

The  
**M E N T O R**



# PERIL ON A SPACE BUOY

by Daniel S. Irwin.

The small travel pod from the territorial surveillance ship jolted its occupants sharply as the docking mechanism locked into place onto the manned space buoy. It had been fortunate that the surveillance vessel had been within the buoy's range when the distress call came out.

The boarding hatch of the buoy opened and the pod's two occupants stepped out to be met by the space buoy's sole remaining living crewman.

"I'm so glad to see you. I thought I'd be stuck up here alone forever."

"I'm Lieutenant Bruno. This is Doctor Reo. I take it you're Casman."

"Yes, that's right, Casman, ship's cook. It's been terrible. Both of them must be dead. They haven't moved for hours, not even a sound."

The Lieutenant, a longtime veteran of the Surveillance Service, was cool to Casman's obvious alarm over recent events. He had seen enough of the unusual that he knew not to be too concerned at first. Doctor Reo, new to the Service but experienced in space duty, easily followed Bruno's lead, maintaining her usual sense of professionalism.

"Where are they now?" asked Lieutenant Bruno.

"They're still in our travel pod. They ran in there screaming, put on emergency suits and after a while just stopped moving. I didn't know what to do. This is my first time out here."

"First time?" inquired Lieutenant Bruno, not really expecting an answer.

He gazed at Casman, sizing him up. His impression of Casman was that he seemed rather wimpy. But then, he knew with the expansion of the Coalition's regional jurisdiction the proverbial "bottom of the barrel" was being scraped for bodies on space buoys, garbage handlers, and the like.

They reached the hatch to which the travel pod was attached.

"They're both in there. They're both still," stated Doctor Reo as she peered into the pod through the hatch porthole.

"Atmospheric readings appear normal," said Bruno, observing the hatch's pod gauges. "Let's open up and go in."

Casman reluctantly passed his hand over the OPEN plate and the hatch opened. Lieutenant Bruno and Doctor Reo entered cautiously.

"There's no damage to the pod. There's no damage to their emergency suits other than the face shields are smeared with something on the inside. What do you make of it, Doc?" Casman said.

"That's all I see from in here. They're obviously both dead. We'd better get them inside and check them out."

"Then... they're both really dead?" stammered Casman.

"That's what we call it," answered Lieutenant Bruno.

Space buoys being small craft, they made do with a shop table in the storage chamber for examination. The first body was placed upon the table, the helmet unlocked.

"Oh, Christ!" gasped Casman as he watched the jellied goo pour from the helmet as it was removed.

"Casman!" barked Lieutenant Bruno, "if you're going to heave on us, get out of here. We don't need you right now."

Casman hurriedly ran from the chamber.

"This one drowned, Lieutenant. Let's have a look at the other."

The second was examined in the same fashion. The jellied ooze that poured from his helmet readily indicated the same fate.

"Drowned? Doc, what is this stuff? "

"I've read about this," Doctor Reo said, "it's a residual effect from a new thing the Honan Alliance is trying. The oxygen in their suit air packs is mixed with concentrated frestogen.

"Frestogen? Never heard of it."

"It's a synthetic gas. They mix it with oxygen like we used to mix in nitrogen to eliminate the problems of running full oxygen. You know, basically as a flame retardant. There's just one draw back."

"What's that?"

Doctor Reo dipped a gloved finger into a helmet, lifting some ooze. "When the skin's exposed to it, even in a mixture, human sweat turns to a runny jelly."

"Wait, Doc you're telling me that these people drowned in their own sweat?"

"That's about it, Lieutenant."

"They would have to have been awfully active to make that much sweat."

"Not really, a short jog would produce more than a pint of this ... and still more in a warm temperature. You've noticed how cool this buoy is."

"Yeah, right off."

"That's part of the reason. Frestogen is mixed with this atmosphere. It's even more concentrated in the air packs of the emergency suits."

"And the suits fit tightly all over the body with the exception of the helmet face piece."

"Right, so all that sweat within the suit was forced into the face piece, drowning them."

"But, Doc, wouldn't they stop and calm down to halt production of this ooze once they realized what was happening?"

"I'd think so, Lieutenant, but not in this case. Something really had these two going. There's nothing we can do for them now."

"With this danger, why is it being used?"

"The usual reason ... it's cheap. We're talking Honan Alliance. They've contracted for support of some minor Coalition vessels."

"Doc, let's go talk with this Casman some more."

They found Casman in the galley, nervously rearranging food containers and prep-pans, not really accomplishing anything.

"Casman," began Lieutenant Bruno, "your two shipmates drowned."

"What? Drowned? How can that be? Lieutenant, I don't understand."

"They drowned in their own sweat in their suits, Casman," added Doctor Reo. "Frestogen sweat. You said they were screaming and thrashing around in the pod. Do you know what they were trying to do?"

"No, Doctor Reo. I don't have any idea what set them off. It just scared the hell out of me ... and still does."

"Well Casman, as the lead investigator in this case, I need to inform you that right now we have no idea what went on. So, we'll be aboard for a while longer. I'm sure we'll have a lot more questions for you."

"I understand that, Lieutenant," replied the bewildered Casman.

Doctor Reo sat at the galley table and rubbed her eyes.

"Casman," she said, "you got any real coffee on this buoy?"

"Sure, I'll make some."

Casman busied himself with the coffee making while Lieutenant Bruno and Doctor Reo looked over the space buoy. Nothing appeared out of the ordinary as far as they could determine. A search of the dead buoy keepers' cabins revealed nothing. Casman's cabin was a mess. His untidiness was attributed to his being new to space duty. Lieutenant Bruno and Doctor Reo returned to the galley for a break from their investigation.

"You both want some?" asked Casman as he reached overhead for cups.

"Sure," said Lieutenant Bruno.

"Good," responded Casman as a smile came across his face.

Casman set cups before the two,

"I pride myself on my coffee, Doctor Reo. It's a special brew. Rats don't like it."

"Rats?" she asked as Casman withdrew from the galley.

Doctor Reo's cup of coffee was half gone when she suddenly dropped it to the table.

"Bruno! On the wall behind you! Rats!"

Lieutenant Bruno turned to see rats climbing from a vent. He looked back to Doctor Reo. Beyond her he could see rats on the galley shelving.

"Where the hell are these coming from?"

"My God, Bruno, they're filling the corridor!"

The two briskly rose from their seats and moved from the galley, backing down the corridor away from the swarming rats. Rats were rare in space, yet those that had adapted through mutation had become endowed with powerful jaws and razor sharp teeth. It was nothing for them to bite their way through the strongest alloys. This, compounded with an extremely aggressive nature, made them one of the hazards of space duty and brought fear to practically everyone who came in contact with them.

"Casman! Casman!" called Doctor Reo. "Where's he at?"

"He's not answering," replied Lieutenant Bruno. "They've probably got him. We need to move out of here."

"But where? They keep coming! Use your side arm!"

"Can't here, it would cause too much damage."

As the two steadily retreated, the corridor filled with more and more rats.

"Doc! Move back onto our travel pod!"

Doctor Reo hurriedly passed her hand over the OPEN plate, opening the hatch to the travel pod.

"Good," she thought, "they're not in here, yet."

She climbed inside with Lieutenant Bruno right behind her. They closed the hatch.

"Lieutenant, what's going on? Where could all these rats be coming from. We didn't see signs of any before."

"I don't know, Doc. We've got another problem."

"What's that?"

"The pod won't unlatch. If we can't get loose, the rats'll tear their way in here."

"That'll leak our atmosphere. We won't be able to stay alive."

"We better suit up. At least, that'll give us more time to figure something out."

The desperate pair slipped into their emergency suits and locked their helmets in place. It now seemed a matter of time before death entered the pod.

"There!" cried Doctor Reo, "they're coming through!"

Rats squeezed through the edges of the hatch, ripping gaps in the door with their teeth. Instantly, Lieutenant Bruno and Doctor Reo were covered with rats. Each waved their arms frantically trying to brush the rats off before the fierce rodents could shred their suits and rip at their flesh.

Lieutenant Bruno felt something wet on his neck and chin. Jellied sweat was forming inside his suit! Determined not to meet the same fate as the buoy keepers, he ceased his struggle against the rats, choosing a quick death by ravenous rodents rather than the choking torment of drowning in his suit.

To his surprise, the end did not come. His years of experience with the Surveillance Service took hold.

"Doc! Doc!" yelled Lieutenant Bruno as he gripped the Doctor's forearms. "Doc! Stop!"

"I can't stop! Damn these rats!"

"Doc! Look at me!"

Something in Lieutenant Bruno's voice reached Doctor Reo, and she stopped.

"Doc, listen to me! Close your eyes!"

"What?"

"Just do it! Now!"

"Alright!"

Doctor Reo shut her eyes tightly, still in terror from the clinging rats, hopeful that Lieutenant Bruno knew what he was doing.

"Alright, Doc. Run your hands down your arms! Do you feel anything? Any resistance at all? Can you feel rats?"

She hesitantly did as Lieutenant Bruno instructed. Then again, with a smoother motion.

"I can't feel them!"

Relieved, Doctor Reo opened her eyes.

"They're back! They're all over us!"

"No!" shouted Lieutenant Bruno. "They're not here. Close your eyes again."

"What's going on?"

"It's a hallucination! We only see them. They're not real. They're not here. The pod's not damaged."

"What?" said Doctor Reo as she reopened her eyes.

She could still see the horde of rats. Yet, when she tried to touch those ripping apart Lieutenant Bruno's suit, she could feel nothing. No resistance to her hand at all ... as if nothing were there.

"Don't worry, it should wear off ... I hope. Settle down before your suit fills with sweat."

"I already feel it around my neck," Doctor Reo said.

"Sure. If we'd kept going, we'd be drowned by now. Someone had to add frestogen to the air packs on our emergency suits.

"Casman?"

"Casman. He's the only one that could have done it," Lieutenant Bruno reasoned.

"What are we going to do?" Doctor Reo asked. "We can't just sit here with these rats all over us."

"Let's get out of these suits."

Rid of the emergency suits, the threat of drowning was gone. To the Doctor's surprise, the quantity of rats started to decrease. They opened the boarding hatch and reboarded the space buoy. Warily, they crept down the corridor toward the galley. There they found Casman sitting at the table doing what he did best - not much of anything.

"You! You two should be dead!" cried Casman.

Lieutenant Bruno rushed Casman, knocking him to the floor. A few well directed punches to the chin eliminated any difficulty in tying up the confused cook.

By this time, all traces of the rats and any evidence of their having ravaged the space buoy had gone. Lieutenant Bruno ransacked the galley, the only area of the buoy which they had not yet searched.

"Where's it at, Casman? I could say that we could do this easy or we could do this hard. But there's not going to be any 'easy' in this case. Give it up or I'll smash your face with my boot. Hell, I might just do that anyway."

"OK! OK! It's there on the bottom shelf, at the back ... in a silver container."

Lieutenant Bruno found the container and dumped its contents: several small brown paper packets, on the table.

"What's that?"

"That, Doc," said Lieutenant Bruno, "is your rats."

"My rats?"

"Saturn cryst. It's rare in these parts. It's a short term suggestive hallucinogen. You take this stuff and it plays on whatever first comes to mind. It's great stuff if you take it and concentrate on a dream vacation or a romp in the sack with whomever. It's a short-term hell if you don't know you're on it and someone puts something in your mind."

"Rats ... Casman mentioned rats. It was in the coffee."

"Exactly. He got you thinking about them and you, unintentionally, fed the idea to me."

"So, Casman, what about the buoy keepers?"

"Those buoy keepers deserved it. I had all I wanted to take from those wise asses. They didn't like me. They said I was a woose and didn't deserve to be in space."

"After you killed them, you got worried and called for help. Right?" asked Lieutenant Bruno.

"I just wanted to scare 'em. I didn't know that they'd end up in the pod and suit up. Even then, I couldn't understand why they died. Nobody really ever told me about this sweat stuff. How

was I supposed to know about it? I never do anything to work up a sweat. They had it coming."

"And, when we got here," began Doctor Reo, "you thought we'd figure out that you had something to do with the buoy keepers' deaths and hoped the same thing would happen to us. Happen to us with your help by adding concentrated frestogen to our pod emergency suit air packs and giving us Saturn cryst."

"Yeah, sure, whatever you say. I never wanted to come here. I sure didn't come here by choice."

Lieutenant Bruno and Doctor Reo returned to the surveillance ship with their prisoner. From there, Casman was placed on a special transport.

"So what happens to him now?" asked Doctor Reo.

"He'll be tried for murder and be found guilty. Then the usual treatment."

"The usual treatment?"

"The worst criminals, the murderers, are sent back to Earth for life-long incarceration in the facility in Paris.

"What a way to get back to Earth."

-Daniel S. Irwin

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QUESTION: Have you any old letter, magazine or magazine appearance of Don Boyd?

I am searching for notice of all (or any) of these things. This is because I am compiling a bibliography of his published and unpublished work and want it to be true, proper and accurate. This is because I feel it is worth remembering.

He hasn't been accredited much fame or even recognition for his life's work, for his time's output. But not only is this unjustified, it is unfair. At the very least his voice is uniquely Australian. He endowed this country with plenty-enough traits of gruesome and surviving elder nastiness in the form of big entities slumbering subterraneously and sending out quaking dreams of madness and mayhem to mortals. (Huh, sounds

like Lovecraft. Oh, well.) However, he also supplied enough strength and vigour of character portrayal, as well as zest for lionising on piqued sardonic events and terrorous actions, to whet everyone's least nightmarish appetite.

So if you do have some of it or know of where it might reside, like something from some forgotten vault, please write at Danny Lovecraft at above magazine address.

Or conversely by email to danny158@hotmail.com

Thank you.

# E.R. JAMES: FROM SKIPTON ... TO THE STARS

by Andrew Darlington

## *FROM NEW WORLDS TO NEW MOON*

"I am rather ancient" E. R. James admits with sly humour, "tho' not yet moribund."



To a seventy-seven years young 'time-traveller like myself, Science Fiction is a vital pulse that has carried him across not only hundreds of future centuries, but thousands of light years of interplanetary space too. All from the modest confines of his Postal Delivery route through Skipton, North Yorkshire.

But E.R. - or Ernest Rayer, is maddeningly self-deprecating. Tall, with short spikey silver hair, he sits opposite me now, rubbing his forehead or downstroking his neatly disciplined moustache as he says "your praise leaves me shattered". This, from the man who wrote as 'Somerset Draco' or 'Edward Hannah', whose

science-based fantasies are reprinted in German and French magazines and anthologies, while there are over one hundred stunning fictions published under his own name spun out across the years from 1947, to the present day. If there was ever a Golden Age of British Science Fiction, then E.R. James is an integral part of it. He was there at its inception. His fast-paced action stories jostling for text-space with those of E.C. Tubb, John Brunner, and Ken Bulmer - often in consecutive issues of the same magazines. While open up a recent 1990's title - *NEW MOON* - and he's there too with a fine ecological story of the menaced rainforests.

