, terrorism, greed, lust, and just plain dog-eat-dog existence. I avoid all that by communicating with Rod Serling and Ray Bradbury. We are collaborating on a new television series called "Kaleidoscope Dreams in Psychedelic Colors"! You are all nuts if you miss its TV debut in the not-too-distant future. Can you dig it before someone digs your grave??? Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! "Start acting crazy before you go insane so nobody will know the difference!"

And now, coming up, we have the story corner. Actually, for all he rhymed his poem, Gerald Heyder might as well have had that in the story corner too, but he calls it a poem. At any rate, still your objections to fan fiction and curl up in a comfortable place so that you can read fiction designed to have you read it. You won't suffer for the experience, you will be glorified as was the man who saw a beggar coming up the stairs to his patio and accepted his begging bowl from him, pocketing his alms. Why was this man blessed? Because he had taken a burden off the beggar and ennobled him. Besides, some of those coins were worth money on the market. But on to our first story:

WORMWOOD by William Rose



The first thing he noticed when he opened his eyes was a nude woman floating toward him. Well, not quite nude, but very near to it. She was wearing those transparent Mirandan silks and not her standard-issue jumpsuit, which was a clear violation of regulations. If an officer saw her there'd be hell to pay.

"Hello," she said. "Who are you? My name's Rita."

He noticed that her breasts, which were quite large, floated too, and her long, ink-black hair spread around her head like a storm cloud. "I'm Lieutenant Robert Altagracia-Bykov," he replied. He tried to shake hands with her but missed her hand. Then he realized that he was floating too. "Why are we floating?" he asked.

"Because there's no gravity, silly," she said, and giggled.

He felt his face burn and tried to ignore her breasts. "I can see that," he said. "But WHY is there no gravity?"

"Because we've turned it off," she replied.

"But why?" he insisted. "It's against regulations to turn it off."

“Because it’s fun,” she said. She giggled again, and floated off down the corridor. Reflected in its curved metal walls, her brown body and multi-colored silks resembled the positronic fish that float between stars. She waved at him and blew him a kiss. To his amazement he saw that she was taking off her silks one by one and leaving them floating in the air. It was another clear violation of regulations.

“Hello, there.”

He turned rapidly at the sound of the voice and couldn’t stop turning until he grasped a handrail. It seemed to be on the ceiling or what he believed to be the ceiling at this point. He was beginning to feel dizzy. A grinning face was looking up at him and below it there was a hand. He noted with relief that the man, whose dreadlocks were floating and twisting in the air like snakes, was wearing a regulation silver jumpsuit. In his disorientation it took him a moment to figure out which hand he should extend and how he should extend it to make contact with the other’s hand, but finally he managed. “Lieutenant Robert Altagracia-Bykov,” he said. “Reporting for duty.”

“We’ve been expecting you, lieutenant,” the man said. “Glad to have you aboard. I’m Cal.”

“I have my orders here,” the lieutenant said, opening the seal on the large pocket in his pants leg. “They say...”

“Forget it,” Cal said. “Orders schmorders. I bet you’d like to see the bridge.”

“That would be great.”

“Then come along, Bobby my boy,” said Cal. “You don’t mind me calling you Bobby, do you?”

He hated to be called Bobby. “No, of course not,” he said.

“Fine. Then come along with me, and welcome to the good ship Wormwood.”

The lieutenant looked at the man but said nothing. The name was not the one he had expected. Nor was the bridge what he had expected. The main consoles had been removed and things which looked suspiciously like mindgame videos had been jerry-rigged in their place. Men and women were working the machines and laughing loudly. There was a bewildering mixture of regulation jumpsuits, Mirandan silks and total nudity. Bottles of various sizes and shapes floated through the air and were seized apparently at random. Some of the bottles were standard-issue concentrated

food and soft drinks, but others were unlike any bottles he had seen before. These were the ones people drank from most often. “How do you like it?” asked Cal.

“It’s very interesting,” he replied. That was true. It was certainly not like any starship he’d ever studied in class.

“You look a little confused,” Cal said.

“Maybe it was the chute that brought me aboard,” he said. “I feel a little dizzy.”

“Here, sit down.” Cal maneuvered him into a plush chair and strapped him in. He began to feel better and then he noticed the control panels at his fingertips. “Hey, this is the captain’s chair,” he exclaimed, struggling to get loose.

“That’s all right,” said Cal. “She won’t mind. They don’t work, anyway.”

“But aren’t you the captain?”

“Me?” Cal laughed. “I’m the botanist. Not that there’s much to do but tend to the hydroponics. I’ve got some great Rigellian cabbages.” He was proud.

“Where are we?” the lieutenant asked.

“Who knows? Somewhere in the hole.”

“You mean we’re in the hole already?”

“Yep. We went in just after you got here. We were waiting for you, as a matter of fact. Yes. We couldn’t just let you zip off the chute into deep space, now could we? You could get a nasty gamma burn out there.” Cal laughed uproariously, as though it were the funniest joke ever, and the lieutenant felt still more confused.

“I’d like to see the captain,” he said.

“You’ve seen her,” Cal said. “That was her who piped you aboard.”

