

Planet Magazine

Wild SF, Fantasy, Horror, Humor, Poetry - Online™ Vol. I. 4 FREE!



Inside this Pulitzre-Prize* Winning Zine:

Science Fiction by Andrew G. McCann.

Horror by Jeff Gilbert, Mark Monlux.

Poetry by Romeo Esparrago, Martin Burwell.

Humor by Biedermeier X. Leeuwenhoek.

* The Pulitzre-Prize is self-awarded annually to the best on-line publication named *Planet Magazine*. It was created in honor of Pulitzre the Goateed, the former Overdrol of the Planet Angts and occasional writer of what he called "ligh veres." •

Masthead

Circulation as of 12/94: 36 Spewzillion Fictionburgers

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WHAT IS PLANET MAGAZINE?

Planet Magazine is a free quarterly of science fiction, fantasy, horror, poetry, and humor written by beginning or little-known writers, whom we hope to encourage in their pursuit of the perfect story. There could be other reasons we're doing this, of course, motivations that are obscure and uncomfortable; instincts linked perhaps to primal, nonreasoning urges regarding power and procreation — the very same forces, no doubt, that brought down the Atlanteans and their alabaster-towered oceanic empire. And the Dark Gods laffed.

Anyway, Planet is nationally distributed in electronic form (text and full-color versions) via American Online, CompuServe, eWorld, New York Mac Users Group (NYMUG) BBS, and Cthulhu knows where else; there are a couple dozen printouts of each issue floating around, as well. Feel free to pass this magazine along electronically or as a single printout, as long as you don't charge for it or alter it in any way. **We welcome submissions** (details below). Planet does not carry any advertising or offer a subscription service (but it can always be found every third month in certain locations; see below). Letters to the editor are welcome and are likely to be printed. Send questions or comments to PlanetMag@aol.com.

SUBMISSIONS POLICY

Planet Magazine accepts original short stories, poems, one-act plays, and odds-and-ends (use the lengths in this issue as guidelines), as well as original accompanying illustrations. We prefer unpublished SF, fantasy, horror, poetry, humor, etc., by beginning or little-known writers (we tend to eschew stories published in other e-zines, as well as porno, gore, and ads from immigration lawyers). Because this e-mag is free and operates on a budget of \$0.39 per annum, we can't afford to pay anything except

the currency of free publicity and life-enhancing good vibes (of course, that and \$2.50 will get you a double-tall cafe mocha with powdered mesquite ash, but it's still a buzz to see your name in print).

Story submissions: Send stories, poems, etc., as Stuffit- or Ziplt-compressed ASCII text files to PlanetMag@aol.com. Two submissions max at a time, please.

Illustration submissions Send only one or two per story as separate, compressed, 16-color or 16-gray pict files to PlanetMag@aol.com. We're also open to cover ideas (ironic holiday, seasonal, or topical themes are best), but query first.

DISTRIBUTION SITES

Planet is distributed primarily in two electronic versions (text-only and fancy) and can be downloaded from the following sources, among others:

- The **America Online** Writers Club Forum (keyword: WRITERS; the route is The Writer's Club: Writer's Club Libraries: Writers Club E-Zines). There you'll find a stuffed (.sit) text file (readable by Mac or IBM, using some version of Stuffit and a word-processing program), as well as a stuffed DOCmaker version (a stand-alone, read-only file with color, pictures, and a suitable layout; for Mac only). Both versions are also available in AOL's Science Fiction & Fantasy Forum (keyword: SCIENCE FICTION; the path is Science Fiction & Fantasy: The Science Fiction Libraries: Member Fiction & Scripts Library).
- The **CompuServe** Science Fiction & Fantasy Forum (go: SFLIT; look in the Science Fiction literature library). This library carries only the text version, compressed with Ziplt (.zip), which can be read by PC or Mac using some form of Ziplt (UnZip, PKzip) and a word-processing program.
- The **eWorld** Community Center's Trading Posts (shortcut is command-g: COMMUNITY) carries the DOCmaker version in .sit format; the path is Community Center: eWorld Live: Trading Posts: Newsletters Folder. This version can also be found in the SF, Fantasy & Horror Forum (command-g: SF). The path is Arts & Leisure: Forums: SF Fantasy & Horror: Alexandria Restored files folder.
- The **NYMUG BBS** (New York Mac Users Group) carries the text version in its Electronic Pubs folder.
- No **Internet** site exists yet, as far as we know, but we're open to suggestions.

At 2400 baud, the text file takes a few minutes to download, while the DOCmaker file takes about 15 minutes. At 9600, though, the DOCmaker version takes only about 5 minutes to download. The latter option is the coolest (starting with Planet 1.3, you can click on the illustrations and get a special surprise).

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COLOPHON

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Editorials & Letters

Wild SF, Fantasy, Horror, Humor, Poetry - Online™ Vol. I. 4 FREE!

GUEST EDITORIAL TIRADE: THE DIRTY, BIG SECRET

Didja ever notice how everyone wears clothes? Didja ever wonder where they get them? Well, where they get them doesn't matter; don't worry about it. The point is this: Clothes are not a one-time cost. They're not worn just once, and then discarded. (Excepting the paper-dress craze of the 1960s — Ed.). All of those clothes you see people wearing every day have to eventually be cleaned. That's right! Every single article of clothing that every single person on this, our planet-under-alien-siege-that-we-call-"Terra" has to, at some point, be washed and dried. But that's not my message here.