"I don't know that there has ever been a 'Golden Age of British SF'" he argues. "Some of Hamilton's and Carnell's magazines of the 1950's and 60's may have merited 'gold' - but it depends on the reader, as does all writing. I merely enjoy trying to write stories. I spent most of my life earning - rather than writing, just to survive. The stories helped me run a car ..."

His right eye has a greenish iris, the legacy of World War 11 enemy shrapnel that 'peppered him' after five weeks in Normandy. "At the end of the war I was still in the Army - a Lance Corporal" he recalls, "when my cousin (SF writer Francis G Rayer, who died in 1981) wrote that he knew of an editor who wanted Science Fiction stories. This was Walter Gillings, a very helpful man who took three of my earliest tales."

The first of these, *PREFABRICATION*, appeared in the slender *FANTASY* No.2 - one of the original British weird fiction titles. A collector's gem that now fetches an outlandish price-tag, it arrived in April 1947, during a time of post-war reconstruction - but his story concerns the prefabrication not of houses, but people! 'IS SUCH A THING POSSIBLE - TO CREATE SYNTHETIC LIFE?' probes the magazine blurb, 'SCIENCE HAD FOUND A WAY TO MANUFACTURE HUMAN BEINGS ... IN A

WORLD IN WHICH MONOPOLY HAD THE LAW ON ITS SIDE. RESULT - CONFLICT !

His next editor - John Carnell of Nova Publications, "asked me to meet him in London, and we had a lunch together. London was very different then, and I'm not sure - but I think I was still not demobilised at the time." Carnell's stable of magazines became a regular E.R. James market, with work subsequently appearing most frequently in *NEW WORLDS*, *SCIENCE FANTASY*, and *SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES*. He experienced little editorial interference, although James recalls Carnell as being a 'very moral' editor; "he once commented 'is it *really* necessary to have the word 'body' in this story ?' I mean - '*body*'"

The E. R. James novel-length *ROBOTS NEVER WEEP* took the cover of the launch issue of *NEBULA* in 1952. Oddly, editor Peter Hamilton Jnr liked the story because it was significantly different to what Carnell was publishing. To further emphasise the 'clear blue water' between titles Hamilton initially wanted to publish the story under a pseudonym. James wasn't keen, and the ensuing dialogue resulted not only in his name being retained, but at an improved word-rate too. *HE AWOKE. FINDING HIMSELF IN A METAL WORLD, PEOPLED MOSTLY BY MACHINES, HE STRUGGLED FOR THE RIGHT TO LIVE AND GRADUALLY THE NIGHTMARISH TRUTH CAME HOME TO HIM..'* ran the blurb. The wide sweep and breath-catching speed of its two-fisted action has many purely Gernsbackian elements, leaving little space for reflection, motivation or characterisation. There are metal raiders with pre-Asimovian tendencies rampaging from a fantastic Space Island built on an orbital 'volcanic asteroid'. Their leader, the deranged Ursula, is a brain in a metal shell, "a woman shut up in a sphere, with lenses for eyes. Human, yet inhuman". Agent Johnny Found comes to awareness as he's about to be pitched into an 'atomic furnace' by a noxious dwarf and his robotic cohorts, only to be rescued from certain death by the lovely Sacha (his stunned soul warmed to her exotic beauty'). He's had his memory erased and replaced with an artificial identity enabling him to infiltrate the raider's base, where he finds himself torn between his conflicting loyalties to the ravaged and besieged Earth he's left behind, and his new allegiances to the evil cybernetic dystopia planned by Ursula. Meanwhile, the armies of manic mechanoids attack, "from the sky, between lofty pinnacles of tall buildings, down past upperlevel roads, huge rockets soared tail-foremost. Robots moved towards this second wave, even while the roads still glowed red hot".

Johnny Found's adventures in the robotic future came with a dramatic cover painting by longtime SF artist Alan Hunter. James was just 32 when he wrote *ROBOTS NEVER WEEP*. But by then he'd already sold over forty articles and stories, some half of which were SF-based. According to Hamilton's editorial comment he also had a novel placed with an agent - although "this (is) by no means sure of publication..." Well, that novel has yet to appear, but as the 1950's picked up momentum ER. James' magazine adventures were unstoppable - the powerfully tense *BLAZE OF GLORY* has three people trapped in an asteroid as it spirals in towards the sun, *RIDE THE TWILIGHT RAIL* - often cited as his greatest tale, is a cover story for *NEW WORLDS* set on the hostile planet Mercury with its silent inhabitants "utterly alien beings, outwardly featureless, huge; inwardly a complexity of crystalline structures with a silicon base", and then, notably, there's *WORLD DESTROYER* for which *NEW WORLDS* set aside its 'strongest editorial taboo - that of current world politics coupled with the threat of atomic war'. Beyond the solar system - in *THE MOVING HILLS*, he created the deserted Siemens Planet, a world of dead cities and apparently empty deserts in which two stranded Earthmen become assimilated into the automated self-replicating pseudoliving landscape There was also *MADE ON MARS*, *GALACTIC YEAR*, *ADVENT OF THE ENTITIES*, *FORTY YEARS ON* (a retro-Detective theme as Dormer - as in 'Sleeper', attempts to reconstruct events leading up to the explosion off Ceres which cost him four decades of life) and so very many more. His prose is often functional, his protagonists have Euro-friendly names like Johnny, Ricky or Ann, while his female characters are little more than plot confections, and although there's an unmistakable sophistication as the work evolves, James remains an exponent of basic story-telling skills. The elements he excels in are conflict, hardship, and action, all set against the eerie poetry of the solar system where "on one side of the thread of life was the burning heat of killing, on the other the utter chill of death".

In the 1957 fanzine *THE NEW FUTURIAN* (no.6), he contributes a rare article touching on his methods of writing. "With me, the idea is the peg for a story" he expands to me now. They were originally written directly onto the typewriter, "but it was already worked out in my head, everything that was going to happen through every stage. Perhaps the ending wasn't clear yet, but everything else was." A pause. "In the past I used to have an idea, sit at my new Imperial Companion, and change hardly anything. But now I write and rewrite before turning to an electronic machine ..."

He gets up. Leaves the room for a moment to return with an original NOVA PUBLICATIONS share certificate, dated 1st January 1949 and signed by John Beynon Harris (John Wyndham). He passes this rare artefact of SF history across to me dismissively. "You might as well take this. As a souvenir of Skipton !"

Critics were not uniformly supportive. "You could go to the bookstalls and there they were on time, the same shaggy old writers in there" recalls Brian Aldiss (in *CRUCIFIED TOAD* no.4), "all those frantic people, E.R. James and Francis G Rayer, couldn't put two words together in the right order". James' success throughout this period proves that others thought differently. Lacking the intellectual vigour and experimental energies that Aldiss was to bring to the genre, James' stories are never less than solidly inventive and often wildly enjoyable, ideally suited to the demands of the magazine market of the period. Born in 1920, Science Fiction was always a part of his life. The influences that shaped his style began when, "as a boy, I read some of the Gernsback 'pulp' and the first three volumes of the Martian romances of the Old Master Edgar Rice Burroughs which held me spellbound (but not so much his Venus books)", while H. G. Wells "still reads as well now as when I first read them. "Then there were boys mags such as *ADVENTURE* and *WIZARD*". "I began reading Science Fiction stories before leaving school" he told a *NEBULA* 'KNOW YOUR AUTHOR' column, "I can remember the plots of quite a few stories out of the American 'pulp' of Gernsback and his contemporaries. Wondered why these and other such stories were not more popular, and began to write manuscripts with a science flavour myself - and enjoyed doing so, though no-one wanted them". He continues, "I wrote a little, but submitted none of it. The war altered everything, however".

As the first stories appeared he "made plans with a friend, also writing and selling, to live together. But instead married Margaret, and altered my address from Somerset to North Yorkshire". In common with many of his contemporaries he took a 'bread and butter' job, with the GPO - perhaps delivering his own royalty cheques, and the occasional rejection slip too. Skipton is a beautiful town for such activity. On the way here today I pass Menwith Hill - a surreal formation of huge Quatermass-like white spheres that house a U.S. radar installation (don't look for it on the map, it's not there ! ), and a Greenham Common-style Peace Camp beyond its periphery. Then I pass through the looming shadow of Skipton Castle. Two very different zones of fantasy. "I found that postal work fits in with a \*career of part-time writing very well" he told a

*NEW WORLDS* author profile. "In fact, I declined an offer of an indoor clerical appointment in the Post Office because I felt that the outdoor work left my mind less exhausted and more eager for thinking up stories".

He was a guest speaker at the Harrogate SF Convention alongside Aldiss, Kingsley Amis, and James White (who was "even quieter than I am !"). Organiser Ron Bennett, now a Harrogate based book-dealer specialising in ERB-iana "had me give a sort of opening speech, at the beginning of which I stood on my head Yoga-fashion to get attention".

Among the work produced through this, his most prolific period, was REFRIGERATOR SHIP, delineating the murderous equation necessary when a ship full of deep-frozen colonists emerge from star-drive to find their potential colony-world vaporised by nova, and they have insufficient reserves to return them all to Earth. There were also a number of collaborations with cousin 'Frank' Rayer, beginning with THE LAVA SEAS TUNNEL for *AUTHENTIC*, predicting the eco-energy crisis when an expedition beneath the Earth's crust in a boring machine seeks an alternative to the exhausted oil and coal fossil fuels. Built up largely by passing manuscripts back and forth, making alterations and additions to each other's work, he admits to being "never completely satisfied" by such joint efforts. Although they were snapped up by the magazines. He does, however, admit to a certain retrospective satisfaction with his fictional portrayal of Venus as a super-heated desert world, "more as it is, or more as the planet has proved to be" than the lush tropical jungles envisaged there by some of his contemporaries. Among my own favourites is the hauntingly atmospheric THE TRUTH from the December 1958 edition of *NEBULA*. Four survivors of a Space-Time Liner from the 22nd Century are marooned in the 'endless ooze' of a world that may, or may not be primeval Earth. The corpses of two other crew members are buried there with the foreknowledge that---the atoms of their bodies don't belong in this time and place", and inexorably their viral presence infects and alters the biosphere. Meticulously worked out, and forsaking his more usual speed of narrative pacing for a slow claustrophobic intensity, it's a beautifully worked out story. "Then TV came along, and the old magazines all suffered. Not just SF titles but all printed word publications clear down to the text-based boys comics. I transferred to working on the Post Office counter and did less writing." He resumed with a vengeance following his retirement, selling a number of extremely well-received stories to a new generation of magazines - beginning with *SECOND CENTURY*



KOMA in *DREAM*, and then THE TREE in *NEW MOON*. His current writing method involves "two large bulldog clips on a sheet of plywood about 12"x18", or another sheet of plywood about 12"x30" with an adjustable lamp on one end and a slat into which the smaller board will fit. These are excellent when sitting in an armchair. One clip holds notes and the other the narrative on old A4 paper (torn in two and written on the back)." He half-jokingly toys with the idea of writing and submitting a story to one of the current crop of Women's magazines, *REST* or *BELLA*, while adding "I'm halfway through a novel (*THE LURE OF FAR CENTAURI*) of which I have high hopes - who can have more?", so perhaps Peter Hamilton's 1952 prediction will yet be fulfilled ?

"I still enjoy other people's stories. I subscribe to *INTERZONE*, and belong to a postal book-chain through which I get issues of *ANALOG*. But I look in the Science Fiction section of W.H. Smith, and there's no SF there! It's all Fantasy or Sword & Sorcery. I still wonder why the British public generally takes so little interest in science, and more particularly in the wonderful, if frighteningly vast and terrible vistas which seem only just around the corner of the future in these inspiring times. And on a more personal note "I just keep trying, somewhat fitfully, but hopefully, to become a little famous" he concedes modestly.

Now ancient - but not yet moribund, he's not always at ease with current trends, or with all of the stories he shares magazine space with. "I live reasonably well. I survive and write an occasional short story that does more for postal profits than it does for me. *INTERZONE* seems out of my reach, my ideas don't suit them (he writes that Ed Gorman's *CAGES* in *INTERZONE* no. 109 'would have so disgusted E.J. Carnell of the old *NEW WORLDS* that he would have lost faith in humanity'). Perhaps I'm too old, but I find some of their kind of writing very disturbing. There's so much sex-for-sex sake and sarcasm these days that I try to promote a little romance and sincerity whenever I can. But of course", the slyly self-deprecating humour again, "It could be said that, as I am no longer so fired-up with youthful ways, some of this is sour grapes - and the rest is a senile tendency to think the best of people ..."

**E.R. JAMES:  
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WORLD DESTROYER in *NEW WORLDS* no.37 (July 1955)  
HOT WATER in *NEBULA* no. 16 (March 1956)  
PERIOD OF QUARANTINE (with F.G. Rayer) in *NEW WORLDS* no.48 (June 1965)  
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CREEP in *NEW WORLDS* no.51 (Sept 1956)/reprinted in German *UTOPIA* magazine  
BEAUTIFUL WEED in *NEW WORLDS* no.57 (March 1957)  
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POMPEY'S PLANET in *NEBULA* no.22 (July 1957)  
MADE ON MARS in *NEW WORLDS* no.63 (Sept 1957)  
TRAINING AREA in *NEBULA* no.30 (March 1958)  
ROUTINE OBSERVATIONS in *NEW WORLDS* no.71 (May 1958)  
FRICTION in *NEBULA* no.34 (Sept 1958)  
THE TRUTH in *NEBULA* no.37 (Dec 1958)  
HOSPITAL SHIP in *NEBULA* no.38 (Jan 1959)

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 (July 1959)  
 BEYOND REALISM in *NEW WORLDS* no.86  
 (Aug/Sept 1959)  
 REFRIGERATOR SHIP in *SCIENCE FICTION  
 ADVENTURES* no. 11 (Nov 1959)  
 SIX-FINGERED JACKS in *NEW WORLDS* no. 119  
 (June 1962) anthologised by Blackie & Son Publ  
 THE THOUSAND DEEP in *NEW WORLDS* no.  
 121 (Aug 1962)  
 FORTY YEARS ON in *NEW WORLDS* no. 135  
 (Oct 1963)  
 SECOND CENTURY KOMA in *DREAM* (Sept  
 1987)/ reprinted in *A BOOK OF DREAMS*  
 anthology  
 THE ABREACTION in *DREAM SF* (Summer  
 1989)  
 THE SUGGESTION FORM in *DREAM SF*  
 (Autumn 1989)  
 SURVIVING THE NIGHT in *DREAM SF* no.28  
 (April 1991)  
 THE TREE in *NEW MOON* no.2 (March 1992)

There were other stories sold 'all rights' to various small publishers under various pseudonyms, of which "I now have no record beyond small cash entries", there's a letter published in *INTERZONE* no. 111 (Sept 1996), as well as the following:

WORLDS AT WAR (paperback anthology from Tempest Publ, Bolton, Lancs) with SCAPEGOAT (as Edward Hannah), MASQUE (as Somerset Draco), DODIE SLAMMED THE DOOR, and THE CLEVERJACK AND THE MOONSTALK plus a long story by F.G. Rayer CUTE FUN ANNUAL (Gerald G Swan Juvenile Hardcover/ 1953) with CHAMPION ROBOT, lead story SCHOOLBOYS ALBUM (Gerald G Swan Juvenile Hardcover 1954) with THE QUANTIMERS MURDER IN REVERSE - a "time-travel story, if I remember correctly", accepted by Peter Hamilton for *NEBULA*, but never used due to premature cessation of the title.