“That was piping me aboard?”

“Yep. She’s a peach, ain’t she?”

A young girl wearing an extremely short miniskirt and black boots floated by. “Gimme some skin, Cal,” she said.

“Sure thing, Uhura,” he said, slapping her hand. She did a forward roll and caught a bottle in each hand. “Pretty neat trick, huh?” said Cal.

“What did you call her?” the lieutenant asked.

“Uhura. She’s an archaeologist specializing in ancient media. She’s the one who discovered Star Trek. You heard about it, Bobby?”

“Yes,” he said. “I even saw episodes in training school in cultural anthropology. Is that why she’s dressed like that?”

“Yeah. She calls it a granny dress.”

“It’s interesting.”

“Me, I like Mirandan silks better,” Cal said with a judicious look. “But to each his own.”

The lieutenant felt as though an elevator going down a deep shaft had suddenly reached the bottom. Bottles clanked as they rained down on the floor. He realized what had happened—someone had turned on the gray generators.

“Okay, folks, let’s get serious,” Cal shouted, clapping his hands. The others linked arms and began to dance, kicking their legs high in the air. “Serious, serious, he wants us to get serious,” they sang in chorus. The lieutenant recognized the tune as the Rigel Rag. He leaned his forehead on his hand.

“Cal?”

“Yes, Bobby?”

“What the hell’s going on here?”

“First trip through the hole, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“You’ll get used to it. It’s business as usual on one of these trips.”

“Cal, what did you call this ship?”

“The Wormwood.”

“But that’s not its name. It’s the Intrepid.”

Cal bent over laughing and slapped his thighs in glee. “Man, oh man,” he gasped. “Can you imagine a hole ship called the Intrepid? That’d be far out, as they used to say.”

The lieutenant looked around. Everyone was laughing, more than half of them rolling on the floor. He could feel his face burning again. "Well, it's damned well not called the Wormwood."

"What better name for a ship that goes through a wormhole?"

"Wormholes are singularities in the fabric of space/time," Robert said. "Not three-ring circuses."

"And wormwood is what they used to make absinthe. *Artemesia absinthium*, to be technical. It was finally forbidden because it was believed to drive people insane. Hallucinations, the whole bit. So what better name for a hole ship?"

"But it's not its name. It's the Intrepid, and every single one of you is going to be court-martialed when they find out what's going on here."

Robert realized that he was shouting and that the bridge was suddenly very quiet. He sank back in the seat. "That's okay, man," Cal said, laying a hand on his shoulder. "It'll be all right. We all freak out a bit at first. And don't be bothered if we laugh a little. What else can you do in a hole? Besides, we're all loony." He sighed. "Damn that Uhura," he muttered to himself. "Now she's gotten me using that wild 20th Century jargon."

"I don't understand," the lieutenant said.

"Don't try. Just go with it." Cal's voice slipped into a rhythmic singsong that, combined with the barely intelligible archaisms, he found strangely hypnotic. "They spent a hundred years playing around with wormholes on a subatomic level, shoving electrons into them and watching them pop through. Then they found this granddaddy of a wormhole that somebody just left lying around, and we're popping through to see what is on the other side. This is my third trip, Bobby, my boy."

"So what did you find?" The lieutenant automatically lowered his voice because he knew the project was superclassified.

"Not a thing," Cal said.

"Nothing?"

"You got it."

"Then why are we going through again?"

“Who knows?” Cal shrugged his shoulders. “But the pay’s good and it’s a swinging crew. So just let it flow, my man, just let it flow.”

Bobby woke with a pleasant floating sensation. He realized that he was floating because someone had turned off the grav generators again, but he didn’t mind that. He didn’t mind being called Bobby any more, either. In fact, he didn’t mind much of anything. Cal was right: life in a wormhole was good, as long as you just let it flow.

Suddenly he fell to his bunk and at the same time heard the hoarse “whonk, whonk” of the ship’s alarm. Gathering his Mirandan silks about him he lunged out into the corridor to see what was the matter. The captain came running toward him, her long black hair tied back in a severe-looking bun. “Hi, Rita,” he said. “Want another tumble?”

“Captain Boyd to you, mister,” she snapped. “Get to your station on the double. And get into proper uniform before I throw your ass in the brig.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” he said, snapping to attention and saluting. Now it registered that she was wearing a silver jumpsuit with her captain’s stripes on the sleeve. Three minutes later he was entering the bridge, properly attired. He stood for a second with his mouth open. Gone were the mindgames. Navigational consoles lined the room, and uniformed officers sat in front of each station, their hands dancing across the brightly blinking keys. The captain was seated in her chair, her fingers poised over the control panels. Cal was standing stiffly by her side as they gazed at the huge viewscreen where a blue supergiant glowed brilliantly in the darkness of space. The star looked strangely elongated.

“It’s a binary, captain,” Cal was saying. “Its companion is a black hole drawing enormous quantities from it.”

“Lieutenant Armand, is there any life on the planets?” the captain asked an officer who was leaning over one of the consoles. Bobby noticed with a shock that it was Uhura.

“None that our instruments can detect, captain,” the woman replied.