My message is this: Who so "kindly" provides all of these cleaning services? That's right, the appliance, detergent, and drycleaning companies. HOWEVER, who owns these "necessary" companies — WITHOUT exception? That's right again: the government of a certain "SECOND planet from Sol." Moreover, who supplies all of the "needed" detergent and drycleaning fluids — specifically, perchloroethylene — which can NOT be manufactured by any technology known on Earth this century, and which occurs naturally only in the torrid Swamps of Venus. AND, finally, who receives the proceeds from these sales, the cash upon which a certain non-"Terran" war effort depends?

I think you now see where this is leading. But for those of you who just WON'T see, repeat a catchy little phrase after me: Free Earth! Free Earth! Wear Your Clothes Covered with Dirth! Or maybe: Who Cares About the Health Boards/Down with the Venusian Overlords. OK, gotta "run." Can't stay in one "place" for too long.

Signed,
[Biedermeier X. Leeuwenhoek](#)

Sharing Our Wares: A "Special" Editorial for Our Treasured Readers

So many people have come up to us in the cyber-saloons to ask, "Now that you've successfully completed a year of publishing your *Planet Magazine*, sometimes garnering tens upon ones of readers, shouldn't you start charging for it? Please?" Upon reflection, we couldn't agree more, and now we are offering our readers the opportunity to hack up \$30, no \$60, cash, for each issue of this "zineware" — no, make that \$85 for each story of every issue, retroactive — so that we at Planet Magazine can have the money to buy a

PowerMac PowerBook 9991 (with skulljack and pituitary-ware) and a Snuffmaster Pro tonguepad. Come to think of it, how about making it \$165 per issue — better yet, \$250 per story per issue — as we also need to buy the Mysterstein 4-D and Power Rangers vs. Flying Barney Assault CD-ROM games.

To give you some background, we note that we seriously considered various other payment plans that would benefit readers before we finally settled on the zineware concept — which, as we said, comes to a meager cover price of \$550 per word, for which the reader is repaid billions of times over, at the very least. For your consideration, we list a smattering of the "ware" concepts that we weighed (hey kids, invent your own!) and subsequently trashed over an intense 10-minute period:

Airware: The reader sends us some air; seemed pointless.

Bearware: Too dangerous.

Careware: Too "nice."

Dareware: We don't want to get involved in any hijinks.

Earware: We can't "Gogh" with that idea.

Fairware: We like carnivals, but this would be too inconvenient.

Gereware: Got any Cindyware?

Hairware: We're already wiggged out.

Irware: Doesn't work with Terran computer systems.

Jeerware: We get too much of that already.

Kirware: I'd rather have a draft.

Leerware: Depends who it is.

Mareware: Too much like deerware, which is everywhere.

Nearware: Incompatible with our farware.

O'Hareware: Planely, we don't need this.

Pearware: Only if it's from Tom & David's Orchard & Software.

Queerware: No thanks — not that there's anything wrong with it!

Rareware: Maybe, as long as it's rare because it's good.

Searware: Ouch, no thanks.

Tearware: No. We already use ripware and sobware.

Uareware: Can't be used in non-ammonia atmospheres.

Veerware: We already do this, without any 'ware.

Wareware: Too redundant, not to mention repetitious.

Xareware: Works only with the Xarian's picto-language.

Zaireware: No. Rhodesia-ware didn't work very well, either.

So, there you have it. Just more evidence of how hard we work to please you (raises moist eyes mournfully toward heaven, reminiscent of Warner E. Sallman's painting "Head of Christ," with no disrespect meant toward anyone's religion, human or alien). So, again, please send in your scamware fee of a pittancelly \$780 per letter, including punctuation. Is that really so much to ask? No, of course it isn't.

As an aside, we'd like to sorrowfully mention that, tragically, our high expenses mean that we still will not be able to afford to pay the struggling writers who contribute so faithfully

(starts chopping onions) to make this zeen what it is... (double-clicks on sound files labeled "Bawl," "Wracking Choke," and "Sniffles"). Sorry, we...we can't talk about it anymore.

With Endurance, Boldness, and Vision, I remain,

[Andrew G. McCann](#), Editor
December 1994

P.S. If you fall for this, and actually send money, please use only e-credits and the following address in the Galactic Data Core: planetmag@zines_sf_fantasy_humor_poetry_horror.english.earth.solsystem.milkyway.datacore.don_trump. •

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(New Policy: Letters will be edited to make them longer and harder to understand.)

Dear Editor: Just a word of congratulations on the outstanding mag you are producing. I've been sending it along to the Channel 14 BBS in my town (414/453-0545 FC system) where it is getting downloaded a bit. I also edit a DOCmaker mag, *Sci Fi Tattler*, and have been getting very little correspondence from readers. Have you guys been getting a lot of response? I hope so, since it is a heck of a good mag.

[Tim Kretschmann](#)
[Muskego, WI](#)
(TimKBear@aol.com)

[Editor's Note: Thanks Tim. Your zine is excellent, which of course I never told you until you sent your e-mail. I think that people are more likely to write in to a publication when they're exercised about something. And if people think that's a cynical view, well, they would think that, wouldn't they? Anyway, I rather enjoy writing fake letters for our fake letters column. You might try that. (To find *Sci Fi Tattler* on AOL, go to the Science Fiction & Fantasy Forum. The keyword is SCIENCE FICTION; the path is Science Fiction & Fantasy: The Science Fiction Libraries: Member & Club Magazines.)]