My thanks to ER. James for invaluable assistance and co-operation in compiling this feature.

- Andrew Darlington



# Poetry, Too

## AD ASTRA

by Bill West.

Jodrell Bank, Cheshire,  
holding great Merlin's wide net –  
purse seine telescope

star birth's gas and dust –  
a bright yellow ring of cloud  
in infrared light

close Andromeda,  
showing its bright clouded lights  
in its spinning gas

in a magnetic field,  
synchrotron radiation,  
electrons darting

gamma-ray bursters –  
what extra-galactical  
powerful event?

## SAY THERE LIL' FELLA

by Daniel S. Irwin.

Say there, lil' fella colored green,  
Why ya so gosh darn mean?

You done zapped two cows an' ripped out their  
guts.  
That's against the law, no if's, and's, or but's.

An' I know you been makin' those circles in my  
crops.  
Now your game is up, I'm callin' the cops.

Hey, don't fly away you screwy lil' putz!  
If you ain't here, the sheriff'll thik I'm nuts.

Hold on there, boy! Don't take me, too!  
Well, maybe life's easy in a Martian zoo.

## CHANDRA

page 11

*In honor of the late Indian-American  
Astrophysicist, Subrahmanyan Chandrasekar*

by Bill West.

Big as a boxcar,  
Chandra, chaser of x-rays,  
shot out by quasars,  
black holes, and supernovae,  
a space observatory,

meant to reveal the  
elusive x-rays, making  
them skip across its  
mirrors shaped like a barrel,  
coated with iridium,

and nested inside  
one another to increase  
their capacity.

The x-rays will be  
focused, when gathered, into  
a sharp camera,  
gathered into an image-  
creating spectrometer.

It will sail at a  
third of the way to the moon  
to peer into the  
cores of active galaxies  
in which x-rays abound,

where we guess black holes,  
much like massive, gaping mouths,  
suck in hugest stars,  
emitting only x-ray  
crumbs, and it may be we'll see

dark matter, the glue  
of the galactic clusters,  
and we may, at last,  
through great Chandra's eye, look at  
our galaxy's own deep heart.

## BEFORE AND AFTER BEING

SEPTEMBER 2001

by Meryl Brown Tobin

Before being  
where were you?  
They say there is  
life after death.  
Belief is comforting,  
but, either way,  
will it change  
the way you live now?  
After death, do you think  
you will go back  
to being what you were  
before life?

Since you didn't know  
you existed then,  
can you expect  
to know afterwards?  
Unless you know  
you exist,  
is there a point  
in existing?

#### WALK IN THE FOREST

by Meryl Brown Tobin

A footfall.  
I stop abruptly,  
swing round.  
A huge mouth opens,  
fetid breath in my face.  
I turn, run like Atlanta.  
Big teeth snap at my heels.

Hot mouth closes over me.  
I scream.  
Scream echoes  
in a vast chamber  
sealed off  
as teeth interlock.

Saliva wells round me,  
I fumble for my torch,  
shine it round purple walls.  
A rip tide sweeps me  
down a steep tube,  
sucks me  
into a swirling cauldron.  
Acid sears my flesh  
as I fight tidal pull,  
go under screaming.

Eyes burned out,  
I surface again.  
H-E-L-P!

#### THE MENTOR

### *Three Poems by Meryl Brown Tobin:*

#### BIG BANG

Big bang,  
life started.  
Now Earth fights  
for survival.  
Big bang,  
life ended?

#### PLUTONIUM

Plutonium  
fiery, powerful,  
terrifying, incapacitating, all-destroying,  
obliterates in a holocaust,  
annihilator.

#### EARTH

Earth,  
bountiful, drought-ridden,  
feeding, starving, enduring;  
fights humankind to survive,  
Mother.

#### CONSERVATION

Conservation,  
green, sustainable,  
food-giving, pleasure-giving, diversity-preserving,  
gives life to us all,  
ecological eternity.

#### THE NIXII HINT AT NEGOTIATION POSSIBILITIES

by Steve Sneyd

pick flower find red  
hot to touch as old metal  
type slug made your name

decide blowing on  
fingers to cool this half of  
dream enough too much

don't want to get rest  
of what shown beautiful Pick  
Me sign pointing to

sunbright woman touch  
will be ice will take off your  
fingerprints worth it?

# THE GOD AND THE VIRGIN

by Pauline Scarf.

Zeus stood in front of the star-mirror in his Cloud 9 apartment overlooking the Earth, examining his appearance. He wore his latest robe and his grey curls had been cropped short only that morning by the nymph Erkestia who was his favourite hairdresser and his love of the moment.

Smoothing the purple garment, he nodded his satisfaction at his reflection, then turned away with a half smile on his face, Of course Erkestia was not invited to his wife, Hera's birthday party, the old goat had already suspected what was going on between them. But he had arranged to smuggle her in when he knew his wife had her guard down or had drank too much honey mead.

When she had come in disguised as a boy his plan was to make off to this his personal apartment where Erkestia and he would make love for hours secure in the knowledge that Hera would need time to sleep off the effects, not knowing whether he was there or not.

The knock on the door drew his attention from the sparkling buckles of his new sandals. "Come in," he called in the most polite voice, thinking Erkestia had somehow smuggled herself into his palace, eager for his attention.

When the door opened Zeus was forced to conceal his surprise as Hermes, the Messenger God stood in the doorway.

"What do you want" snapped Zeus. "I gave instructions I did not want to be disturbed."

"Sorry, your Reverence," stammered the messenger. "But I thought you should know that Hera is waiting for you in her rooms."

"Blast Hera!" boomed Zeus throwing down the goblet of nectar he had just poured for himself. The golden liquid would have splashed Hermes' immaculate robe if he had not stepped back the moment he saw what was coming.

"In the name of the Vestal Virgins!" exclaimed Hermes.

Zeus stopped still at this remark "Virgins? Did you say virgins? I didn't know there were any left. At least not over 16."

"Not these days where anything goes. And 16 is still a baby," he pouted. "Know what I mean?"

"Yes," said Hermes. "I know. But there are still virgins older. But not many," he added

aware of what was to come, sorry he had made such a statement.

"What in the name of the most beautiful virgin?" demanded Zeus.

Hermes felt taken aback, not wanting to betray the special women who dedicated their chastity to Hestia, but afraid of angering the god.

"Come on," scowled Zeus, "What is her name?"

"Celeste," stammered Hermes.

"Celeste," repeated Zeus dreamily, "And where would I find this Celeste?" he turned on his heel so that he almost knocked over the lesser god who was standing closeby. "Well," he frowned, towering over Hermes when he did not get an Immediate reply. "Where is she,."

"W...What about Erkestia?" asked Hermes.

"Erkestia can wait," boomed the king of the gods. "Now where's this Celeste."

Hermes had no choice but to answer, fearing the worst if he did not. Perhaps even more thunderbolts. "She serves as a priestess in the Temple of Hestia."

"Hestia!" cooed Zeus, a smile forming on his lips as though he had some sort of plan.

"No!" thought Hermes knowing what would come next, aware he had said too much.

"I heard your thought," mocked Zeus. "But you needn't worry," he peered through his cloud curtain, pressing a switch that brought the Temple of Hestia close up. "The blonde, is that her?" he beamed as his gaze fell upon a comely young woman with luxuriant curls flowing like a carpet to her waist,

"Yes," stuttered the lesser god miserably.

"How old is she?" boomed Zeus.

"She has already turned 20."

"You needn't worry," cooed Zeus. "I am not going to force myself on her, She will come to me of her own accord," he grinned.

"What a schemer!" thought Hermes, then checked himself just in case his master had telepathised them, but Zeus was too busy gazing at the blue-eyed maiden to register what anyone else was thinking.

"I must have her," he said aloud. "I must have her for myself."

"But Hestia!" exclaimed Hermes. "She...."

"Never mind Hestia," laughed Zeus. "I'll go to her when Hestia isn't tuned in and when her back is turned, In fact he went on, "that will teach Hestia a thing or two. Remember," he said half to himself, "when she stole my thunderbolts. Not to mention my thunder."

"Mmm," replied Hermes wishing he had kept his mouth shut, considering the fate of the poor little virgin who had taken Zeus' fancy.

"In fact," began Zeus, "I think I'll go now, seeing Hestia in preparing for Hera's birthday party."

"But what about your wife's ..."

"When you're married as long as I've been it doesn't matter. But what would you know about married life?" he mocked.

"I'm gay," pouted Hermes. "You know that. And I...."

But when he looked again he found that Zeus was no longer present. "What can I do?" thought the messenger. "And it's too late for me to warn Celeste when the Old Boy is probably already there,"

In the Temple of Hestia the priestess noticed the handsome youth. He looked innocent enough at first. But on the second glance Celeste noticed a glint of something she could not quite decipher.

He must be of royal blood however, for he wore the purple robe associated with rank and power. And she was aware that the king was elderly. But, perhaps, this was his son. What did he want she wondered? Had he come to make an offering to the Goddess, Maybe if she prayed he would just make the offering and go.

Adjusting her white full length robe to cover her milky shoulders she modestly bowed her head in prayer. But when she cast her eyes upwards after what seemed an interminable time he was still watching, his eyes seeming to focus only on her.

Embarrassed, she decided to pull herself together and ask his business here. Yes, that's what she must do she reasoned.

With all her strength she rose to her full height with as much dignity as she could muster, her regal bearing apparent. After all she had been born of royalty herself to the King of Macedonia. And this was most certainly not her brother the Prince Alexander.

Celeste was certain she would know him anywhere even though she had been brought here years before as soon as she had reached her teens and had worked her way up to be the chief priestess. Hoping the youth did not see the tremble of her lips Celeste asked him his business in her light musical voice.

If the youth had noticed he did not betray

this, but stood watching her with the hint of a smile on his lips before he answered her question. "I am a king," he said simply, "and my dominion will have no end."

What could it all mean? Either the youth was arrogant or simple. After all, everything had to end sometime. Even kings must die. But he certainly did not appear simple. Arrogant it must be then.

Celeste gazed at the youth. He was tall, tan and well muscled, whereas Alexander was fair with golden hair and for a moment she thought he bore resemblance to the god Zeus whose statue she had seen many times as a child when her father had taken her and Alexander to the Temple of Zeus to pray. She would recognise the god's image anywhere.

But what would he be doing here? Gods rarely came down to earth themselves, preferring to send messengers to their human subjects.

"What do you want? she asked, her voice soft, but firm, although something, about the youth attracted her in a way she had never experienced before, and was unable to explain.

"I wanted to see you, Celeste," he said simply, and Celeste noted for the first time that it was lust she could see in his eyes, And he even knew her name.

Uncomfortable now, she wanted to shrink away from this man whoever he was. But she must not show her fear to him although she felt like fleeing. He took a step closer, held out his arms to embrace her. Strange. The fear had left her replaced by an awareness inexplicable.

"I must not feel this way," she chastised herself. "I have pledged my chastity to the goddess Hestia," she heard her voice say firmly, although she wanted to throw herself into his arms,

"You will be mine," he said softly, but his voice was a command. Taking her hand and all the while gazing into her eyes, Celeste realised she was being hypnotised, but she dared not look away. A feeling stirred within her. Was this what people called love? But it was forbidden for priestesses to give in to such pangs, let alone loose their virginity. To do so meant death if discovered.

"You will bear me a son," said the stranger. His eyes were piercing, holding her.

"What is your name?"

"Just call me Zeus," boomed the man.

He is surely conceited to call himself by a god's name she considered, yet the resemblance to the god's statue was uncanny.

The smile on his face told her he had read her mind. And as her last vestige of strength slipped away she felt his body on hers as he gently pressed her down onto the alter, kissing her

passionately, and she gave herself completely to him as she had never done before with any man.

Celeste's mind was in a turmoil. How could she have performed such an act? If she was with child the man had said it would be only a matter of time before her secret was discovered.

The man had claimed to be Zeus, had even asked her to accompany him to Heaven, but she had refused, thinking he was mad.

But if he was, why had she given into his advances. After all, she had never given into such an impulse. Impulse. The word permeated her brain,.

Celeste realised what had happened, She had been drawn to this man like some sort of magnet or magic more hypnotic than any human could endure, She had always been a tower of strength capable of resisting any temptation, had even prided herself on it. But she had been drawn to him, hypnotised.

Frantically she paced the floor of the temple. What if it really had been Zeus? She would never be able to resist a god's will, would she?

Celeste mulled over the fact that when Zeus had declared his undying love for her she had decided to play along, stating he was already married to Hera, and, therefore, not free to marry her,

He had been taken slightly aback, but had promised to get a divorce, saying he would be back that evening to hear her answer. If she would accompany him to Heaven he would make her immortal.

Celeste decided to let him down gently, just in case he was mad. But there was no trace of madness in his eyes when he had said this. What was a girl to think?

Something moved in the darkness, a sandalled footstep, coming closer, The torch cast shadows in the temple, brought a figure into view.

Zeus stood before her awaiting her answer. The priestess gave a start when the temple was bathed in light. Surely this was proof! After all, only a god could turn night into day.

"Zeus", she breathed.

"That's me," he puffed out his chest, "I need to know your answer."

Before Celeste could reply another figure was seen. Another youth, golden haired this time and she wondered if it was Alexander. But the man had curls whereas Alexander's hair was straight.

"Who's there?" she breathed.

"Ornatius, I've come to make an offering."

"Damn," thought Zeus. "Just when I wanted some privacy." He was about to zap the intruder into a different time zone when he heard a fluttering overhead.

Before he could glance up he saw the silver arrow fly through the air, prick Celeste's bare arm. Her gaze fell on the golden-haired man who had addressed her. "Ornatius, my love," whispered the priestess, ignoring Zeus, walking daintily over to where Ornatius stood, planting a kiss on his lips.

Ornatius was taken aback until another arrow grazed his cheek. "My love, what in your name?"