Bobby stared, wondering what had become of the miniskirt and boots. She didn’t look the same without them. “Is there anything wrong, lieutenant?” the captain asked. Her tone was not friendly.

“Nothing, sir,” he said, snapping to attention.

“Then get to your post and see if you can figure out where the hell we are,” she said.

He slipped into the seat in front of the astrogation console and looked at it in dismay. The coordinates that were busily blipping across the screen meant nothing at all. They were sheer gibberish.

“Well, Lieutenant Altagracia-Bykov?” the captain asked.

“The console’s malfunctioning, captain,” he replied. “Either that, or we’re venturing somewhere it can’t compute.”

“More than likely,” the captain said. She turned to Cal. “What do you think?”

At that moment the ship stopped dead, throwing Cal, the captain and half the crew to the floor. The lieutenant clutched his console and held on for dear life. The next moment he felt the ship move again, accelerating rapidly, but in the opposite direction, or what he took as the opposite direction. Since entering the wormhole he had really no idea of which way they were going, if indeed they were going anywhere at all.

“Oh, Cal,” the captain said, standing up and rubbing her forehead.

“You hurt, baby?” Cal asked as he put his arms around her.

“Not really,” she said. “I just bumped my head when I fell.”

Bobby looked around. People had risen to their feet and were busy with screwdrivers and pliers. He felt a tug against his lap and realized that he was floating upward. Soon some of the consoles had already been disconnected and were floating in the air. Crew members jockeyed them toward the exits as others floated in the mindgame panels back into the room. He could hear someone humming the Rigel Rag as he worked.

“You okay, Bobby?”

He felt fingers in his hair and looked up to see Uhura looking down at him with concern. She was already wearing her ancient miniskirt and black boots. He wondered dazedly how she had changed so quickly. Maybe she had them on under her suit.

He heard another voice say, “Leave some for me,” and opened his eyes. The captain was descending on him from the other side, her bun undone and her hair billowing up around her head like a black cloud. He started violently as she unsealed

his jumpsuit. “Just relax, Bobby boy, and let Rita take care of you,” she said in a whisper.

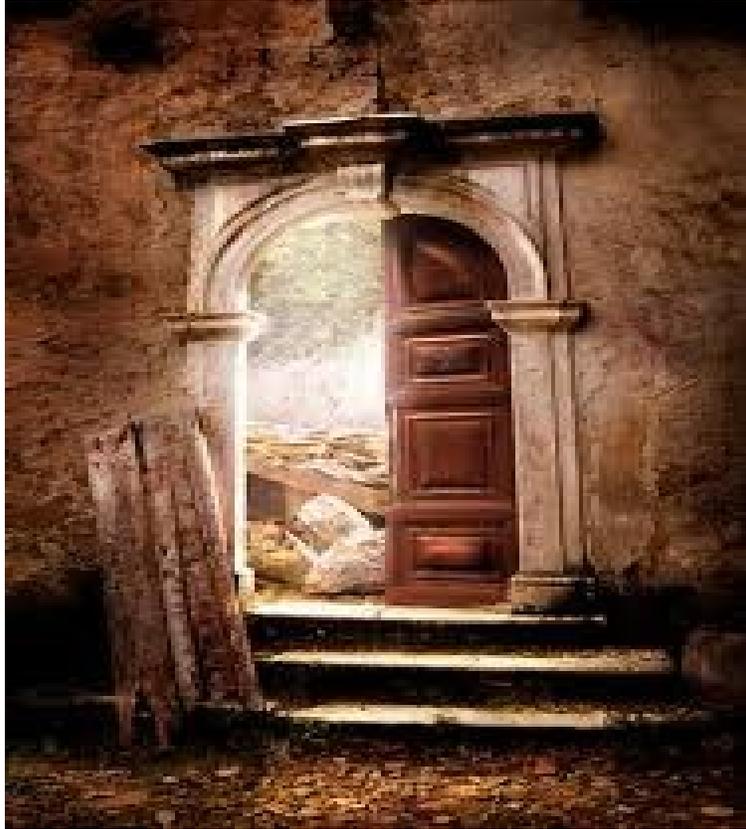
“Aye, aye, sir,” he said.

“What’s this ‘sir’?” she asked. “I’m your spacehoney, Bobbykins.” A cloud of bottles floated past and he heard Cal laugh somewhere on the bridge. He relaxed and closed his eyes.

They were back in the wormhole again, no doubt about it. They had nothing to show for the trip, but who cared? He just hoped there would be many, many more trips through the singularity and that he’d be on all of them.

Well, there’s a fate and a half, gentle reader, and if you feel lulled by the same influences, or similar ones, perhaps you can recover your equilibrium by our next story, which does not have a happy ending, somewhat unlike the above story. It has its own reality, which may not be so true of the story just presented. Fasten your rocket boots and take a tentative first few steps, asking yourself whether you should be relying on others when making such an unusual and daring attempt, and you will be like the unhappy spirit in the next story, making his way through the...

DOORWAY TO ELSEWHERE **by**
Jack Creek



“You shouldn’t have taken it.” Flint’s voice was low, reproofing.