Dear Editor: I found Planet 3 on AOL and enjoyed seeing it. A friend is thinking of getting into electronic publishing and wanted to see what's being done. Yours is one of the best!

[Joanne](#)
via [CompuServe](#)

Dear Editor: I know that you are awaiting my answer to your recent missive. Please do not fear. I am very excited in anticipation of the reply which I know I will be composing to you before very much more time has elapsed. Here's the problem... Ever since I incorporated myself and registered all identifications of myself (past, present, and future)

for copyright purposes, I must first consult with my attorneys before I can send out any of my trademarked thoughts, comments, ideas, etc. You see, since there will undoubtedly be a presidential library named after me, it is very important that all of my public and private utterances be catalogued, filed, and sold to the highest bidder when the price is right. I cannot frivolously "give it away" as they say. I am sure you appreciate the delicacy of my position and the potential legal imbroglio we could both be in if I do not get legal approval before I answer. I want you to know, however, that I hold you in the highest regard, and I wish you all the best luck in the world in all your endeavors. You are a very special human being whose worth cannot be minimized. Regards and cheers.

Sincerely,

[Quentin de la Pascalito con Fumare \(for Mr. David Leibowitz\)](#)

P.S. This form letter was sent in lieu of a personal response, since Mr. Leibowitz has no knowledge of the correspondent, nor does he wish to.

[Editor's Clarification: The preceding is an actual letter from a fake person, as well as a fake letter from an actual person, whereas the following are fake letters from fake people, albeit written by an actual person.]

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR-WITHIN-THE-EDITOR

Dear Editor: I dream of a world someday where everyone has a number instead of a name. Ha! Just kidding. You'd actually have to have a combo of numbers AND letters, like license plates,* otherwise, the "names" would get ridiculously long and difficult to memorize — "Hi, 234,449,226, how are you?" "Oh, fine, 235,992,011; thanks for asking. See you at the on-line VR arcade tonight." THEN where would we all be?

With kindest regards,

[C.D. Romm](#)

* Of course, we'd have to disallow all-alpha "vanity" names; otherwise, Mr. 3,550,344,402, for example, could register the name "Bob," defeating my whole purpose of architecting a new social order. On the other hand, I suppose I'd have to permit "Bob1," for instance, wouldn't I? And that's none too different, I suppose. Listen, let me think this through again and then get back to you. Meantime, please, whatever you do, don't publish this letter. (Hey, I hope you didn't get bored while you were reading about my idea and skip that last sentence there. Just kidding again!)

Your Ladyship: I beseech you to not feel any obligation to respond to my messages. It's not that you haven't been helpful, it's just that, well, you're quite frankly a boar. And it's been particularly difficult at the various balls I've held this year (such as the St. Pancreas' Purging Day Fete). The reason: Your tusks keep catching in the yards of silk and taffeta that comprise all the princesslings' gowns. Much tearing, followed by many tears. This can't go on. Yours, nonetheless,

[Sir Amic "Chip" Mugg](#)

Dear Editing Unit: Yes, we do currently have an opening at our office; unfortunately, we are using it as a door just now and don't foresee that situation changing at any time in the near or distant future. In the very distant future, however, around about the year 3414, we do intend to convert this doorway into a high-paying administrative job in the Bzorgian City bureaucracy on the dark side of Mercury (a bit cooler there, I believe). One drawback to this position, I must tell you, would be the requirement that applicants demonstrate the ability to breathe in a vacuum and to withstand the Sun's coronal temperature of about 1 million degrees Kelvin, or whatever — all without a space suit of any kind. Sorry about this, but the Bzorgian race, which of course has the long-term contract to run Mercury Mining Inc., insists on these capabilities, and there's really very little we can do about it. Nonetheless, I'm sure you can do it if you just show a little backbone and apply yourself. There you go.

All the best,

[Prof. Ken Tankerous](#)

[Research Chief, UGI Mining Division](#)

Dear Editor: I've long been known for my uncanny ability to forecast trends: Witness my prediction of last summer, that silicon-based AIs — from a future so far off that the very stuff of the universe has decayed into molecular oatmeal — would be seen on every runway from Paris to the Blue-Egg Trellises of Andromeda. So here's The Concept for 1995: Exhaustion! I predict that *tout la monde* will be on the brink of collapse this spring. Those Pretty Young Things of Tribeca and Tokyo will be called The Walking Skels, spilling hot coffee on themselves at 3 a.m. in some chic spot with no name and a door buzzer. Everyone from supermodels to environmentally conscious movie stars will be appearing in ads and at openings with black circles under their eyes and a tendency to burst into tears.

OK, so what's the concept behind the concept? Simple: When you're breaking down physically, not to mention mentally, you're telling people: "Yo, I care enough to burn the candle at both ends. By spending all my time in a spiritual quest to become all things to myself, both emotionally and financially, I'm telling people that I am 'wired' in every way, that I'm in the moment, and that my money is working for me. Because this is a world of opportunities, and if you're not No. 1, you're not even in the game." You heard it here first.