"Celeste." came her breathy reply.

"Damn!" admonished Zeus shaking his fist in the cherub's direction.

"Sorry," lied the cherub, "I meant that to hit you, but Ornatius moved and got in my way."

"How dare you come into Hestia's temple, Imp!" exclaimed Zeus.

"You dare," grinned the cherub mischievously.

"I'll get you for this," warned Zeus shaking his fist again, knowing he had lost his chance as the two lovers kissed and embraced once more.

Ornatius was the first to break free. "But what have I done,?" he whispered. "You are a virgin. And...."

"Not any more. Zeus saw to that."

"What do you mean?" The youth seemed shocked.

"Zeus seduced me," said the priestess.

"Zeus, damn Zeus!"

"Well," reasoned Zeus. "Perhaps I should disappear before he attacks me and spoils my best clothes. And I am late for Hera's party. The Old Girl will be really put out."

When Celeste and Ornatius saw Zeus vanish they glanced at one another. "Does that mean you do not love me?" asked the priestess, lowering her eyes modestly.

"Nothing could change this love," said Ornatius putting his arms around the priestess once more.

"Let us get out of here then," whispered the ex-virgin.

When the two departed the temple hand in hand Eros's smile broadened. "Another match made in Heaven. She was too beautiful to have dedicated her life to Hestia. I've been meaning to do that long ago," he beamed, putting his bow and arrow away, a look of satisfaction on his baby face. Throwing back his head he laughed till he cried.

"That's one I've got back at Zeus for," he cooed. "I know the Old Boy will have forgotten about Celeste in a decade or two. Love is fickle," he giggled. "At least where Zeus, is concerned."

Laughing helplessly he disappeared on his way to perform some other mischief elsewhere.

- Pauline Scarf

# A Planet Much Like Earth

## Part 9

by Mae Strelkov.

Well, this new draft has got out-of-hand. It's turning out less and less like the other two (each of which was unlike the other).

But there were two chapters I want still to include: the one about our horses, and the one on the topic: Pigs. (Pigs we had, pigs we detest and which belong to our neighbors, etc., etc.)

Oh, there were other "awful" chapters, about the darker aspects of life here ... the terrible things that happen to little girls raped right within their own families when barely nubile and no help for them. Either they resort to some curandera (and she pokes about and often by accident even may kill them), or they have to "obey the priests" and let the baby be born. Such babies haven't much chance, they arrive with shrunken limbs as likely as not, and half-mindless. No happy planning of children's arrivals in advance nor preparations for making their lives happy once they come. It is all a burden, a tragedy; most of the babies here come to unwedded mothers who often don't even know who the fathers are. But the Church does not permit a "tidying up", nor such education; nor birth-control, or family-planning clinics, of course. And here you can see the stark results. In the States where misnamed "right-to-live" campaigns would do away with all family-planning, it mightn't end up like here, for there remain alternatives ... as long as other faiths maintain still a toehold. in competition. I am not (normally) in favour of abortion, carelessly resorted to without reckoning the cost, spiritually, psychically, and so on, to all concerned. But preventatives? Men here would not demean themselves by using condoms, and what can a poor woman do?

"Our lord", as everybody who styles himself a Christian calls Jesus, left more symbols of what lies ahead (or what lay ahead for us at the start of this Era) than even the most subtle theologian ever recognized. Only when the Era

began reaching its end, did the code-book become available, thanks to the researches of sinologists such as Bernhard Karlgren, who reconstructed archaic Chinese pronunciations for us, so the old symbols could be studied from a fresh viewpoint. A book of its own would be needed to tell all that tale, so starkly obvious to one familiar both with the Bible and with archaic Chinese writ, as I have become. For the present purposes, I'll stay simply with that one primary symbol of the Gadarene Swine, ("about two-thousand" of them), taking their turns -- symbolically -- to depart over the precipice abandoning our Space-Time, to plunge into an Abyss of No-Space/No-Time once a year. Now that almost 2000 years have elapsed from the "start" of our Era (1 AD for reckoning purposes). the Times of the Gentiles, the Reign of the Pigs of Legion., has to be reaching its end. Things can be shouted from the housetops that were whispered only in secret till so recently. Jesus said it would be so!

So I'm not mincing words, to protect the timid sensibilities of possible publishers. If they still cannot publish this sort of "speech", I still speak my piece every chance I get anyway, for it is a "charge" that was put upon, me. I didn't know what I was getting into when I started the study years ago. But neither can I dodge the price required of me, now I'm ending my part of the task.

In this remote microcosm of Nature and Man I stand apart from the rushing tides of humanity and the "sound and fury" reaches us as a mere echo from afar. For example, on this new and blazing morning, we have heard from a passer-by from Palma Sola (for there are T-V's there -- and actually here also a neighbour or two has one, but due to the mountains around it doesn't work well), and it seems the Challenger has blown up with seven aboard it. One thinks of the shock to populations in "civilized lands".



Here? A mere shaking of the head is apparent on the part of the news-bringer. And still the majority of citizens around here will not be impressed. If they're told, by any chance, for the whole concept of trying to achieve escape velocity or build something special in the line of satellites, is unthinkable, here.

When we first came we had a little radio, that could only capture a powerful station or two in Bolivia where Quechuan was spoken a good deal. It doesn't work now, this radio, but our electronic[-minded] son Robert in Buenos Aires, has made for Vadim a new radio. The only question is getting it to us ... one wouldn't risk trying to send it as a package by post! So meanwhile, we really are dependent on the occasional bits of news brought us by some passer-by from afar and the newspapers Vadim picks up in San Pedro when he must go there once a month.

It's like being on another planet... when I read science fiction tales of pioneers on frontier planets, waiting for the return of the spaceships bringing news of Earth occasionally, I think: I am experiencing it right now. And indeed, the people here are as strange to me as the "aliens" in s-f tales of other planets. The people here have never (most of them) wandered farther than Jujuy town, at the very most. Many never even have wandered as far as San Pedro just a hundred-odd kilometers away. The ucumarú lurking in the heights of our "Barbarous Range" (Santa Barbara's domains) is no more alien than its "descendants" if the tales be "true" that it mates with locals every chance it gets.

Of course there are many, many rich, proud, cultured and elegant people in the Province of Jujuy. I have not discussed them for I have not gone out to meet them. (We knew so many in Central Cordoba Province, of this type, it is not 'new' to me, and I always seek the new to understand.)

At the foot of the western flank of Santa Barbara Range there is a stud-farm that raises and trains race-horses (some 80 are there right now). They heard we have a Pure Arab stallion -- its story I'll now be telling soon. So they camp with all their elegance and charm to woo us, especially the stallion's owners, Tony and Sylvia. The result is that mare after mare is beginning to arrive from that stud-farm. (I don't think we'll ever get around to charging anything, but they have offered to tame the two young horses that are reaching the age for it, we have here. We'll have to get the animals to them, however, and we'll first have to make them accept a bit and

bridle to be taken there ... a long, difficult way across the mountains, via El Fuerte, 20 kilometres north from here, and then across a series of terrible precipices and ravines before their stud-farm is reached.) They have just brought the second mare for servicing, - the first they brought weeks ago.

They bring the animals on their own. (not trucking them.) Soon Arab blood will improve the quality of Jujuy horses, evidently, if this goes on. Vadim does not quite approve, for it's all so hit-and-miss. (No proper supervision as the service goes on, the horses and mares galloping around in the fields here and fighting it out, sometimes, too.)

Our Arab stallion may be worth a fabulous sum (had he papers, but he doesn't, nor did his sire, and dam - the latter two having come into the possession of that second set of bosses we had in Cordoba .. the ones who manufactured paper-coffins, remember?)

(Vadim says they got the mare and the sire legitimately. He saw the papers for same)

So how is this young stallion now ours? Did we steal him? Buy him? Was he given to us? Not so easy to answer... But to tell how he became our animal, I'd have to backtrack a bit and describe how our children years ago acquired a mare with her colt ... the mare's previous owners had called her "Mosoca" ("Snot", or "Little one"), for she was such a pet she used to spend her time in their kitchen looking for tidbits to eat. But as she grew huge and huge they had to sell her (for they had only a bit of land), and they would then repeat the process, raise another good filly for selling later on, at a profit each time.

Mocosa already had had her first colt. We, therefore, bought her with it. (The former owners were neighbors of our children, in the little house we then had in a suburb of Cordoba city.)

The children named the colt Snappy after a horse a friend of mine had in the U.S.A.. I didn't think they should, for I felt she mightn't like it -- to her there could be but one "Snappy" in the world. But they went and did it anyway, and the colt accepted and soon learned its name, so that was that.

There seemed to be a 'streak of Peruvian' in Snappy ... he grew huge and proud and with "too much of a head", Vadim insists. But he raises it so arrogantly, it looks splendid on his strong, shining body - brownish. (I forget the right term for the hue.) When Mocosa and Snappy arrived at the estancia where we were

back then, they at once showed themselves the superiors of all the horses already there. and soon Snappy started noticing mares on every side, Most of the mares were pretty old, but he didn't mind that. Sylvia and Tony were most embarrassed but the owner's wife, (I'll call her "My Lady" here.), reassured them.

You see, her husband in France had kept stables with such pedigreed horses in it, they were famous the world over, and on several occasions won the Grand Prix. But here in Cordoba, he kept a few dozen horses and mares only so as to have work-animals (for pulling grass-cutters endlessly across vast hectares of sweeping lawns, and for pulling the milkcart, and so on), and also riding horses for his hosts of summer guests. He flatly refused to have an "ordinary stallion" about. And if they were going to have blooded mares for a pedigreed stallion, the whole system would have to be altered, proper stables built and skilled horse-breeders brought in from France. Otherwise it wouldn't make sense to him.

But now, low! a lively young stallion had made his appearance on the immaculate estancia. My Lady was tremendously entertained, and the estancia's owner himself, (Don Ed), was amused, no doubt about it. All the titled, or very-rich-and-influential guests shared the entertainment.

Snappy, chief actor that summer on the stage of that great and famous estancia, courted mares for all he was worth, to the amusement of the applauding public (famous figures from Europe and their hosts). Our children's delight was increased when My Lady told them. "Any colt or foal born to our mares will be all yours. So see how many you can get! I wish we had more mares ... a pity most of them are so old."

It was a very happy year for our kids, as mare after mare showed signs of pregnancy, till the guests left at the end of the summer season, and only My Lady and her spouse remained. (Normally they too used to leave by then for Europe, but she had decided to "try a winter", in Cordoba, believing she "needed cold" for her health. Not a winter had she experienced for years and years.

My lady spoke to the children of their new Arras. (We here understand a word that sounds like that as "stud-farm", but now, looking it up in my old English/Spanish dictionary, I see that in a Spanish usage, it can suggest a dowry. Also "thirteen pieces of money which the bridegroom gives to the bride as a pledge, in the act of marriage", Vadim tells me there's an H

before the word, "or something", he adds, but I don't find that in the dictionary, so let it be.)

At any rate, our children's new "Arras" (or stud-farm) became a popular theme of discussion throughout the hills of Cordoba, back then, and the kids' enthusiasm delighted everybody.

All went well till no mares remained still ready to be served anywhere nearby. Then off galloped Snappy all over the Sierras of Cordoba, seeking more mares. He was becoming a danger; strong, powerful, huge, ready to attack any horse that wasn't a mare (or a mere foal, for he doted on foals and colts, too, acted the "protective parent" towards them all),

At last, despite the regrets of folks like My Lady and her friend who were all so proud of Snappy's virility, (extending through the entire mountain-side by then radiating from our source), Sylvia and Tony asked the tambero of the estancia to castrate Snappy. The task was accomplished successfully. Snappy found -- to his own surprise henceforth -- mares weren't worth "all that bother" after all. Yet his instincts to protect mares and their foals remained strong in him, and his courage in maintaining all male horses in subjection to him, (even other stallions. when the new bosses brought them in), continued. Not a stallion but feared our gelded Snappy, to the end!

The new owners took over with great plans and much flourishing of "unlimited resources", but as the Military Government began to lose its grip (and their own unnamed "principal" got locked up around then), the new owners ended up poorer than church mice, suddenly. So they could no longer put on airs with their two Arab stallions, several wonderful Arab mares, and other blooded stock.

One of the Arab stallions, (by suggestion of one of the owners right then), was crossed with our Mocosa, and thus she produced her second foal; Starburst, we called him. (Because of the mark on his forehead that looked like a starburst.) Starburst has turned out absolutely beautiful; we eventually had to geld him, but he was soon huge like his mother, while perfectly shaped like his Arab sire. He and his half-brother Snappy became buddies at once, and "forever", both absolutely loyal to their mother, too.

Well, the winter I'm discussing (when our Arab stallion was born up there in the Cordoban heights), was icy, bleak, piercing... every blade of grass was gone. And the poor, blooded horses -- and also a herd of imported

cows – of the new owners, wandered neglected and disconsolate in the savage, rocky heights, all on their own, lost in the thick mists of the cloud shrouded mountains (as ordered by the owners, who couldn't supply fodder for them in the stables any more.)

Our own horses were accustomed to such winters and knew how to wander afar seeking bits of food (dry grasses, etc, hidden behind and under boulders, branches, etc.) and thus they always survived the hard spells. But the poor, blooded imports hung hungrily around the stables, waiting in vain to be fed. It was pitiful and yet what could we do? (Our own salary was five months in arrears).

In one of the overgrazed paddocks there, that winter, a very special Arab mare, (incredibly fleet -- a racing pony originally), gave birth prematurely to a tiny foal. She dropped it in proud disdain and walked off as if she'd had nothing to do with that miscarriage. "Not hers!"

Normally, when this happens during a period of hunger, the other animals will come up to lick the dying foal for its salt, till it dies. But it just happened that night, Mocosa and her two sons had come by on their way to say hello to us the next morning, (dropping in from the wild heights further up where the "good horses" never ventured), and they passed that discarded foal.

What do you know? Snappy and his younger brother (who learned everything from Snappy) established themselves as the poor thing's defenders, chasing all the other animals away. Mocosa came up to nuzzle it in pity and it somehow managed to get to its shaky legs and begin sucking her. (She'd still been feeding Starburst, occasionally though he too now was big.)

And so, that next morning, Sylvia and Tony came running home crying, "Mocosa's had a baby and we didn't even know she was pregnant!"

Yes, indeed ... when we ran out to look, there was the touching tableau: a fragile mini-colt reaching up to suck Mocosa's very full teats, (she never runs out of milk, and even now that that little Arab is a biggish stallion, when not fathering colts himself he still runs up to suck her -- most frustratingly, to us!) And fiercely protective, behind the mother-and-foal, the new "big brothers", of the tiny one stood ready to attack any other horse that tried to come near!

But of course we soon figured out the situation.