Edgar Pangan, expatriate from Earth, small-time crook, and currently exile on this rim-world of the galaxy, turned savagely to his companion. “It was only a moldy stone idol. A collector on Earth wouldn’t look at it twice. I thought I could barter it for a night’s lodging. How was I to know it was one of their deities or something?”

“Not just one of their deities, it was the likeness of the supreme god of the Woboes,” the shopkeeper in whose establishment he had

sought refuge informed him. “Anyway, you must have known it would stir up the natives.”

“Well, I took it back. I traipsed half-way across their miserable planet to take it back. What are they so uptight about?”

“They do not forget—or forgive,” the other Earthman informed him. “When you’ve been on Trivinia as long as I have you’ll have learned something of the idiosyncrasies of its peoples. That you’ve dared to contaminate one of their sacred objects with your alien hands is grounds enough for retribution.”

“But what do they want, some form of penance?”

“Probably your life,” commented the older man dryly.

“The hell you say!” Pangan exclaimed. “Well, what am I going to do then? I can’t stay cooped up here until the hue and cry dies down. Out on the street I stick out like a sore thumb.”

“It would be advisable to leave Trivinia,” advised the shopkeeper.

“You’re telling me. But where do I go? My name’s mud in the rest of the galaxy. I wouldn’t be here if I had any choice.”

“I know, you told me you were reported to the rim worlds. As an alternative to hard labor, I think you said.”

“Yeah, the authorities hoped I’d turn over a new leaf. On this crummy little hunk of real estate, not much bigger than a national park back home. There’s hardly room to turn.”

“Nevertheless,” returned Flint, “you were unwise to raise the ire of the natives.”

“Okay, okay,” Pangan said with a grimace. “But that’s not helping me any now. Even if I had the fare, the spaceport’s off limits to me. I couldn’t even ship out as a stowaway.”

“There are other transportations routes,” the old shopkeeper told him blandly.

“Other routes, what other routes? You know as well as I do that there’s only one ship that calls here once a month.” He looked at Flint keenly. “What do you mean, other routes? You know something I don’t?”

“I’m an old man,” returned the shopkeeper. “When I came here I was a young one. In those intervening years one learns much of those with whom he deals. I, too, once despised the Wobo for simple-minded tradesmen. But I lived to learn better. Simple they may be, but they possess powers of which we Terrestrials, for all

our vaunted science, can only dream. I, too, might have taken that 'other' route—once!—if the need had been great enough. But I chose to stay, more or less integrating myself into the economy of the society.”

Pangan stared at his companion. In all the years he had known Flint, it had never occurred to him that he, too, might be a refugee, that he, too, could never “go back”.

“But because you are an Earthman,” the old man continued, “and because you’ve been a good customer—within the limits of your resources—it is just possible that I may be able to help you.”

“Help me? How could you help me?” Pangan glanced warily out at the street. Apparently no one had followed him here. Only a few pedestrians were visible in the gathering dusk, and none of them saw any particular reason to inspect the old curiosity shop. Flint scribbled a note on a sheet of paper.

“As soon as the thoroughfares are empty of traffic go to the street named Reve. Look for a house with a jaman tree in front. It is occupied by one Malmuke, skilled in the science peculiar to his race. The common people, who do not understand such things, call him ‘sorcerer’.

Show him this note and he will help you leave Trivinia.”

“How do you know? Why should he? What are you...?” Pangan floundered, perplexed. “Anyway, I have nothing to pay him.”

“To you he will charge nothing, because I was once in a position to do him a very great favor.”

“But how...?”

“The Wobo may be a primitive people,” replied the old man, “but their wise men have mastered the art of the transmutation of atoms, using a procedure that no KNOWN race has been able to duplicate. No, I have no idea of how this seeming miracle is accomplished.”

“But suppose something goes wrong. Where does that leave me?”

“What is your alternative?” asked the old man. “To be torn to pieces by a mindless mob?”

“Suppose I land back on Earth or somewhere?”

“I think you can be assured of transference to a world where no one has ever heard the name of Edgar Pangan,” the shopkeeper assured his visitor quietly.

Pangan glanced at the paper. He saw that it contained a few lines in the alien tongue. He folded it and put it in the pocket of his tunic.

“You will leave by the alley entrance,” Flint instructed him. “But, remember, not until such an hour as the streets are deserted. In the meantime, you may wait in the back room of my shop. Now, excuse me, here comes a customer.”

Some four hours later, keeping within the shadows of the buildings, Pangan moved swiftly through the deserted streets toward the address given him. By Terrestrial standards the city was a small one, and, during the two years he had been obliged to live on the rim world, he had learned most of the thoroughfares by heart.

He saw no one. He wondered if Flint knew what he was talking about. Did he really believe that hocus-pocus about sorcery, transmutation of atoms? Still, he had nothing to lose. He had come to the end of his rope. It took him about three quarters of an hour to reach the street and locate the house. A light burned within despite the lateness of the hour. Pangan hesitated, looking about him. Should he knock and run the risk of alerting a casual

passerby, or should he just barge in unannounced and risk being mistaken for a burglar? His decision was made for him. Apparently his presence had not gone entirely unannounced, for suddenly he heard behind him the familiar cry of “Am-iii,” to be repeated within seconds by a score or more throats as the mob, seemingly materializing out of nowhere, regrouped for the kill.