Best,

[Mac N. Tosh, President](#)

[Digital Fragrances, Inc.](#)

Dear Editor: Hi! I'm Ted, 'n' this is my wife, Gina. We live in Palisades Park and were just tapping into the 'Net to look for the nail-care and carwax forums. We found the Espresso Forum, where we met Tomas and Marte, who were surfin' in to post their "Ode to Tompkins Square." As American citizens and rightful consumers of on-line services, we're worried that the end result of activity such as ours will be a huge datapit of electronic blather (such as your publication) that accelerates entropy, and thereby the destruction of the universe.

Sincerely,

R. "Ted" Founder
President, Lost-Our-Lease Inc.
Chairman, Going-Out-of-Business & Sons

Dear Seeker: Nay, I have not "passed beyond," for I still live electronically to guide you in your Life's Quest. Follow me, and I will show you The Way! By the way, now, for only a \$49.95 introductory price, you get three, free ritual ceremonies (observer status) and a special offically printed I.D. card that gets you free electronic paycheck deposit in The Semiautomatic Church of Exalted Cronies' bank account.

Gazing Intensely,

Luc RaTive

Cult Leader, Small-Arms Dealer and Swiss Confectioner •

Science Fiction



ASTROBEAST

By Andrew G. McCann

Just before midnight on a Saturday, a young astronomer in Puerto Rico became the first to spot the small object sputtering toward the sun. It came in past Pluto, riding a spark that moved clearly against the millions of hard, bright stars behind it. Within two hours of e-mailing his colleagues at various universities and institutions, the young astronomer became temporarily famous, his news roaring around the globe in a vast electronic exhalation. As the next few days passed, everyone but infants and the infirm became engrossed by the progress of what was now clearly an interstellar vehicle, steadily moving toward the big, blue egg called Earth.

The first messages from the visitor were transmitted soon after its bronzey, boomerang-shaped ship popped and fizzled into a steady, tight orbit around the moon.

"Greetings, Earthlings. I come in peace," the hissing voice said on every radio, TV,

cellular phone, and karaoke machine in the world. "Perhaps you wonder why I can communicate with you, particularly in English?" the visitor said with a slurping sound. "Well, have you ever seen those movies where the alien learns your language by watching broadcasts that, over time, have left Earth and radiated in long waves to places beyond your galaxy? Well, this time it really happened." There was a sharp intake of breath and saliva: "Humorous, isn't it?"

The next day, a small black lozenge popped out of the creature's ship and made a rapid, arcing descent into the wispy atmosphere of the luminescent planet. Every available camera in working condition was trained on the lander as it dropped with a long, smokey tail. The visitor, guided by jet interceptors, landed on the broad expanse of Wright Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Newscasters beyond the distant chain-link fences surrounding the air field droned over the casually stunning footage: Telephoto lenses showed a jerky, humanoid figure taller and broader than a man, but with a tiny head. It stood, shimmering in the heat waves from its lander, in a padded white-and-black suit. The suit was covered with nauseating symbols that reflected no known cultural cues, hallucinatory images designed by something with a vastly different brain structure. Cameras zoomed in swervingly on its dark visage: A white tongue was partly extended like a phosphorescent half-moon against a twilight sky.

As it began walking along the tarmac toward the control tower, its double-jointed arms and legs swung stiffly, like a tele-operated scarecrow. A dozen military personnel in safe suits slowly approached the creature, gathering around it.

On the evening news, video stills released by the Joint Chiefs of Staff showed close-ups of the creature as it sat on a metal folding chair, against a white wall, in a classified location. Its face was like a small Balinese demon mask: ridged cheekbones, thick, extremely broad lips, a deep-blue complexion. It wore a helmet that looked more like a bejeweled turban — or perhaps it was formed of living, pink-gold tissue. Its eyes were yellow, round, with no pupils; the lids slid together vertically in a bellows-like rhythm. The mouth was fixed in a rigid grimace, like a figure 8 on its side, with light-green fangs bared permanently. Perhaps its most disturbing feature (although the debate on alt.astrobeast.ugly.sucker was endless) was a constant hissing, sucking sound, like someone inhaling the last of a cherry shake through a big plastic straw.

"Astrobeast," as the media had dubbed the creature, was put before the journalists of the world after being interviewed by the military in a sterile chamber. The thirst for information was overwhelming, and so the government held the press conference in an aircraft hangar, with the alien standing behind a plywood lectern.

J. Quincy Publick of *The New York Post-Times* asked the first question: "Y'know, your English really is quite good. And you seem to have a sense of humor; many people have laughed at your comments." He paused, awaiting a sound bite.

"Funny is funny," the alien said. "I see your youth, their eyes like television screens, hollow and full of empty interactions. They crave 40 ounceers, junk food, convertibles,

ever-higher expectations. What good is a stable job? It has no ethical, spiritual basis for anyone. But they don't want that; they want to be rock stars, no?" The creature turned to the reporter, fixed him with a distant look. "And how is working for a newspaper any different than operating a drill press? And what good is operating a drill press?"

The reporter, uneasy amid the stifled guffaws of his colleagues, said nothing. Yet he felt the cold hand of meaninglessness brush along his spine. And an internal silence bloomed for him at that moment, for a seed of dread had found fertile soil.

Another journalist spoke up: "Can we ask... that is, has it been cleared... Why are you here?" Like a blue-faced owl, the visitor's wide gaze swept the room. "Just passing through."