The tiny foal was indeed the half-brother of our Starburst, the same sire had been used in

both cases. That sire was dead by then, victim of that terrible winter and of its own high-strung inability to adapt. It had begun having fainting fits, when it didn't have enough mares around to fecundate, and by then there were *no* mares available in heat for it, of course.

Well, we summoned the two stable-boys in charge of the horses by then, for the new owners simply couldn't face us when we'd tell them what should be done for the poor animals, so they'd bypassed our authority and turned the helpless animals over to those two kids -- who spent their time drinking and ignoring the animals and neglecting their tasks. We rounded up the two kids and warned them, "Come and help us make the animal's mother accept it. This can't go on; we don't want the poor thing."

So they spent that day (Tony helping) trying to convince, the Arab mare to let its foal suck it. No luck! The mare kicked and reared, and it was a very hungry and sad day for the poor little one. At last, we decided: "We can't let it starve," so we took it back to Mocosa. She didn't want it by then, but we insisted so she gave in and it followed her around dispiritedly. But it was so helpless and weak, when the young man who was in charge of the *esancia*, (a relative of the owners), came, we asked his advice and we also told him, "You had better arrange for someone to feed the creature with a bottle regularly; and you'll need medicines and tonics or it will die anyway. We can't let it go on sucking Mocosa. We were planning to have her served this year, again."

The lad (his name was the same as Blase's real name here, so I'll call him "Blassy" in this story to distinguish between the two), he got his most stubborn look and said, "I'll see. I'll ask my family's advice, and let you know," and off he went. He didn't show up for a long time, for the decision we required, he couldn't give. Offer to pay all costs, when the animal was obviously going to die? It looked so rickety and shrunken and worthless ... a mere abortion. Why even try to save it? A waste! He ordered the stable-boys to have the creature's mother served again at once (during her first early heat), by the surviving other Arab, and hoped for better luck next time. ((I should add in passing here, that poor mare duly produced another abortion as the result of that early serving, but it could not be saved, and died at once.))

As for the little one, Mocosa found herself stuck with, while Snappy and Starburst guarded her and the colt devotedly? Sylvia and Tony spent hours each day fussing over it,

treating it for its many deficiencies ... we took out credit on our own with the vet in the town below, to make sure it would have all it required, as Blassy wouldn't hear of helping us pay for it. He looked so scornful of our foolishness and sentimentality ... pitying a worthless abortion that ought to have been left to die without wasting more time on it.

And so the lovely little creature -- tame as a dove - grew slowly but well, and by the summer you could see what fine lines he had ... what "blood!" (Even without the missing papers proving the high pedigree. Our bosses and their Blassy began to get interested, and desperately plotted on how to get it back from us. They were too much macho type to come up to us and say "Thank you, we were wrong and you were right to have saved it. How much do we owe you? We'll gladly pay for your help in raising it and the expenses you incurred.")

Oh, no, never that. They invented the Blasé-type tricks of "might-is-right" which they planned to go right on using.

But even so, they had to approach the problem with care, for the colt still needed Mocosa's milk, and how get Mocosa away from us, together with her two big sons in the bargain? (The other young mares born to our former bosses' mares, were away right then being tamed by flunkies in places nearby.)

What these new bosses tried to do firstly was simply, announce that all the peones' animals (and ours also) belonged to them by right. "Our friends down south," they told us, "now own all the animals that were on their estancias, that the peones tried to pretend belonged to them, but they had no proof".

"Well, we have proof," answered Vadim. "Don Ed and his wife helped us get all the papers in order, that prove Mocosa and Snappy are ours -- also the other mares and colts not here now, and as for Starburst, he still sometimes sucks Mocosa, so that is sufficient proof he's hers. Besides, we've had him branded too, and his papers also are clear."

Foiled by that set of facts, they tried to think up other ways, nor did they risk stealing by that trick as yet the animals of the flunkies who -- warned -- made their animals disappear from the bosses' reach.

One day a great "Gathering of the Clan" occurred. Our new bosses, and all their supporters, came on holiday to the Big House, and showed their clout, terrifying the flunkies. (They timed the visit for when Vadim and Sylvia were absent, having come north to check on

putting up a little house here in this new place we'd just then bought.)

The Gang felt sure that I could be easily quenched - I *look* very mild and Tony (in their view) was still "just a boy". Sylvia had been the "firebrand", their opinion, and she's six years' Tony's senior. Vadim too they feared, for his rectitude.

So they rode about like royalty, these new owners, and shouted threats and accusations, imputing to us acts of thievery, (*Who's the sire, of Starburst?* they roared, as if they hadn't formerly told us to use their Arab stallion, since it hadn't enough mares to keep it in good fettle). And by the time all the flunkies were turned into quaking jelly after a day of wild shouts and curses, the big boss ordered,

"Put all the animals of the Strelkovs into a corral without food or water and keep them there till they die." (Nice trick; they hoped I'd say, "Oh, please, please, don't starve our poor horses. Take them for yourselves before you do that!") Like the good mother in the story of Solomon versus the two "whores", remember?)

So even Mocosa with her desirable little Arab colt, (by then we'd named him Starfire), were put into the corral, to be dealt with the next day, as planned.

But I boiled! Tony, when he consulted me, agreed we'd find a way to fight somehow. So we went to bed early, and slept a bit. But I woke at three AM and went into the next room to call him: "I'm getting breakfast. Get up too! Right afterwards, you will ride, or run yourself, better, across to our neighbors and get permission to take our horses. They'll be up early, to milk their cows."

He agreed -- a marvellous ideal So by seven a.m., the corral where our animals had been left "to die of thirst and hunger" was empty. Our animals were safely far away.

Blassy came to our house just furious, as the mouthpiece of his furious family.

"Where -- are -- your -- horses?"

Tony had the answer pat. "Well, since they bothered you here, we have taken them far away. They will not bother you again."

"Well," stammered Blassy. "We'll permit you to keep Mocosa here; you can bring *her* back with the Arab colt."

"Thank you, but it won't be necessary. We really didn't want to bother you. We supposed you had nothing against our keeping our animals in the heights ... besides they often aren't even on this estancia, they wander even further away above. But since it bothers you..."

What could he say?

"Yes, we don't want them here," he muttered, trying to be stern.

From then on, the bosses and he wracked their brains on "How to get Starburst and Starfire back, and keep for their own?"

The question was, *Where were they now?* They asked the peones, and no one knew. We, meanwhile, had taken the horses away (including our others as well, those that were being broken in elsewhere by flunkies, and Snappy's daughter right then were pregnant by accident, thanks to a very highbred British horse roving the wilds), we'd taken them many kilometers away to the foot of the mountains, and were paying for them in pastures down there, but it would be for a short time. Already plans were under way to ship them by railway to Jujuy and our own place here. (Which we did by March of 1983 ahead of our own arrival that July.)

In the absence now of Starfire, poor Blassy began the long-lasting polemics about getting Starfire back somehow. He argued with Vadim who grunted to us, "Oh, I'm sick of it. "Why don't you give Starfire back? Who wants it?"

"It'll only die if we give it back. You know how the flunkies are - in their care already how many of the weaker animals die from neglect and mistreatment too. Riding them in secret without care... treating them with cruelty! Better Starfire should die at once!" we replied. Vadim shrugged and answered, "It's I who have to stand Blassey's tantrums all the time, over that blasted little animal."

But we stood firm. I and Sylvia and Tony. "Better that Starfire be dead than suffering what he'd suffer in the keeping of the bosses' flunkies, poor little drunks!"

After all, by then, Starfire was like our own child! We'd saved him from dying over and over, brought him up despite all the cards stacked against his survival.

Blassy tried fighting with Tony and Sylvia over the colt. Shouting that they were "mere thieves". (*He should talk!*) Tony and Sylvia kept their tempers and argued very nicely, "All we ask is that you pay us our expenses and also something for our care of the poor thing and really you should pay for the use of Mocosa who raised him for you."

Fury, fury! Blassy would have ordered us out before a firing-squad then and there, but the former powers they'd supported were no longer able to be so summary to "all enemies".

"You are sending your horses to Jujuy?"

"Yes, we are..,"

"Soon?"

"Soon enough," said our kids, non-committally.

In desperation poor Blassy (and really we felt sorry for him, for he was just a kid himself, say twenty-odd), turned to Vadim for one last try.

"So what about the little Arab?" he asked. (We'd already almost finished our packing; some of our belongings were already in storage; we'd begun emptying the house of our things leaving most of its rooms vacant. We'd packed ourselves into the back part only, meanwhile, and Tony was already at Military Service, away.)

Vadim answered Blassy. "Look into your own heart. Consult your conscience. When Starfire was dying, did you bother with it? Did you care? Did you at least encourage Sylvia and Tony in their 'foolishness', trying to save a premature dying animal, just because it was so brave and wanted to live at any cost? They asked you for help -- they were doing it, they thought, for you. You refused to pay attention. You ignored it till certain it would live and grow big and beautiful. Now you demand it, and refuse even now to pay the costs we incurred. But to us by now, it is like our own child. If we brought it back here, can you promise it won't die from sheer neglect as by now both your Arab stallions died, and many others of your fine horses also? We won't let poor Starfire suffer such a fate. It trusts us, don't you see? So look into your own heart and tell me what you think."

Poor Blassy hung his head, scraped his feet back and forth uncertainly, then nodded.

"So you're keeping it?"

"Yes, we are."

He nodded again, resigned, and turned away.

And that is how we have a pure Arab stallion now!

And more, Starfire has gotten Mocosa's granddaughters pregnant, and each one of them has given us another exquisite half-Arab colt or foal. Their names are: Starlight, Starlady, and Starbright, so far. All those beauties in our valley-land add glory to the whole region... all the gauchos around are proud too of our Arab stallion and his relatives! They come from afar just to look and rejoice.

- Mae Strelkov

# THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE: PSKOV LAKE

by Pavel Viaznikov

This time I would like to tell just about one of my summer days on an uninhabited island. It was a very nice day, though... a hazy, lazy and (yes!) sort of crazy day of summer.

I was in Pskov, where I use to go every year, visiting my grandaunt. I know this beautiful ancient city very well, and I love it. Its thickset churches with heavy onion-shaped cupolas, carved limestone walls and belfries shaped like walls with rows of bells on them, its strong Krom (Kremlin) fort over the confluence of mighty Velikaya (Great) and fluent Pskova rivers, its towers and museums always make me feel... I don't know how to put it – historical, perhaps? Also, I like names of places and especially churches here: St.Nicolas-on-the Droughty-Place, Christmas-in-the-Corner, Annunciation-before-the-market-place or Assumption-at-the-Bridge... sounds funny, but these are just combinations of the “official” names of the churches and their location; of course there could be more than one St.Nicolas's church, since this saint is very popular in Russia... By the way, last year an icon appeared in the St.Nicolas's – a figure of one of the Evangelists showed through the whitewash. Mind you, the stone walls were left bare by the Revolution and the Bolshevik's anti-religious campaign, by the WW2 and a fire. Probably, the ancient pigments were absorbed by the limestone, and the fresh lime developed them like chemicals develop a photo film.

According to the legend, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century a Russian *knyaz* (prince) Igor once went hunting in the woods, and wandered away from his retinue. He found himself on the bank of a mighty river, near a small village and a ferry (actually, the ferry was but a rather small boat). Igor wanted to cross the river, as he noticed a deer on the other bank; so he called for the boatman. The latter proved to be a boatwoman – a nice-looking but strong girl. In the boat the prince started making advances to the girl (she was a freewoman and even a prince had to behave like a gentleman with her – no feudal's pleasures!). The girl, though (her name was Olga) retorted with an

eloquent lecture on Christian and gentleman's morals. The prince was charmed with her beauty, strength and cleverness, and, forgetting his hunting, he made Olga a marriage proposal. Some time later Olga came to these places again, to visit her native village, and standing where her boat used to wait for travelers, she saw a scene of divine beauty: three pillars of sunlight fell, vertically, from a gap in the clouds, illuminating a rocky cape on the other bank, in the confluence of two rivers. The Princess took this for a divine sign, and persuaded her husband to build here a new town and a cathedral, dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The place was conveniently located on the famous trade route “from Varyags to Greeks” (i.e. from the Northern Europe to the Black Sea and beyond), easily fortified and protected, – and Prince Igor agreed, establishing one of the main centers of the medieval Russian civilization. Pskov, even with a prince, was a republic: all important decisions were made by *Veche* – public voting of all classes – boyars, warriors, merchants, craftsmen and peasants (the only group excluded from this democracy were the slaves which were not many). The prince was only the military leader; besides, he performed the judge's duties and represented the city in its relations with other cities and countries. The *Veche* could always overrun him. Later, the city joined the Hanseatic League. When in Paris, the “prince of European cities”, people had to walk in deep dirt and all kinds of garbage and waste – including the load of night-pots! – was thrown out of the windows, Pskov boasted of drainage system, regular waste-removal service, and wood-paved streets. Stephen Bathory, the Great Prince of the Polish-Lithuanian Principality, wrote in his diary – “This city is bigger and better than Paris!» Well, that was quite a long time ago. Modern Paris improved a lot, while Pskov... well, it retained a lot of its medieval charm, but it is not a very modern city, you know. Also, it suffered a lot from Bolsheviks who used to tear down churches in order to build something new (sometimes they constructed good things, yet many ancient buildings were lost), but

most of all it suffered from the Nazi occupants who did not care about constructing here anything at all, they just destroyed everything they did not need.

Well, I have written about Pskov a couple of times, but just in case I decided to do it again. And this time I decided to go to the isle of Zalit (the name is probably derived from Russian for “flooding”). The island is in the middle of Pskov Lake, and it is 40 minutes both from Pskov and from the Estonian border by a hydrofoil boat. The boat goes there three days a week, Thursday to Sunday, in the morning and in the evening (8 AM and 6 PM). On Sundays, there is only one boat, so if you miss it you will have to wait till next Thursday (of course you can also take a motorboat to the nearest coast and then try to get a bus or hitch-hike).

I came to the Pskov pier at quarter to eight in the morning, expecting to be the first in the queue. Yet, the queue was already there – a long line, consisting of fishermen with their rods and packs, old *babushkas* in tightly tied shawls and medium-aged women in similarly tight black kerchiefs, all with books with crosses on the cover; a couple of nuns, a bearded deacon in his long cassock, and a dozen or so villagers from the isles, wearing heavy rubber boots and carrying numerous bags and packs – mixed feed for poultry, household hardware and chemical goods, and one man had two cardboard boxes of cheap vodka. Thus, when the boat came and everybody boarded, the vessel was packed like a country bus. The goods filled the aisle between the rows of the seats, as well as the boarding chamber – obviously contrary to the safety regulations. Then, the boat slowly left the pier, turned near the mighty walls of the Krom, and sped up, lifting itself on the hydrofoil fins.