He opened the door and entered the building. In the center of the room—sans furniture, for the Wobo did not believe in ostentatious display—sat an old and venerable member of the clan, one of the oldest natives that Pangan remembered ever seeing. He was clothed in a flowing ‘habit’ of utter black, relieved only by an inscription embroidered in brightest yellow, apparently an insignia of rank. A pile of rags constituted his “throne”. His long, slender appendages rotated the prayer wheel before him but his eyes flicked upward, meeting those of the Terrestrial as he entered. Though he made no perceptible motion, a tiny, glistening tube appeared in his hand, pointed at the intruder.

“No, wait.” Pangan fumbled for Flint’s note. Perhaps he had made a mistake in coming to this place. After all, would a priest of the

people assist a fugitive to escape—especially one who had violated a sacred shrine?

The weapon vanished as the ancient creature held out its appendage for the proffered missile. He read it, comprehended it, then it, too, disappeared without any motion that the Earthman could detect.

Outside, the leaders of the mob were pounding at the door. Evidently, even the home of a spiritual leader was not sacrosanct. Transportation, Flint had said. The priest would provide transportation. Pangan's initial skepticism revived. It seemed unlikely that the machinery necessary to make a transfer could be concealed in this humble abode. Was there a back entrance? At best, he would only be buying time.

“Yes,” the creature before him said, speaking in a peculiarly reedy voice. “I can transport you far beyond the reach of those who seek you, but, even so, I am compelled to caution you about the consequences. It may, in your own vernacular, be a case of “out of the frying pan into the fire.”

“Words!” sneered Pangan, with a bravado born of desperation. “You talk because you can't deliver...for all your vaunted powers, you are a charlatan, a fraud!”

Malmuke rose. "Very well, Mr. Pangan, you shall have your desire." He stepped to the wall and drew aside a tapestry, revealing a metallic sheeting, incongruous in that hovel. He pressed a concealed catch and the door slid into its recesses, revealing—a black nothingness. "Behold, man of Earth," said the shaman. "At your service, the doorway to elsewhere."

In spite of his need, Pangan hesitated. But Flint had been sure that the old priest would help him. And how could he be in a worse fix than he was in now? The howling of the mob outside, strengthened by reinforcements, obliged him to make his ultimate decision. He stepped forward into the dark.

His first thought was that Flint had been right about transmutation. He was no longer on Trivinia—nor any world he had ever known. The pattern of the stars—none of them familiar—denoted an alien world, light years from where he had started his journey, a world more alien than any he had yet encountered. Here there were no buildings, not the slightest sign that intelligent beings had ever trodden here. The hard rock was devoid of even elementary life. He could only guess at the temperature, but he was sure it was many degrees below zero. Even if he could find shelter he could not survive long without heat. Better to have

braved the mob's wrath than to die a frozen corpse. Flint, he thought. Flint must have known. The old man had sold him down the river, had probably been in cahoots with the priest all along.

He turned to the door through which he had just passed, but it fitted so snugly as to be almost a part of the rock itself, and there was no appendage to serve as a handle or lever. A scream rose in his throat as he hurled his weight against it, again and again, until he finally collapsed, a sobbing heap upon the rock, soon to be a lifeless hunk of protoplasm. Only the alien stars, aloof and impersonal, were witness to his demise.

Well, here's a man scuttled, as it seems suffering the doom of a negative person, that of dying in a milieu of negativity. What will happen to his spirit? Perhaps it will be etched into the rock; certainly he isn't going anywhere even if there is life after death. If there is, is there a place for there to be that life upon? But soft, if there were no witnesses to it, would it have occurred? He may have been like the tree falling unnoticed in the forest.

We have one final tale, this one unillustrated, as an illo for it would be trite, I think, by now. Let us proceed---fellas?

DRAGONS ON MY MIND by David Phillips

Once in a great while, there comes into this dull world a person who just has to have the answers. Not just any answers, but THE answers—the true ones. Eric was just such a person.

Eric Anderson lived in a small town in South Texas, in the Big Bend Country, just at the foot of the Chisos Mountains. Scott, Texas boasted only about 2600 residents, but it was the largest town for many miles, and the county seat. Since it had a county library and other services necessary for the only real town for a hundred and fifty miles, it was not a bad place to live.

The Anderson home was a rambling story and a half farm house that had been a mile outside town when it was built, but the town had grown, and it stood just inside the city limits at the time of our story.

Now Eric had been a curious person since he was small, but as he got older, he grew downright inquisitive. By the time he was eleven, he felt that he just couldn't live without the answer to any question that popped into his head. That was troublesome, for they kept popping all the time.

To make it even worse, Eric had large eyes that were silvery blue, and they were always open (when he was awake, of course). Also, his ears, which were not so large, were always listening, as well. Consequently, he was constantly seeing and hearing things that made him ask even more questions, although he often couldn't see his clothes on the floor of his room, or hear his mother tell him to pick them up.