Another reporter: "Well, where are you from?"

"Far away."

The questions now began piling up. "Any more of your kind?"

"Yes, but not here."

"Do you have any Space Wisdom or something for us?"

"Perhaps." The vast room fell silent. "But ask yourselves this: Would you know it? For aren't all of you like participants in an enormous telephonic conference call, each in his windowless cubicle, trying to describe some outside reality? All those voices traveling over simple, twisted copper wires, while the air beyond your habitats remains forever undisturbed by a pure, natural voice."

"You mean, like the story of the Elephant and the Blind Men?" called out one journalist.

"Yes, but this is an elephant with nine dimensions."

An Air Force lieutenant strode toward the lectern and raised his hands. "OK, ladies and gentleman, we've got time for one more question."

Sam Donaldson was quickest off the mark: "What will you do now that you're free?"

"I'm not free yet," it said.

The journalists shuffled out, oddly subdued despite being part of a historic news conference. "More like Astrobummer," one reporter mumbled as he walked out.

It was only 11 hours later that J. Quincy, who never filed his story, decided to disappear. And so he left, forever from the life that he had known and forever from this story. He was only the first.

Months passed. Astrobeast moved from nation to nation, holding press conferences, answering the media's hungry questions, and visiting privately with eager politicians, intellectuals, and artists. Always his comments left in their wake an uneasiness and despondency, and a cult of despair arose spontaneously in various cities around the globe. Some governments banned him, but his words and stories were compiled and distributed exponentially via photocopies and the Internet. One favorite: "Even in the interactions with your computers you crave only Doom."

It was on a Saturday that the Dyings began. People of all cultures already had stopped breeding, as relationships broke apart and individuals withdrew more and more into themselves. Reprint sales for Sartre and Camus and Plath and Strieber skyrocketed, while others just turned to drugs and alcohol. The alien's autobiography remained at No. 1. Astrobeast had been reading from his book, "Entropy is All," in a vast auditorium outside Moscow: "...For your globe is literally exposed from every angle — indeed, from hyperspatial and interdimensional angles that you are not aware of. 'Entropy is the final taker,' my race says. Be glad for that, as something unlooked for could destroy you at any moment, in any place. Thus, there is no protection from the forces of enervation and degradation. Know and accept that your defenses, whether military or philosophical, are the equivalent of brandishing a kitchen match at an oncoming thermo-nuclear warhead." His tiny eyes took in the assembly. "I will add that there are those who have blamed me for the troubles you face in many locales. But I say, you only act upon what is already deep inside you."

At the end of the reading, the people filed out, frightened. And the killings, of others or themselves, began; like a forest fire leaping from tree to tree, crowns exploding, trunks falling, it spread unchecked.

Twelve days later, somewhere way out in the Oort Cloud's left field, a behemoth appeared, a ship blacker than black and quieter than a poisoned desert. The One Who Pilots sat in the shadows of the Chair of Command; his long, gray forelimb reached up and out and tapped the side of his charcoal-red quickhelmet, sending a telepathic quickclone to the creature his people called The Locator, but whom he privately thought of as The Eater of Minds.

"Is it complete?" asked The One's mental agent.

"Yessss," said The Eater. "They did little damage to the planet before the end, and now there are only a few left. Final cleansing will be easy."

"We will enter planetary orbit within 15 minutes. Please vacate the system before then." The One paused. "We ask again, formally: Do you require payment?"

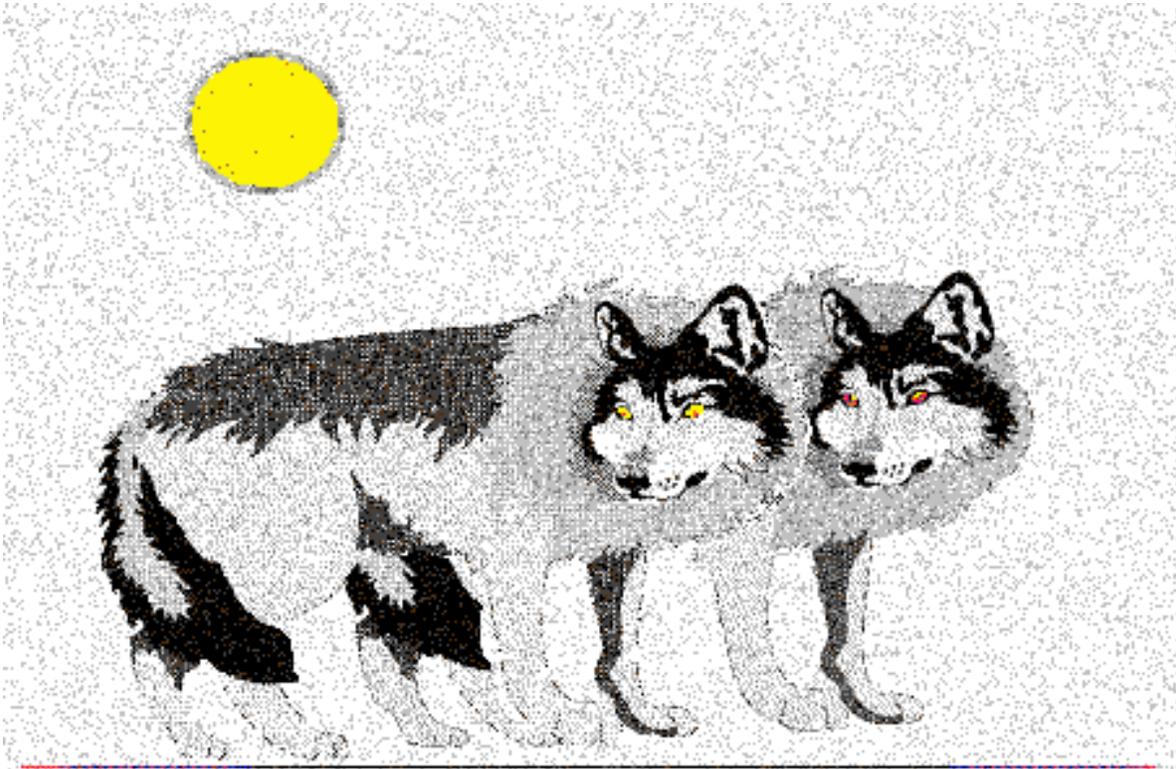
"No, I am quite, quite full. I found a tap root here, a veritable artery of the will; I won't need to feed again for some time," said The Eater. "So there is no need for the robotic interface. We are partners, and I would like to speak to you directly to express my solidarity and comradeship."