The ladies in black shawls opened their books and started reading. The reason for their going to Zalit was that there is a church dedicated to St. Nicolas (this saint was especially revered by seamen and fishermen); and the dean of the church is popularly believed to be a very wise man, and lots of people come to consult with him on the religious matters. Besides, on the island there is a cell, inhabited by a hermit monk, revered as a holy man. Yet, one cannot meet with him without a special blessing of the eparchy Mitropolite. I did not have one, nor did I have any business with the hermit, so I decided against walking to the (quite remote) cell-house. Yet, I wanted to go to the church. It was in bad need of repairs, and the small graveyard behind was overgrown with biting nettle, cowslips and rosebay. The church was empty, as the morning service was over and the next one was due in four hours.

After all, I met the famous dean of the church and even got his blessing. Wearing Bermuda shorts, I could not enter the church itself, but anyway I wanted to leave a commemoration-note and ask an attendant to lit a candle (in commemoration-notes people write down first names of their relatives or of people dear to them, living and dead separately, like: “✠ Praying for the good health of the Lord’s serves: Petr, Olga, ill Anna, Yelena, Roman...” or “✠ Praying for the eternal rest of the Lord’s serves: Alexander, Vassiliy, Zinaida...» You then give such notes to a special attendant sitting in the “candle-booth”, a special kiosk selling candles, icons, books and other similar articles, pay a small donation to the church, and during a service the priest mentions the names in his prayer). But the candle-booth ran out of paper for the notes, so I went out and knocked at the nearest house asking for some. I was answered by an aging bearded man with a gray ponytail who worked in the vegetable yard. He opened the gate and, disapprovingly looking at my very casual clothes, asked what I needed the paper for and, when I explained that it was for the commemoration-notes, he asked me some questions and even asked to say a couple of prayers – like “Rejoice O Virgin Mother of God...” and the Articles of Faith (aka “Credo”). By that time I guessed that he was a priest (ponytails are not commonly worn by old men but it’s normal for an Orthodox priest – who wears long hair – to tie one when working, for example. Besides, the man’s manners were befitting for a priest). The unexpected interrogation was OK with me as it was obvious that the man just wanted to chatter a little for a change, after his gardening toils. It was interesting for me, too. The priest was pleased “to see a young man knowing his religion” and then I asked my questions, too. Thus I found out some facts about numbers of pilgrims (on big church holidays not only extra hydrofoil boats go to Zalit but the fishermen’s kolkhoz arranges motor boats to “the Land”, carrying passengers without any special comfort (they have to stand on the deck). He told me also about the most revered icons in the church, and then blessed. Thus, my vacation became in a way a pilgrimage, too. I brought the paper to the church, lit a candle and now could turn to exploring the surroundings.

The boat to Pskov was due at 6 PM, so I had a whole day ahead. As I discovered soon enough, there was nothing to do in the fishermen’s village; I walked about a little, looked at rusty motor-boats, fishing-boats, clumsy old flat-bottomed row-boats and boats looking rather like Viking drakkars, only shorter. Also, I enjoyed observing a small herd of cows – a dozen of them

or so – grazing on water-weeds, belly-deep in the lake.

Then I dropped into a small shop, featuring varied kinds of freshwater fish – mostly, dried or smoked, and obviously purchased from the local fisher-folk; stale rye bread, cheap beer, rice, pearl-barley and some ancient-looking rusty tins of canned vegetables or meat. I bought a beer (more for talking with the shop assistant, a plump aging lady in blue robe) and asked questions. The island was 7 by 3 km, and the lady advised against walking to the far end of the island, lest I miss the evening boat. She then said that, if I did not want to wait for the evening hydrofoil, I could take a collective farm's motor boat to the nearest coast, and then transfer to a bus to Pskov. "The hydrofoil boat will be packed like a can of herrings", the lady warned me. "There are lots of pilgrims here this day, and many local folk will go to the Land for the weekend, they sell fish in the market".

She also told me some things about the island, the above-mentioned hermit, and the life of the fishermen. The life was tough, the prices high (for the locals) and wages low and irregular. The small fishing fleet was deteriorating, as were the catches: among the reasons for that, she named the Estonian border in the northern part of the lake.

Leaving the shop, I climbed the hill, as I noticed a strange construction there; it was made of white-painted metal pipes and looked like a giant cage or a carcass for some building, or rather, a tower. It proved to be a WW2 memorial: the island was a place of battle of Marines and members of emergency volunteer force with the Nazis.

The top of the hill proved to be an excellent observation position, providing a glorious panorama of the lake. I could see the lake's shore and all three islands: of those, two are inhabited (Zalit is bigger and its population is bigger, too; on the second island there is a small village with only six families living there, a semi-ruined church and about a dozen of empty houses). The third islet, probably 500 m in diameter or so, and shaped like an overturned and pressed obliquely into the sandy bottom of the lake soup plate, was uninhabited but had a giant electric pylon on its flat top. The islet could be reached by a long curved sandbank, partly covered with shallow water, and I decided that the rest of the day I would spend on the islet.

The uninhabited island proved to have dense population of birds – innumerable seagulls, some big black birds whom I could not recognize, and the slopes of the "soup-plate" were perforated with swallows' and swift's holes like a Swiss cheese. Also, there were lots of grass-snakes.

The birds made a deafening noise, and with my approaching the nesting grounds the noise became positively unbearable; the fauna (except grass-snakes, of course) rose up and swarmed in the air. The grass-snakes, which sun-tanned themselves on the stony path, were unwillingly making way to me. I felt a bit nervous, for what if the grass-snakes were not really poison-less grass-snakes, or some of them weren't, or they were wrong kind of grass-snakes?.. you never know with them snakes, you know. I was almost barefooted, wearing only open sandals (you know, the kind made of a sole with straps around the foot and the heel). So I remembered the grim fate of Oleg, Prince of Kiev – the legend says that a *volkhv* (a druid, a Slavonic pagan priest) predicted that in a year he would receive his death from his own horse. Oleg had the horse killed (even though he was Christian, polytheistic traditions were still very strong, and the *volkhves* were considered as magicians and good prophets). After a year, the prince returned to the same place and, seeing a pile of bones, came up to it and put his foot on the horse's skull, saying: "Sorry, my friend, for having you killed through silly – and false – predictions!" Next moment, a black viper darted out of the cranium, which it chose for its nest, and the prophecy came true...

I walked long enough, looking for a place to drop myself in. Yet, while Zalit has rather wide sandy beaches, this islet was a sand hill surrounded by stones, probably brought in to strengthen the shore, as the islet supports that power-pylon. There was sand under and among the stones, yet there was not enough room to accommodate a body. At last, I managed to find myself a nice spot, not bigger than a king-size bed, all surrounded with big, flat rocks, good to sit or even lie on. Another big standing rock served as a screen – it completely covered this little beach from possible spectators. Smaller rocks in the water with shadowed gaps between them provided a natural cooler where I put a big plastic bottle of beer and some mineral water. Thus, I got all modern conveniences including even an early warning system: the birds soon got used to my presence and their cries became much quieter, while if anybody else appeared within the birds' domain, their panic started anew, so I could know that a person is coming, and from which side of the islet.

Almost immediately my solitude was violated by a couple of fishermen who paddled to my very own little resort in a rubber boat. I warned them honestly that I was going to be a nuisance, as I was going to swim, thus scaring their fish away. The men asked me to wait a bit with scaring the fish, and to let them try catching



– just three throws of a line. OK, said I and watched their attempts – vain attempts, I should say. The fishermen were finishing their fishing; they started it before sunrise and already had a big sack of fish. Catching from the islet did not give them anything, and soon they left. Then I did some bathing (skinny-dipping, in fact, as now I was alone) and remembered that the Commies for some unknown reason considered bathing in the nude immoral and punished it as an administrative offence or even as hooliganism. That's strange, as it is known that Vladimir Lenin himself, when in emigration, either in Austria or in Switzerland, once went with another prominent Bolshevik, Bonch-Bruевич, to a nudist beach and enjoyed himself, telling his comrade that it would be nice to introduce similarly free, non-hypocritical ways in Russia, too. How can anything done by Communist No.1 be immoral?! I do not know why the Party did not decorate every beach in the USSR with a statue of nude Leader (with Bonch-Bruевич or without). Well, anyway I bathed, took some photos of the surrounding landscapes and of the birds, which by now were not shy of me at all and recklessly approached me – some were now sitting on stones within three or four meters from myself. The lake and the islet were really beautiful, and the light wind blowing from the water smelled of seaweeds, fresh water, and a bit – of fish and of pines (the shores of the lake opposite to the islands are covered with pine and fur-tree forest). The wind was just strong enough to pleasantly caress the skin and carry away excess heat (the day was quite hot). I was happy as a puppy.

All of a sudden, there was a sound of thunder, seemingly out of blue skies. I climbed a rock and saw that a horde of heavy cumulus clouds. They were not black as they usually are when pregnant with a storm, yet actually looked solid and full of water. Now and then lighting sparkled among the clouds. Further, closer to the horizon, the clouds were much darker, purple and black, and I could see the rain walking towards the lake on its shaky glass legs. Judging by the speed of the clouds (the wind was still weak near the ground), the rain was expected on the islands in about twenty minutes. There was no place to hide from it, but I did not bother – I just packed my clothes into my big bag and calmly waited for the rain. (Neither was I afraid of lightings, which can be dangerous near the water – I was protected by the power-pylon, as they are always equipped with a lighting-rod.

The clouds, which moved so aggressively, suddenly split as if hitting an invisible obstacle (probably, the islands were heated by sun well enough to produce a strong ascending air-current?), and pillars of sun rays immediately

rushed in through the gap in the clouds. The scene was tremendous – bright golden sunlight on the background of dark sky (the clouds now looked dark blue with the famous silver lining), and dark blue ruffled lake... perhaps Princess Olga saw something like this when she vowed to build a cathedral to the Holy Trinity. Yet, I never promised such things, besides, there already was a church on Zalit – at the moment it was brightly lit by the sunrays and gleamed upon the dark background even if long unpainted. Well, living beauty! And the storm missed the islet after all; the clouds parted and left most of the lake in the middle. So, I bathed again (though while I was observing the celestial activities, the currents or winds brought some kind of algae to the islet – tiny (pinhead-sized) emerald-colored, semi-transparent globes, which were floating everywhere from surface to shallow bottom. The green things did not stick to the body but slid off with water-drops, leaving nothing on the skin. I think that fish eat these algae, because birds started hunting for fish as soon as the green mist filled the water.

Then I sat on a warm, conveniently curved rock, and started reading a very interesting book – an essay on life and writings of Lewis Carroll. Then had a snack and continued reading. And... went asleep. When I woke up, I was lying on my stomach, and my body was itching all over. Sunburns! It was good that I turned over in my dream; otherwise my front would have been all coals. On the other hand, now I was like a well-done barbequed beefsteak and had no place good for sitting or lying on. At that moment I did not fully realize the scope of my misfortune, as the itching was still quite bearable, so I just found a partially shaded spot, opened up my umbrella and went on with Rev. Dodgson.

After some time my early warning system started screaming, and I dressed a little. These were three kids who paddled through the shallow water to a big cupola-like rock and started fishing. I looked at my watch and saw that it was high time to start moving towards the pier, in order not to stay here for the night.

I decided to take a short cut and, instead of walking around the “soup-plate”, climbed its sandy slope, overgrown with wormwood, camomile, rose-bay and cow-wheat. Hot air smelled like a herbal medicines shop or a cup of absinth, with a distinct note of dried birds' droppings (I mean that the droppings were dried, not the birds). When I reached the flat top I saw that most probably a human foot never touched this land since the power-pylon was erected. The view was great, but the birds went positively mad. They had nests here, and took me for an egg-poacher, I believe. I saw several nests, with

clumsy gray seagull chicken toddling around the nests but still far from being able to fly. Of course, I did my best to move as far from the nests, as possible, so that the seagulls would not have heart stroke. The seagullings were not afraid of me at all, though.

I was fully dressed now but when I came to the opposite slope I realized that I was virtually as good as naked: that slope was covered with biting nettle, thorns and poisonous blister-weed (the latter does not bite at once but after several minutes itchy blisters appear on the afflicted spot; people allergic to its poison can get anaphylactic shock). While I was wearing a pair of Bermuda shorts, a T-shirt and the above-mentioned open-foot sandals, which protect solely the soles... I could not turn back, as it is much more difficult to climb down the steep slope than up, and as turning back meant missing the boat. So, I crossed my heart and pushed through the nasty weeds, trying to choose biting nettle and not blister-weed. Back on the shore, I bathed again to wash of at least some poison, and ran to the pier.

When I approached the pier, it was empty, and I thought that I was going to be the first passenger. Yet, just like in the morning, I made a mistake: as soon as the hydrofoil boat appeared in the distance, a big crowd poured out of some leaning-over barn. The queue was hiding from the sun there; besides, there were benches as the barn was designated to serve as the waiting-room. The people were mostly pilgrims, and some were the villagers from Zalit (the latter were now carrying all kinds of fish, like buckets with fresh pike, bags of dried perch, bundles of smoked bream, barrels or plastic drums of salted wild carp and boxes of tiny dried snetok (looking like very small anchovy, and excellent with beer). They filled the pier and it rocked like a giant cradle (actually they use a pontoon for the pier). They nearly pushed me off, and started arguing and trying to reconstruct their queue. They shouted at me, blaming of squeezing in instead of joining the queue properly, and telling me to leave the pier and to join the line from behind. No way: I could neither jump off the pier nor walk on the people heads like Benkey (a known Japanese Zen teacher) or Dundee the Crocodile. Some people were arguing about their own places in the queue, and very fervently at that. I asked one especially combative lady, wielding a prayer-book, whether it was her pilgrimage that inspired this belligerent behavior. The lady now turned to me and I was close to being beaten with the book of prayers but the boat at last came up to the pier. I was literally carried in, but instead of staying in the cabin (after all I really did get in front of the queue, even if unknowingly!) and went to the roof (or the upper deck). The boat had a small platform with rails

there, and, normally passengers should not be there when the boat goes at cruising speed. Kids are not allowed there at all, and the grown-ups are warned to hold on the rails and onto their possessions. The safety rules are violated... but the people have to go, and the local shipping company cannot afford extra trips, they are unprofitable as it is and the municipal authorities have to pay a big portion of the cost of the fuel, crew wages and etc. It is impossible to increase the fare as most people, especially those from Zalit, will not be able to afford going to “the land” then.