The sight or sound of almost anything could push his curiosity button, so he was constantly asking his father things like “Who's the greatest athlete that has ever, ever been?” and “Where did God come from?” Fortunately, his father was relatively wise, although he was often frustrated and overwhelmed by Eric's limitless curiosity. One day, some subtle stimulus prompted Eric to ask, “Dad, do you think there really are any dragons?”

Will's first impulse was to say no, and let it drop, but before it came from his mouth, a flash of sudden inspiration intruded upon his mind, and he said instead, "I don't know, son, why don't you go to the library and try to find a book all about it? I'll tell you what, the library closes in about fifteen minutes, so I'll run you over there."

So they drove to the library and found a book all about dragons.

"Gee, I'm smart," Will thought as they drove home. "That should keep him busy for awhile."

However, when he glanced over at his blond-haired son sitting on the front seat, he felt a small twinge of alarm. It seemed that Eric's eyes were even larger, and the look on his face was something like rapture as he pored over the pictures and stories of dragons. That night, Will had to tell him three times to put the dragon book down and finish his homework, and he finally threatened discipline if the homework was not done. Eric grudgingly put the book away for awhile, but it seemed to be an irresistible attraction for him as it lay beside him on the desk. About bedtime, Will looked in as the boy sat in his attic bedroom. His head was bent over the drawing pad on his lap, as he sat crosslegged on the brown braided rug, diligently attempting to draw a picture after the likeness of a shimmering green and gold dragon. Repeating the writhing lines of the creature in the book was too much for an eleven-year-old artist, and he groaned and ground his teeth as Will watched silently.

"I can't do it! This doesn't look like a dragon!" He ripped the page out of the pad, and almost crumpled it up, but then thought better of it.

Eric's mother, Miriam, came to the door just as Eric was giving the book one last loving glance before putting it on his desk. As he trudged down the hall to the bathroom he whispered to Will, "You're not encouraging him in all this dragon nonsense, are you? He doesn't need any more strange ideas in his head."

"Look, Miriam, it's okay for him to be curious, it shows that he's intelligent."

“Well, maybe so, Will, but I worry about him. It seems like his mind is always out in space somewhere. He has to learn to apply himself if he’s ever going to be something.”

Will put his arms around her and lay his forehead against hers. “Let’s just let him be a kid for now, okay?”

Eric took his dragon book to school the next day, and got two checks on the board for looking at it when the teacher was instructing. Then, on the way home, he was so engrossed with it that he forgot to get off the bus at the stop near his house, and had to walk back home through the old section of town from the next stop. He was walking down Gregg street, passing dusty, run-down buildings, mostly unoccupied, when something across the street caught his eye. It was a curio shop that he had never noticed before. Above the door was an awning, once white metal, but now mildewed gray, and above the awning faded letters painted on the crumbling brick. What was left of the sign read **Swenson’s Curios and Book Repair**. Eric, without even realizing it, slowly walked across the empty street toward it.

The wide window was grimy with dust, and had a meandering diagonal crack that ran downward from the top right corner. Below that crack, however, was the thing that drew the boy’s attention. Fixed to a wooden base was a twisty branch of scrub mesquite about eighteen inches high, and two inches thick at its widest point. Writhing around that, its sinewy body contorted and claws splayed, was a statue of a dragon. The beast seemed to be attempting to snap at something over its shoulder, wings unfurled as if ready to fly. Eric stared for a long time, standing before the window, at the shimmering blue-green scales. Even through the dust on the glass, the beast was luminous in the afternoon sun, looking very much as if it were alive.

When he opened the door of the shop, a bell rang in the back, and a moment later he saw the proprietor approaching between rows of shelves that contained hundreds of old books, completely disordered

with a layer of dust all over. In a gruff voice with a Swedish accent, the old man said, “Yes, what do you want, boy?”

Eric surveyed the person before him for an instant before answering, taking in the sagging jowls, thin bowed frame, weak eyes. Thinking that the man was as dusty as his shop, he said, “Excuse me, sir, is that a real dragon in the window?”

The wrinkled face was almost angry under an unkempt halo of thin white hair as he answered, “Of course it’s not real, it’s a statue. What do you think?” He glared at Eric. The glare was meant to be intimidating, and Eric was afraid, but curiosity won out over fear, and he asked, “Can I see it? Up close, I mean; can I touch it?”

“Get out of here, boy! If you have no business here, you should go home.” The old man really was angry now, and his face turned a blotchy red from the neck up. Eric backed out the door with the old man still staring at him, but as he left, he saw a sign over the dark wooden counter which read **Book Covers Repaired, \$5.00.**

Eric took two things to school with him the next day. In his pocket was a crumpled \$5.00 his grandmother had given him for his birthday, and in his hand one of his oldest books, a WE WERE THERE biography with the spine of the cover ripped off. He missed his stop again after school, and got off the bus in the old section of town.

The bell rang as he pushed open the door and stepped into the dark recesses of the curio shop. The proprietor shuffled painfully to the front, and stood before the boy. He looked irritated. He crossed his arms. “Well?”