"No," said The One. "We will contact you in the usual way regarding any further expansion needs we may have." The One Who Pilots rapidly unlinked from his quickhelmet, but not before destroying his electronic simulacrum that had interfaced with the beast.

Moments later, a small ship shot away from the moon's orbit, away from Earth and straight out of the galactic plane. Trailing a fang-shaped nuclear flame, Astrobeast's ship soon merged with the cold, bright stars. •

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Horror



TWO WEREWOLVES, A SIX-PAK & ELVIS

by Jeff Gilbert

Prologue

"The moon, when its full, makes people change, makes 'em do things no folk would rightfully do, even if they had a lick of sense. When you look up into the sky, black as Hell itself, tell me you don't feel that moon shinin' right through your soul. It's the Devil's searchlight; it'll find you, you can bet on it. You may be able to hide things you don't want no one to know about, but you can't hide from the moon. It knows that dark side, that human side. It knows who you really are. The moon, when it's full, makes people change. And God help you when it does."

- *An old proverb I just made up*

"Some nights the wolves are silent and the moon howls."

- *Bathroom graffiti in the Blue Moon Tavern*

"Listen...the children of the night...what music they make."

- *A heroin addict with nifty dental work*

* * *

Of course, the moon was full...

"Elvis is *King*, man!"

Two werewolves - one grey with dirty streaks of white, the other, a thick furry brown - reclined on fallen pine in a clearing deep inside the cavernous foothills behind the old Miller farm. They were drinking night-warm beer from cans and listening to an oldies station barely coming through on a portable AM radio. Elvis was singing, his silky tenor crackling like an old drive-in movie speaker. The wind had picked up, making the tree branches sway rhythmically as if in time to the swooning ballad. The moon lit the clearing like a 7-Eleven parking lot.

"Gimme a friggin' break," griped the grey werewolf. "Elvis ain't shit. That fat fuck couldn't touch Chuck Berry. Chuck Berry *invented* rock and roll."

The brown werewolf, a devout Elvis fanatic, took exception to this remark and turned his attention from the radio, pointed ears flattening against his head, indicating he was less than pleased with the King of Rock and Roll being referred to as a fat fuck.

"What the hell are you talking about? There is no way Chuck Berry even comes close to Elvis. I can't believe you say shit like that." The brown werewolf leapt to his hind haunches and struck a practiced Las Vegas Elvis pose. He began singing and dancing around the grey werewolf.

"*Ain't nothin' but a hound dog...*"

The grey werewolf hated being called a hound dog. Hound dogs had fleas. He didn't. A few wood ticks, maybe. But no goddamn fleas.

"Knock that shit off," he growled.

"What's your problem, man? I thought you dug Elvis."

"Elvis can kiss my hairy butt - Chuck Berry would have been the real King of Rock and Roll if he were white."

"What? You've got to be *kidding!*" The brown werewolf laughed like the MGM lion. The full-throated yowl could easily have been mistaken for a pre-attack snarl. "That is the stupidest thing I've ever heard you say."

"At least Chuck Berry could play his freakin' guitar. Elvis just pretended to play, shakin' his sorry ass all around; shit, I bet he never even *learned* how to play the damned thing."

Chuck could write songs, too, man. Name one stinkin' song Elvis Goddamned Presley wrote."

"Oh, brother," moaned the brown werewolf, shaking his head and taking another greedy swig of beer. "You just don't know what you're talkin' about." He crooned out the rest of the song, a duet with Elvis in an impressive baritone. Perfect pitch was unusual among brown werewolves.

"That was The King, I said the King of Rock and Roll wrapping up another set of the best oldies, right here on KWLJ 1590!" The brown werewolf mimicked the late night DJ (No, it wasn't Wolfman Jack. That'd be too obvious.) as the song ended. All at once the night's silence was cracked by the sparking piano chords of Jerry Lee Lewis. "All right! The Killer!" he snorted loudly as "Great Balls 'A Fire" came blaring out of the rattling speakers.