Well, I tied my bag tight to a rail-post, tucked my cap into the bag and zipped up the wind-coat – in spite of the hot day this proved to be a wise precaution, for when the boat gathered cruising speed, the wind became quite piercing. I thought that riding on top of a hydrofoil boat, standing, was fun – like an amusement park ride. The wind was trying to blow off my hair and my camera – I took a farewell photo of Zalit from the water, and later wished that I didn’t: halfway to Pskov we went past a beautiful church near the mouth of Velikaya river, the St.Nicolas’ the Miracle-maker (“Nicola’s of the [river-] Mouth”). Again St.Nicolas! This church once used to serve also as a beacon for the merchants’ boats; it is known because in 1473 Sophia Paleolog of Byzantium visited it on her way to Moscow.

I was enjoying the ride, even though my burned skin itched and ached. Suddenly, a sailor (cum conductor) poked his head out of the hatch and ordered everybody to go down, because a storm was coming and the Master expected waves – small ones but still sufficient to provide jumping and shaking, dangerous for anybody standing on the upper deck. Indeed, a soot-black thundercloud was advancing from the Pskov side of the horizon. A big storm was brewing, and even from this distance one could see a solid wall of water moving under the cloud. The forest under the cloud gleamed bright green, lit by the low sun – the tree-tops were waving like a sea, so it was obvious that the wind there was quiet strong.

Yet, we safely reached the Pskov pier – the rain started only after I set foot on the shore. Luckily there was a tent of a summer cafe nearby and I took shelter under it. The wind was trying to carry the tent away and the tent tried to follow the wind – it flapped its flounces, arched like a zeppelin’s back and danced on its supports, while I was sipping excellent “Double Golden” beer and enjoyed the view of the river boiling with rain, the golden cupolas of the Trinity Cathedral, the walls and towers of Krom and the dark, old bronze onion top of the Church of the Assumption “at the ferry”. In fact there was not much of a view, as the rain was really heavy, like a waterfall all

around me, but I knew where to look and could make out silhouettes behind the veil of falling water. Besides, low sun still shone through the rain, as the Western part of the sky was still clear, not a very usual combination.



When the rain weakened down a little, I left the hospitable tent and paddled through the puddles to a public bath-house, because there was no hot water at grandaunt Olya's place and I had to wash, especially since the burned skin is very sensitive to infection. I could not go to the steam-room (a pity, as I gathered some wormwood and camomile for making fragrant steam and now could not bear the steam at all). It was in the bath where I finally was overcome by sickness. My skin was dark red, and the other bathers thought that I had a good steaming and congratulated me with that, while I suddenly felt that I could not stand. I dropped on a stone bench and shivered with fever. It was very difficult and painful for me to dress, my hands and feet refused to obey, and I felt terribly dizzy. At home, I took some aspirin, a desensitizer and buttered myself with a healing balm. Next night I was going to St.Petersburg – one night in train. I had a sleeper ticket but had to spend the whole night sitting, as I could not lie down... Well, I got what I deserved for my careless sleeping in the sun; yet, I enjoyed this trip and brought some really good photos as trophy.

- Pavel Viaznikov



# THE R&R DEPT

**ROD MARSDEN, PO Box 231, Corrimal, NSW 2518.**

Good to see the good ship *Mentor* back in service and you at the helm. It's been a rocky few years between issues. There was the death of good friend Don Boyd who's letters in your zine were always good value. A pity this *Mentor* issue (95) doesn't carry a Don Boyd letter.

Have you thought of doing a write-up on Don and his place in fandom and Australian writing in general? I've written about Don in *Masque Noir* but your perspective would be different. In fact, everyone I know who has done a write-up on Don has tackled the subject from a uniquely different angle to everyone else. It makes the reading fascinating as well as entertaining. I know Don thought a lot of you and *The Mentor*.

You ask what does the future hold? Less for your average human being I am afraid. Since the space race with the Russians and Americans is long over I predict a snail crawl to the other planets. I also see globalisation as a threat to our way of life.

For some months I have been fighting the National Parks and Wildlife Service over them charging a road tax to people in order to get to certain beaches at Iluka, NSW. There is absolutely no reason for the road tax except revenue for the NPWS people. I think it is totally unfair. Australians should be allowed to go to the beach without paying mightily for the right to do so. Of course it's happening at other beaches throughout NSW and is equally wrong at these other locations as well. Why should our beaches just be for those who can fork over the dollars?

If it's a question of increases in population, perhaps we should really cut back on immigration. Perhaps we should be a lot tougher on illegals. Perhaps before we allow migrants to come here they need to show some remorse for overpopulating their part of the world. Also they need to show an understanding of birth control and the need for it. If they don't or can't do these things then the hell with them. Let them live in poverty in their own countries – not here – until they do learn personal responsibility.

One slice of really good news. My dark fantasy short story *THE RESTAURANT* got into the *UTS WRITERS ANTHOLOGY 2001*. This anthology will feature on a panel at the Sydney Writers Festival in May 2001. It will then be launched at Gleebooks on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2001.

*THE RESTAURANT* was inspired by the writings of Franz Kafka. Some time ago I remember reading in *The Mentor* how your travelling Moscovite had visited Prague, Kafka's home. And what a strange place Prague must be. I'll have to visit the place some day myself.

Nice work by Darlington on Hammer SF. Me? I much prefer their horror. I don't know why but the Yanks seem to understand how to make SF movies better than the Poms. On the other hand, Hammer horror was the best in its day. And a lot of Hammer horror still stands up pretty well.

Looking at the poems in *The Mentor 95*, Louise Webster's efforts sank without a trace. Sunk by their total blandness. On the other hand, I enjoyed Joseph V. Danoski's offerings. Daniel S. Irwin's *MARTIANS WELCOME* was nice tongue-in-cheek stuff.

Again let me say it's really good to see *The Mentor* back. You have been sorely missed. (20.04.2001)

**VAN IKIN, Dept of English, University of Western Australia, 25 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6907.**

Derek Pickles' letter really struck a chord with me, especially his final paragraph. It made me feel very bad that it's been so long since I've been in personal contact. (I have kept up trades, but I'm producing *Science Fiction* so irregularly – with sometimes a two-year gap between issues – that it hardly seems like continuity.)

*[Tell me about it... - Ron]*

As Derek says, it is painfully obvious that the publication of *Mentor* is "a labour of love that involves a great deal of time and money", and those of us who read it do have to realise that it can't continue forever. But what you have done has indeed brought many, many pleasant hours to your readers – and it's done a power of good for your contributors, too, especially those writing fiction or producing artwork. How many starting-up writers had the chance to be published next to

the likes of Bertram Chandler, for example? That's what you were doing in the 1970s and 1980s, and I have my own precious bound (yes, bound!) copies of *Mentor* to prove it.

It was a real pleasure to receive issue 95, not only because it meant you'd managed to produce another issue, but because it means you're edging closer to the point where you'll be irresistibly drawn to keep going until you reach three-digits. (If you get to no. 97, I reckon you'll be so close to no. 100 that you're bound to produce another three sooner or later!)

Anyway, just let me add my voice to that of Derek in saying: *thank you*. (25.4.01)

**JOHN F. HAINES, 5 Cross Farm, Station Rd, Padgate, Warrington WA2 0QG, UK.**

Ah, what a pity the excellent joke about stationery becoming stationary in HE WHO WAITS fell flat because of a typo. Good issue, good to see you back (with yet *another* new address – are you trying to wreck my address file? Hope the HANDSHAKES have been getting through – the last one was 44).

Andy Darlington brilliant as always. I was surprised how many of the Hammer SF films I'd actually seen. Someone really ought to remake the QUATERMASS series – especially QUATERMASS AND THE PIT, one of the best ever.

Yes, where *have* the dreams gone? I watched the moon landing in 69, convinced I was seeing the start of something really exciting, not the culmination of it! Amazing how much the world has altered since then, yet how much remains the same. Interesting to compare “predictive” SF with the reality – no, we don't have holidays on Mars, or work two hours a week or have a personal robot, but we do have the internet, mobile phones, c[l]oning and gridlock.

(24.4.01)

**SYDNEY J. BOUNDS, 27 Borough Rd, Kingston on Thames, Surrey KT2 6BD, England.**

Welcome back, and *Mentor* is as good as ever.

HE WHO WAITS was quite good, and it's nice to see fiction in a fanzine again.

Andy's article on Hammer sf was well up to standard; and I remember “The Damned” as a better than average film.

Graeme: a relative? How old is he? Interesting, but he has some way to go to equal the old hands.

*[Graeme is my fifteen-year-old son. I should have introduced the piece as his diary of the events. And it's interesting that, of my four children, he is the only one who doesn't read books and magazines. - Ron.]*

It's a pleasure to read Mae; I can only hope you have more stashed away. As Derek says, a bad time for losing fans.

*[At the moment I am nearly publishing her book in TM. – Ron.]*

David Irwin's poems are the kind I enjoy; amusing, and light-hearted.

Pavel's travel piece wins first place this issue, and I trust there's more to follow. Congratulations on the Strannick award, Pavel.

Interesting letters, as usual.

I shall be looking forward to the next issue; but who can replace Buck and Mae?

(26.4.01)

**PAULINE SCARF, Sydney.**

Thank you very much for sending me TM 95. I especially liked Peggy Ranson's artwork on p. 18. She is a very good artist.

Also enjoyed Mae's pages & THE TRAVELLING MUSCOVITE very much, as always.

AMERICA AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT would be especially enjoyed by children & young people as they enjoy all of those sorts of rides. Guess I'm a bit old for that. I can't help wondering whether Graeme is your son as the surname is spelled the same as yours. A true budding little writer.

(30.4.01)

**TERRY JEEVES, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough YO12 5RQ, UK.**

Many thanks for the latest issue of THE MENTOR. I'm delighted that you are *not* closing it down. The Starship Hint had me all excited until I read the dateline – what a letdown!

I enjoyed the story and it raised the old question – what is reality? Nicely done. Also got a nostalgic blast on reading Andy Darlington's piece and seeing all those old titles. I still have ‘Quatermass Experiment’.

Mae Strelkov was as good as ever but her financial and logistics problems give me the [illegible]. The American trip report would have been better with more flesh on the bones. Instead of a list of “we did this, we did that” I'd like to have some more reactions and feelings about the places.

The Muscovite piece proposed a MUCH needed device, ‘the sound-homing missile’. I know many shops and supermarkets which are virtual ‘no go’ areas because of howling, screeching pop ‘singers’. Good load of LOCs.

(-4.01)

**NED BROOKS, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720, USA.**

Many thanks for THE MENTOR 95. As to the 1963 prediction that we would be on our way to the stars by now, I think Mr Hunter of NASA was overly optimistic. It is not possible to

separate technology and economics when it comes to enterprises on this scale. I think we are certainly a couple of decades behind in putting up orbital facilities – mainly for lack of imagination and will – so it doesn't surprise me that there is no starship in the works. A starship would not launch from Earth after all, but from orbit. But even if we had the orbital facilities to build a starship, do we have the technology? In terms of cyber-electronics, probably – but I'm not sure about power sources or life support.

HE WHO WAITS is a good story, though I was rather thrown off track by the “ping up guts” in the opening sentence – does “ping up” mean something or is it a typo or something I can't think of?

[That read “scooping up guts” in my computer file copy... - Ron.]

I would probably enjoy most of the old Hammer films that Andrew Darlington mentions – I am old enough now that I have forgotten most of the details from the original viewing! And some, like THE DAMNED, I don't think I ever saw at all. I probably have quite a few of them on VHS, one of my collections that is fully indexed.

I enjoyed the Mae Strelkov piece as always – I miss hearing from her. It seems odd to me to publish it without noting that she has left us. I have heard from Vadim a couple of times this year, he is still overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to sort her papers. With a cycle of correspondence between him and me and Steve in Canada it was agreed that I would copyright (for the estate) the only one of her novels that exists in electronic form and put in on the Net – AT THE LIP OF THE VOID is now up at my website (<http://home.sprynet.com/~nedbrooks/home.htm>). The mail situation down there is apparently worse if anything – Vadim sends ordinary mail by registered mail, and says that the Palma Sola post office closes down completely for a month around New Years. (26.4.01)

**STEVE SNEYD, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England.**

Really good to see THE MENTOR back – I've missed it. Account of Pula rang bell as was there during a holiday in then-Yugoslavia, in early '70s. Frustrating as had guide book with good account of place but leader of tour party borrowed it off me (hadn't one of his own!) and I didn't get it back till we were back in coach leaving Pula.

Love idea of Museum of Mice – no doubt suitably gnawed exhibits of captions.

Of the poems, partic enjoyed UNSEEN MARS – SOW undetectable to our senses, yeah, cd be going on all around all the time. Bill West's science poem/SF poem interface opens a vast

“fuzzy set” – there are poems which depicted what they then thought was science *fact*, but are now SF/S fantasy.

Enjoyed the VR story, Andrew D's article also, but no intelligent comment - & saving Mae Strelkov instalment for when can read it, more leisured, accepting mood for that “Lost World”.

(3.5.01)

**JOHN TIPPER, PO Box 487, Strathfield NSW 2135, Australia.**

Many thanks for TM issue 95.

It's been a while but worth the wait as always.

Sad to know that Mae Strelkov is no longer with us in the flesh but 'A Planet Much Like Us' ensures that she'll always be with us in spirit. I'm only sorry that I took so long to start corresponding with Mae. At least I have one delightful letter from her to keep-me-company.

Beginning at the beginning, you ask 'What does the future hold?' I no longer give much thought to this question but figure that whatever does happen, the human race will be better off, due to the Internet and instantly available communication. My instinct tells me this so I no longer listen to the pessimists among us. One interesting point in that headline “a space official”? Just who was Mr M D Hunter?

BE WHO WAITS was all too short, though enjoyable. Andrew's Hammer article was up to his usual standard. Educational and entertaining, more so than anything ever turned out by Hammer. Most of their horror was instantly forgettable crap. Unlike the Universal horror movies of earlier days which still hold up well, Hammer's dross is shockingly dated, much like the early Bond movies. The only Hammer movies worthy of note are the QUATERMASS series, though I've not viewed these for a few decades.

It was difficult to relate to the subjects discussed in R&R due to the time lapse but I'll do my best. Rod Marsden mentioned the superiority of M.I.B. over MARS ATTACKS. I agree, having seen both within the last year. The latter's horror aspect takes something away from the humour content, quite the opposite of M.I.B. which I've found is still good for a laugh after several viewings. Derek Pickles made mention of having fifty books awaiting reading. I've hundreds and figure that I'm never going to read everything I'd like to. Instead I've begun reading so-called 'classics'; LOST HORIZON is next on the list. What really annoys me is having books in cartons due to a lack of shelf space. Several years ago I began storing magazines in boxes, never expecting to do the same with books. Now, well, my desk is supported by cartons of books because there is nowhere else to store them. And still I buy books.

Although I deal in books in a smallish way, what usually happens is - I sell a scarce title for a good price and that in turn allows me to purchase another hundred books.