“I...I have a book, sir, it has a broken back.” And he thrust the book and the five dollars toward the old man. Gnarled hands reached out and snatched the book and the money from the boy. “All right. You stay here.” And as the bent figure retreated to the door marked **Employees Only**, in the rear of the shop, “And don’t touch anything!”

Now Eric was the type of boy who almost always obeyed his elders, but curiosity can drive a boy to do things out of the ordinary, things he knows better than to do. So Eric reached into the window display, and touched the dragon. All he meant to do was touch it, and look closer, but when he did, he found out something shocking. The dragon was NOT a statue! In science class at school there was a stuffed iguana, so he knew what a lizard skin felt like. The dragon's scales, however, felt almost oily, they were so smooth. The tiny teeth were like needles, but definitely teeth, not carved or molded. The splayed claws were curved and cruel looking. Eric picked up the stuffed dragon and held it up to the light. The wings, in the afternoon sun which filtered through the dusty window, were leathery and translucent, and the fine bones and marbled veins could be seen in the wide stretched flesh of the wing.

“BOY!!!” The old man had come up silently. “What are you doing? I told you not to touch anything!”

Eric knew he should put the dragon down, but he couldn't. Something made him clutch it almost as if to protect it. He was speechless, and his eyes were wide as he stared at the menacing figure which approached him now. The old man's face was crimson, and his eyes bulged. He raised his hand to strike the boy before him, and Eric shrank from the coming blow, but then the hand stopped. Slowly he lowered his arm, and, still shaking and gasping from his fit of anger, he stepped nearer. He looked closely at Eric's face, and into his eyes. He saw fear there, but he saw something else too. He spoke slowly, voice cracking.

“I...I'm sorry...it's been so long. I had forgotten. You have it. The wonder, I mean. I'm afraid I've lost it...” His words trailed off, and he stood silent, vacantly staring at the dragon still clutched in Eric's arms. Finally, Eric found his own voice.

“I'm sorry, Mr. Swenson, I really didn't mean to pick it up. I just wanted to touch it, to see it up close. I want to know if there really are dragons.”

“I know, boy, I know. I was the same way once. That’s how I ended up here, in Scott. I had to know about dragons, too, and I spent all the money I had following dragon lore. Here, let’s sit down, and I’ll tell you the story. And I’m sorry I scared you.”

So they sat in two rickety chairs at the back of the store, and Eric set the dragon on the table between them. Then Mr. Swenson told him his story.

“When I was a boy, I had a curious nature just like yours. When my mother would tell me tales from the Old Country, all about light elves and dwarves and gods like Thor and Odin, I thought they were wonderful. I knew they were just stories, but I wanted them to be true. I felt they SHOULD be true. And it always seemed to me that behind all the stories there were dragons.

“When I was a young man, my brother and I had a fur business in Oklahoma. We bought beaver and fox pelts from the Indians, and one day an Indian brought in this stuffed dragon. The Indian spoke mostly Choctaw, but I managed to get out of him that he had traded some furs for the dragon while on a winter hunting trip to the Chisos mountains. He got it from an old trapper who had found it dead in one of his traps, and had stuffed it himself. I don’t know how he did it, because I’ve never found a stitch anywhere on the dragon, and the eyes don’t seem to be glass. Anyway, I tried to find out the exact location where he had trapped it, but all the Indian could tell me was that, when he asked the trapper the same question, he said ‘You have all you need to know in your hand.’

“Well, I guess I kind of got the dragon fever. I read everything I could find about dragons, which wasn’t much. I even made a trip to a big library in Kansas City, and found a great deal of historical information there, but almost all of the sources spoke of dragons as mythical creatures. I kept notes on everything I found, and the more I did find out, the more it seemed to me that all the legends had to start somewhere. There are accounts of dragons in almost every culture, from Mexico to England to Greece to China.

“In the end, I came here, and spent about two years searching the mountains for some sign that would lead me to the answer about dragons. I found that the local Indians have stories about a beast they call ‘Culebrajon’. They say it’s a great serpent with legs and wings that comes out at night and carries off sheep and calves. Some of the old men among them claim that it lives in a cave near the peak of a mountain, but none could say where it was. When they heard what I was looking for, none would guide me, either.

“In the end, I gave up. I had lived up all my money, and had nothing left except a little dragon. I should have gone back to the family business in Oklahoma, but I couldn’t leave. I kept thinking that some day I might find a lead that would show where the little one came from. Eventually, when I realized that I would never find it, I felt like a fool and a failure. I had wasted my life on a myth. I guess I got so bitter that I just made myself forget, finally, all about dragons and all the wonderment I used to have about them. I even got angry every time I looked at it. I guess that’s why I was so angry with you.” He lapsed into silence, chin propped on his hands, elbows on the little table, eyes vacantly staring at the dragon. Eric saw the chance to ask the question that he had been waiting for.

“But, do you still believe that there are dragons? That they are real, I mean.”

The old man did not answer for a while, and Eric began to think he had not heard the question. Then, slowly, the man spoke.

“I suppose...suppose I do believe it. The man, the boy I used to be, believes it...if I could just find him.”

They were both silent for awhile, both staring at the dragon on the table. Finally Mr. Swenson returned to his repair work. Upon finishing:

“Well, Eric, it must be time for you to be getting home. I’m sure your mother will be worried about you.”