The grey werewolf guzzled the beer he was holding in one vicious gulp, belched loudly, and tossed the can in the bushes. "Little Richard can play the *pants* off Jerry Lee," baited the grey werewolf.

"I don't believe this," the brown werewolf said, clapping his head and rolling his yellow eyes. "Would you give it a rest already? Geez."

The grey werewolf continued. "See, Jerry Lee's got that honky tonk shit down pretty good for a white boy, but Little Richard's got *soul!*" Now it was his turn to dance. The grey werewolf jumped up and started pounding the keys on an imaginary piano, shouting at the top of his lungs. "*Lucille...*"

The brown werewolf joined in and started singing over the top of the grey werewolf's howling. "*Goodness, gracious, great balls a ' fire...*"

The two werewolves were making a helluva lot of noise. And they hadn't even killed anyone yet.

* * *

"Those goddamned throw rugs are at it again," grumbled Sheriff Harding as he stepped out on his covered porch, his evening calm ravaged by the clamor wafting through the forest. The worn planks sagged painfully under Harding's considerable girth as he listened to the din. (Fortunately, one of the perks of being Sheriff meant foot chases through backyards and alleys were left up to subordinates.) It was well past dusk and he didn't need any caterwauling werewolves keeping him up all night. Bad enough they had the whole town on edge, baying and howling until two, sometimes three in the morning. But *The Untouchables* was on HBO tonight and, by God, he was going to watch Capone undisturbed if it killed him. Or them.

Suddenly in the mood for a little hunting, Harding called the precinct to send over a car. He hung up the phone, strapped on an oiled .38, confirmed the loaded clip in his rifle mounted next to a Charles Bronson *Death Wish* movie poster he picked up for two bucks at a swap meet, and stepped out into the misting night.

"Figures," he mumbled, looking up. "Full fucking moon."

* * *

The grey werewolf reached into the carton for another beer, but there were none.

"Sonofabitch," he snapped, kicking the empty box into the woods. "We're out of beer! I thought you said we had plenty!"

"We did, except you've been sitting there suckin' 'em down like a freakin' vampire. Tell you what, though," he smiled, "you fly, I'll buy!"

"Oh, right, smart guy; you're gonna have to come along, too. You're gonna need more batteries and I don't wanna listen to you bitch and moan when you can't get King Elvis on the radio. Let's go."

The two werewolves began their descent from the black foothills, taking a shortcut through the Miller farm. They passed by five shit-greased pigs, screeching and snorting, huddling against the shadowed corner of their fouled pen, trying their terrified best to keep out of werewolf reach.

"Hey, good lookin'...we'll be back to pick you up later!" the brown werewolf chortled, eyeing the largest porker.

"Hey, isn't that Elvis?" the grey werewolf cracked.

"Fuck you."

The horses shifted restlessly in their stalls and a neighborhood dog began barking wildly, having caught their scent in the chilly October air. "Friggin' flea bag - let's hurry it up before the whole goddamned kennel is on our ass."

"*Ain't nuthin' but a hound dog...*" sang the brown werewolf cheerfully.

* * *

They came out of the woods, just ahead of the off ramp of I-5. An exiting Pontiac nearly clipped the brown werewolf.

"You *dickwad!*" He howled sharply, sounding like a dog that had been swatted off the couch with a rolled up newspaper. "How do people like that get a driver's license? Maniac! I oughta bite you a new asshole!"

"Cool it," said the grey werewolf. "There's a 7-Eleven. Let's go."

With the gift of grace and speed befitting two lycanthropes in their prime, they were across the road in seconds, closing in on the store entrance. A portly minimum-wager with wide black sideburns and duck-tail hair held in place with 40-weight was standing behind the counter, picking his nose and restocking Camel Filters when the thirsty beasts kicked open the glass doors bannered with *Budweiser Case \$8.99!*

"Take care of the schmuck; I'll get the beer," barked the grey werewolf.

The brown werewolf vaulted over the counter and sunk his yellowed teeth deep into the startled clerk's throat, tapping a vermilion geyser that splattered the cigarette rack, Beef Jerky, twelve cartons of unpacked Winstons, the Slurpee machine - and just about everywhere a severed main artery could spray.

"Fuck...*a bleeder!*" marveled the brown werewolf, smacking his chops. "Tasty!"

With fatted neck gristle stuck between his ruby-stained fangs, the brown werewolf leaped back across the counter and stalked the aisles for AA Energizers - the one with the pink bunny on the package - and dental floss. He padded to the front of the store and, with his teeth, ripped open a carton of Kotex he snagged on Aisle 3, tossing a few tampons into the black red pool Mr. 7-Eleven's mangled head was floating in.

"For those heavy flow kills..."

The grey werewolf, hairy arms loaded with four cases of Bud Lite and a large bag of pork rinds, came around the corner and was greeted by a glassy puddle of brain goo and blood. "Oh, that's just wonderful," he sneered. "You're all covered in that shit; now you're gonna stink like a slaughterhouse."

The brown werewolf stood with chunks of human hair matted to his own, glaring at the grey werewolf. "What the fuck is that?" he asked, pointing at the blue and silver-cartons the grey werewolf was holding.

"It's beer, asshole. Whaddaya think it is?"

"I can't believe you. We hike all the way into this hick town for some brew, and you grab Lite beer! Fuckin' unbelievable."