Such is life. (7.5.01)

**MICHAEL HAILSTONE, 8 Durie Street, Lithgow 2790**

Thanks for THE MENTOR 95, which came yesterday, just three weeks before my redirection notice (or whatever they call it) with Australia Post runs out. I have noticed your new address; PLEASE TAKE NOTE OF MINE. If you send the next issue to my old Blackheath address, I won't get it, and I'll hear no more from you.

As ever, I'm still two years behind in my reading with a forlorn hope that I may start to catch up. So far this has not happened, so, I haven't read the latest MENTOR, but I have looked through it and so will make these few comments.

Your cutting and editorial comment on the cover show how we've lost the dream of space exploration. This is but a symptom of a much wider problem: how we've lost our dreams and vision. Indeed I find it utterly incredible to see us now at the beginning of the twenty-first century and the third millennium in a world that has become so unutterably dreary, boring and ugly with no sign of this drab gloom lifting or lightening. (And other fans expect me to provide "light relief"?) What can one say about a world that has no higher aspirations than money, trade, economics, efficiency and competitiveness? This world is now as dead as a doornail. I think we lost our dreams of space exploration and other worthy things when society became bogged down in asking how much everything cost. You know the definition of a cynic and an economic rationalist: one who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing; that's the world today.

It's unbelievable how the world today, foreseen by past sf-writers as a world of "can do", has become in our reality one of "can't do". I've just been watching something on television about the Aral Sea, which has catastrophically dried up over the last fifty years. Since this is a manmade problem, you'd think that it should be humanly possible to fix the problem, but apparently not; one commentator reckoned that it is "mathematically impossible". That makes no sense to me at all. What a woeful pathetic world this is.

So Rod Marsden hates rap? Thank God; I have company. I could rave on for pages about why I hate it, but I'll restrain myself here for fear of sounding racist. Indeed one evil thing about rap is I find it brings out the racist in me. I resent like hell that one minority on the other side of the world has produced an ugly alien culture that has

overwhelmingly captivated western youth. I wouldn't mind it, if I didn't see it swamping local cultures here in Australia and throughout much of the world. It's not just the "music" (how can one call it that when it's mainly some \*\*\*\*\*s crapping on in a monotone about something thoroughly unintelligible in a weird kind of staccato rhythm?). It's also about our whole way of life, unspeakably ugly clothes, and so on. Roll on Armageddon.

Strange seeing my own letter. I'd totally forgotten what I'd written. I'll comment on it here by saying that Ned Brooks has sent me a tape of WILDFLOWERS, which has Judy Collins singing both and "Michael from Mountains" and "Both Sides now". Her singing style and the instrumental backing give the former song much more zing than the original version by its composer, Joni Mitchell.

Terry Jeeves is of course right in saying that a book is not necessarily evidence that something happened, but Simpson's book LUSITANIA can hardly be fairly likened to books on UFOs, the Loch Ness monster and so on. It is a reasonable scholarly work that makes no outrageous claims. Whether he chooses to believe it or even read it is his business and not my problem; I named the book only because Terry seemed unaware of its claims, which I thought were common knowledge nowadays. Since he admits that he was indeed unaware, I wish I hadn't referred to the skulduggery, since this has led us away from my original point. I have on videotape part of a television series dealing with the loss of the *Lusitania*, and it mentions the skulduggery including the munitions she was carrying and Churchill's plan to embroil other nations, especially the Americans, in the war. As it happened though, neither German bestiality nor allied skulduggery caused the enormous loss of life, but rather bad luck. One torpedo on its own could not have done that much damage, which was caused by a massive internal explosion and caused the ship to sink so quickly that there wasn't time to launch many of the lifeboats. The explosion was caused by the coal, which can be a very explosive fuel, not the cargo. The British and Americans seized on this bad luck for anti-German propaganda. One effect of this was that our own polar explorer, Douglas Mawson, felt called to join up. (At least I think so; it must have been Mawson rather than my great-uncle Charles Laseron, a member of his expedition, since *he* landed at Gallipoli just twelve days before the sinking.)

When was THE GREAT DELUSION written? It seems to date at least back to the first world war or even earlier. Apparently in 1899 there was a disarmament conference in the Hague,

at which it was agreed not to use such nasty sneaky unsporting weapons as submarines to sink ships, but, according to my high-school notes, this achieved nothing, like a similar conference two years earlier. Anyway, the statement that aircraft would be useless in warfare foreshadows my own statement made back in the eighties, whereby I made some real staunch foes in fandom, that nuclear weapons were useless, because they could be used only on cities to kill civilians in huge numbers. Colin Simpson's book tells clearly how the gentlemanly conduct of war at sea as dictated by the Cruiser Rules escalated to the torpedoing of merchant ships without warning, of which the *Lusitania* was one shocking example, the upshot of this being that people in the second world war accepted this as part of life with none of the moral outrage felt over the *Lusitania*. Indeed one wonders how many *Lusitanias* there must have been in *that* war. I referred to three on the German side in my earlier letter. But how did people come to accept the carpet bombing of cities, even before WW2 began? It's truly frightening to see how attitudes can change so quickly. What gets me about the atrocities waged by our side is that such mass murder (and it is indeed *murder*, not war) is so totally at variance with the values I was brought up to believe our society stood for, such as respect for the sanctity of human life and a repugnance of cruelty and barbaric killing. The conduct of *our* side in that war shows that we're really no better than the enemies we were fighting, and that all our huffing and puffing about humanity is just so much hot air and hypocrisy.

And I doubt that we're really much better now. After our prime minister Bob Hawke announced our commitment to war on Iraq, the storeman at my workplace (Customs in Melbourne) started posting regular bulletins on the progress of the war over the next two days. I had naively expected that our forces were supposed to drive the occupying Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. Instead I was aghast at seeing the last bulletin he posted up: of bombers heading for Baghdad. Our side has now learnt a very cowardly way of waging wars, which are no longer wars but rather demolitions. Iraq in 1991 was repeated in Serbia and Kosovo in 1999. All we seem to be good at is bombing countries back into the stone age. The nuclear bomb is just the ghastly logical outcome of that kind of thinking. (9.5.01)

**NADIA ANANAIEVA, 68 Kirov St, First City Gymnasium, Cherkasy 18000, UKRAINE.**

Thank you very much for the book THE WEIRD COLONIAL BOY. I know how busy you are and I am so grateful to you for remembering about our teachers and students. I gave it to a young teacher of English and then I'll share it

with other teachers and students.

We did not have electricity at our school for a week and now again they cut off electricity. They say that there is no money in the local budget. It's a pity but we still have only the rich people and the poor. 90% of Ukrainians live below the poverty line. The teachers' monthly income is less than \$60 and it is less than the monthly subsistence level established by the government.

No laws rule in this country, it's a pity. My elder son studies for his Master's Degree in Management and he earns the money for food and board doing two jobs. Here it is an impossible thing for the young people. So many them leave Ukraine and go to different countries of the world. Even in Russia they pay people more and food and utilities are less expensive. So now you know more about the life of people in this part of the world.

Thank you once again. I wish you success in your creative work. (29.4.01)

**HARRY ANDRUSCHAK, PO Box 5309, Torrance, CA 90510-5309, USA.**

Received THE MENTOR #95 yesterday. Sorry for not LOCcing #94, but I have been drifting away from fandom for quite some time, and seem to be lacking motivation to return to heavy fanac.

I notice the date of the LOCs is around 1999. In the last few years I have mostly spent my time after work in Alcoholics Anonymous, not fandom. I work as a phone volunteer at the local AA office twice a week. I am also active in various Scottish social groups.

I still work for the US Post Office, and at age 56 I still do not have enough saved up to be able to retire before age 70. But I get enough money and vacation time to travel a lot. Since 1998 I have been on vacation to Turkey, China, Europe, Caribbean sailing trips, and Scotland.

Health remains a problem as I get older, and I will have had a bilateral orchietomy by the time you read this. Prostate cancer. Not looking forward to the side effects, or to the nasty comments from fans about this. I may well terminate all ties with fandom. Fortunately, I still have AA which will be more supportive of my condition. (6.5.01)

**ANDREW DARLINGTON, 44 Spa Croft Road, Ossett, West Yorks, WF5 OHE, England.**

A great surprise, and a GREAT surprise to get MENTOR 95 in the mail.

At the moment I'm have a more intimate and direct relationship with the computer I write on than I do most sentient biped human beings. So our re-connection is not without value. On my computer – in the back bedroom where the light



slants in, there are four objects. A fossil trilobite found on the beach during a long weekend at Robin Hood's Bay. A small jade Buddha my son bought from Sri Lanka. A 'museum-copy' Hellenic helmet bartered from the winding alleys of Lindos in Rhodes and a model of Plug from the Bash Street Kids. The fossil coils reveal vistas of millions of years into the words being juggled on-screen. The Buddha invests cosmic spirituality. The helmet uploads myths and archetypes. And Plug does the same with silly absurdism. Each element is an equally essential component. These four elements are now being activated for new stuff for your use and/or amusement. (-.5.01)

**CATHERINE MINTZ, 1810 Rittenhouse Square, 1708, Philadelphia, PA 19103-5837, USA.**

I was pleased to see THE MENTOR gain and appalled at the postage. Here, it's getting very hard to exchange anything substantial with anyone outside of the US. I used to send a fair number of books abroad by sea mail. No longer, the postage costs often exceed the value of the shipment. So I am appreciative of THE MENTOR.

I rather wish someone would take Mae Strelkov's work and edit it into a volume so one could sit down and watch the whole story unfold. Maybe in a few more years when print on demand is a more mature technology and the book can be sold in small numbers online someone will have a go at it.

As for the Space Age, I and another friend were complaining "This is 2001 and it's not as advertised!" We don't even have a Moonbase, let alone people scouring Mars. Of course this keeps a lot of old SF current, but I'd rather we had entered the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with a fanfare.

At any rate, thank you for the issue, all of which I enjoyed but haven't time to loc properly. Philadelphia is the Worldcon town this year. Need I say more? (12.5.01)

**LLOYD PENNEY, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, CANADA M9C 2B2**

Hello again! It's been a long time, but welcome back to both you and The Mentor. Issue 95 made it through the mails, so here is a letter of comment in response.

Where have our dreams gone? Gone to the financial scrap pile, nearly every one. And will anyone learn? Probably not. The public has lost its own version of sensawunda when it comes to exploring space. They were excited in the 60s and 70s when a rocket would head for the moon. They were mildly interested in the 80s when shuttles would rise to launch satellites. From the 90s to today, the public now yawns at any achievement, such as the building of the space station, and the talk of the exploration of Mars. Been there, done that. What's new? Nothing exciting, at least to

them. And now, it may be too expensive to do the exploration we need to expand, and the short-sighted have regained the White House, with Bush Jr. now trying to revive SDI in the sky. Any politician will not support a project that is expensive, and that the public doesn't want. So, human expansion is dead for the moment. What does our future hold? Not much right now. I pray for some visionary to come and forge ahead with this vital project.

HE WHO WAITS asks interesting questions about reality and death. If your reality has become virtual, how do you know you are alive or dead? Will your consciousness survive your death? Will your virtual reality be controlled by you or others? I think the story needs some work in its conclusion, but it has a great set of ideas to be based on.

California's a little closer to me than it is to Graeme Clarke, but we travelled there back in 1984 to go to the Worldcon, and to see some of the sights of California Yvonne saw when she lived there in the mid-70s. We took a trip to Disneyland, and actually found it boring, for at that time anyway, it was geared for the average American kid and his family, and not for any non-Americans they might have let in. The Universal Studios tour was a little better. We spent a week in Los Angeles and Anaheim, but the week before was spent around San Diego and its suburb cities of National City, Chula Vista and San Ysidro.

Another great essay from Mae Strelkov ... a shame it will be the last, now that Mae left us more than a year ago, I think. Every so often, Mae would remind us all how someone who lived in the middle of South America could know so much about fandom and Worldcons. We all miss her, and the website Ned Brooks mentions, with her hecto art for all to see, reminds us all of her talents.

Pavel Viaznikov's trip to Croatia reminds me just how spoiled Westerners are. Where I am, money from my bank account is available at more than a dozen ATMs within walking distance of my home, and I can go shopping seven days a week, with a few restrictions during holidays. He should know that I don't know of many Westerners actually supported incursions into the Yugoslavia nations. It was underway almost before we knew about it, and we found out about slaughters of one group by another. NATO supported one group, Russia the other, and as always, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Congratulations on the Strannik Award! Is it for achievement in the field?

I checked, and I did respond to the previous issue, so I guess my letter of comment on The Mentor 94 got lost, or is still in the files. No

matter, it's like a new series of issues of this zine, so that's okay. RAE to the locol, but that's about all I can muster right now; I'm tired. Anyway, many thanks for this issue, welcome back, and I hope the next issue comes much sooner.

PS Do you have an e-mail address?  
(14.5.01)

[Yes, TM's is [forerunnerx@yahoo.com.au](mailto:forerunnerx@yahoo.com.au). - Ron.

**C. R. ROSS, PO Box 268, Mossman, Qld 4873.**

Thanks for the copy of TM, and I sure agree with your comment about the future. I recall the press release that you re-printed, living at the time in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

It seems to me that unless we devise something more efficient than rockets, we are doomed to stay within our near neighborhood. At best. After all, you can't toss baseballs off of the top of the Empire State Building all day, unless someone brings up a few to replace them.

Thanks for checking for me whether or not Michael Flynn has put out a new book in his 'near-future' series. Damnfino if I'll still be around when this is published or not, but I'd like to read it. My guess is that it's title is DEATH STAR, and I hope that they get a cover artist that is better than the one who made the one for LODESTAR! Except that it had so many hilarious mistakes in it, it would have been pitiful.

Have your read the Pournell & Niven fantasy that was recently published? I haven't,



not liking fantasy... even 'With Rivets on it', to quote the above authors. I DID like the whimsical fantasy of the UNKNOWN, but those days are loong gone. More's the pity. (22.5.01)

**ERIC LINDSAY, [eric@wrevenge.com.au](mailto:eric@wrevenge.com.au)**

Well, it has been a while between issues of The Mentor, but with the excessive cost of doing any sort of fanzine these days, I'm actually a little surprised that you were able to revive it. Especially given that it is still a rather substantial magazine.

I think you had a somewhat better story in He Who Waits. I do hope however that this was one you have held for a while. It seems to me that many of the other outlets in Australia like Aurealis and Eidolon have disappeared, which can not be good for intending fiction authors.

Andrew Darlington certainly told me more than I ever knew about the old Hammer films. Brought back a lot of memories of ones seen long in the past. I don't know I'd ever see them again, as I have no idea where I would find them.

Graeme Clarke certainly managed to give an exhausting account of his Disneyland trip. Looks like there is another writer there.

Pavel Viaznikov's account of his Croatia trip certainly doesn't make it sound as if he encountered a tourist paradise. 25-6-01

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