So he walked with Eric back to the front of the store, and Eric picked up his repaired book. They agreed that the boy was to come back the

next day and bring his dragon book, and Mr. Swenson would get out his notes. Eric walked home through the twilight a very happy boy.

When he got home, he discovered a very unhappy and worried mother.

“Eric, where have you been? I’ve called the school, and all of your friends, and your father was just about to go out and look for you.”

So Eric told his parents the whole story.

His mother wanted to ground him for a month, and to make the curio shop and Mr. Swenson off limits. His father interceded, though, understanding how a boy with a curiosity as powerful as Eric’s could lose track of time when on the verge of a great discovery. He gave Eric permission to go to the curio shop the next day, but said he would pick him up on the way back home from work. Miriam said, “All right, Will, if that’s the way you think we ought to handle it, but I think this is crazy. Dragons are a myth. This stuffed animal must be a hoax.”

“Well, maybe it is, Miriam, but I don’t see any harm in letting the boy find out. If it IS a hoax, Eric will figure it out before long, and it’ll be better if he finds out himself.”

Eric went to bed that night very excited and happy.

Miriam went to bed worried. Will went to bed wondering what he had allowed his son and himself to get into.

Mr. Swenson was elated to see Eric the next day, and took the boy to a back room behind the shop which contained a wide desk with two stools standing near, and a small bed in the corner. The only light in the room was from a lamp on the desk, and no window broke the barren expanse of brick that formed the four walls.

In that dim light, knowledge grew, and the boy learned that Mr. Swenson could have written the book Eric had checked out of the

library. The old man, however, was enthralled with the artist's renderings of gold and green dragons with red mouths and yellow slitted eyes. There were Wyvers, and Lindworms, and heraldic dragons, and Guivres, all of the most important types of dragons. Eric learned that the little stuffed dragon was of the heraldic type, with spiny back, leathery wings, and four legs with clawed feet. His eyes kindled with dragon-fever when Mr. Swenson showed him notes on the records of dragon sightings. There was the sighting by many residents of London on November 30, 1222, of several winged dragons, cavorting in the chill skies, and an account of an Amphiptere (a legless, winged serpent) about nine feet long, which terrorized Essex county for several months in 1669. The old man showed him notes on the diary of the naturalist Edward Topsell, who wrote in 1609 that the villages of Sanctogoarin and Neidenburg, in Germany, were plagued by dragons. And most amazing was the fact that the Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi had in his collection a lindworm (a great flightless serpent with one pair of legs) which was killed near Bonn in 1572, and that Marco Polo reported seeing lindworms on his journeys.

Eric learned from Mr. Swenson that dragons are always associated with the stories of the beginnings of things, with pre-history and the legends of gods and heroes. There were even many references to dragons in the Bible, and a description of one in Job, chapter 41. As they talked, Mr. Swenson's excitement grew, and it seemed that his old rheumy eyes cleared, and took on the same light that was in the boy's.

After a long while, they turned to the little dragon, remembering the words of its original owner to the Indian, "You have all you need to know in your hands." They looked carefully over every square inch of the dragon and of the base, and the mesquite branch, but could find no trace of a map or any kind of message. They were so engrossed in their search that they didn't even notice the shop bell when Will came in. Will stood in the doorway of the back room for a long time, silently watching the elderly man and the young boy sharing the same wonder. When Eric finally looked up and saw his father there, his face fell. "Do I have to go home now, Dad?"

“Well, it’s already dark outside, son. Mom will have dinner waiting.” Then Will introduced himself to Mr. Swenson, who thanked him for letting Eric come.

Eric said, “We can’t find the map, Dad. We may never find where it came from.”

Mr. Swenson rose from his place beside the desk and crossed the room to where Will stood. He took his outstretched hand and held it for a moment, looking deeply into the eyes of the younger man. Then he spoke slowly.

“The boy is too young to understand this, Mr. Anderson, but perhaps you will. Maybe he will not find the answer to his question, I don’t know. But he HAS found something that has been lost for a long, long time.”

Well, sir, I’d like to have a look at his book and the notes myself, maybe then I could find out more information about what a dragon is. I thought it was taken rapidly on a cigarette to avoid a nicotine fit.

But perhaps I am talking to myself. It may be foolish to expect a reader to peruse and take in three stories written down a screen while sitting cramped in his computer nook on a wobbly swivel chair, with people asking him how he’s coming along with the net. But, he may be breathing fire out of his mouth having read a dragon story, and if so, here’s words to calm him down, if they are successful at doing that. Now there’s one more short piece.

DINNER WITH THE WINDSORS by WILL MAYO

Strange. I just woke up from the strangest dream. I dreamed I had dinner with the royal family. It went over well, I think. Charles was nice, as was Camilla, and the Queen liked the poems I showed her, but whenever I saw Princess Diana afterwards (lately, risen from the grave) she went off running in the opposite direction. I never knew why.

And a concluding verse, we'll make it a haiku.

**What we need out here
spring in the blackness of space
life from dark matter**
-Neal Wilgus