"Hey, Bud Lite's a damn good beer. And I don't get as full drinking it."

"Don't gimme that crap. I want real beer. Lose the piss water and get some Rainier!"

"They don't have any Rainier in this dump. How 'bout I get you a Coors Silver Bullet?"

"Ha, ha, asswipe. I suppose you think that's hilarious?"

* * *

They were arguing again. Loudly. Their heated "taste great/less filling" debate was momentarily interrupted by a late-night customer who had pulled up to the twenty-four hour convenience store for a carton of milk and cereal. The man walked through the door, rubbing his drowsy eyes against the bright store lighting.

"Excuse me...could you tell me where you keep the Lucky Charms?"

The two werewolves stopped and turned to the customer.

"Aisle 2," said the brown werewolf.

"Thanks," yawned the customer.

* * *

A call on the police radio brought Sheriff Harding and Deputy Nightstick (that's what Harding called the new night patrol officer), to the disturbance in minutes. Nightstick swung the squad car towards the store entrance and hit the lights.

"Oh, great. Just fuckin' great," groaned the grey werewolf. "You're bitching about my choice of beer, and the cops show up."

"Me? Hey pal, it was your idea to come here in the first place!" the brown werewolf snapped.

Harding and Nightstick had their weapons drawn as they rushed through the door.

"This is not good," said the brown werewolf, stepping back slowly.

"I've been waitin' to do this for a long time," Harding smiled, cocking his rifle and taking aim at the grey werewolf's head. "Kiss your long-haired ass good-bye, you freakin' sonofabitch!"

The grey werewolf growled, his narrowing eyes turning the color of a full vein. He threw the beer on the floor and charged like a pit bull after a paperboy, crashing into a Lay's Potato Chip display - the only thing standing between the Sheriff and a firsthand

introduction to a fully pissed lycanthrope.

Harding fired and missed, the shot taking out a fluorescent full moon lighting fixture over a rack of Halloween candy. Two strides away from a midnight snack, the grey werewolf suddenly slipped on an oil slick of blood and brain and momentarily lost his balance.

Twenty years as a law enforcer reminded Harding that sometimes you don't get a second shot. And sometimes you do. He quickly cocked the rifle and pulled the trigger again. A white detonation went off inside the grey werewolf's head, throwing the stunned creature into the beer cooler, splattering the glass doors with wolf hair and pieces of snout and teeth. Half his skull was sheared off by the force of the blast.

Frozen like a deer in headlights, the brown werewolf shrugged sheepishly and yipped. He was tagged by Nightstick who dropped the smelly creature like a ten point buck with a clean shot to the right temple.

The store reeked of foaming beer and McNugget-sized bits of particulate matter. And dead werewolf.

Both police officers surveyed the damage like proud army generals. "Mighty fine shootin' there, Nightstick."

"Thanks, Sheriff. Didn't do too bad yourself." Nightstick scraped still-oozing wolf brains off his shoes with a box of Cheezits.

"Yep, even the Rifleman couldn't have bagged that flea hotel the way I did."

"The Rifleman?" asked Nightstick.

Harding gave Nightstick one of those Sheriff looks. "Well, that may have been a little before your time, son, but the Rifleman could blow the eyebrows off a moose turd in mid stride."

"Yeah, well maybe, I suppose. 'Cept Dirty Harry coulda bagged that woolly sucker with way more style."

"What the hell you talkin' about, *dipstick*? You tellin' me Dirty Harry is a better shot than the Rifleman?"

"That's right," said Nightstick. "I seen *Magnum Force* six times! I know what I'm talkin' about."

"You ain't telling me shit, son. I'll show you some real shootin'."

Harding had Nightstick place a box of Cheezits (the one he used to scrape werewolf goop off his shoes with) on his head and ordered him to stand at the end of Aisle 3, next to the Pennzoil and Leggs.

"Now, whatever you do, don't move," he warned, sizing up his stationary target. Nightstick stood stock still, balancing the snacks with concentrated effort. Harding squinted to focus. He quickly dropped to one knee and fired his pistol straight into the face of Deputy Nightstick, sending Cheezits and bloody flesh in a colorful burst all over the Otis Spunkmeyer cookie rack.

Sheriff Harding got up, slowly, and looked at what used to be Nightstick's face on Aisle 4. And 5. Harding rubbed his chin and sighed. "Maybe it was the Virginian." •

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[Editor's Note: "Two Werewolves" is the title story from Jeff Gilbert's book of the same name, published by Hairball Press in Seattle. The story is also currently being adapted into comic book form by Harris Publications of New York, and is due for release in 1995. The book is available for \$10 from Jeff Gilbert, 2318 2nd Ave., Suite 591, Seattle, WA 98121.]



DON, DEATH & VIRTUE

by Mark Monlux

Don was eating hash browns and gravy at Mable's all night cafe. Mable's was a place in town whose history was built on the reputation of the college students. But the college students only ate there half of the year before they would go off to their coffee houses. Truckers ate at Mable's. They gave the place credibility. The myth about trucker's restaurants was one of the reasons Don was eating at Mable's. The other reason was that somebody had told him that the hash browns were excellent.

Halfway through his second mouthful, Don began to regret his order. This wasn't turning out to be the culinary delight he had anticipated. Ketchup was not helping. The gravy might actually be sludge from the refrigerator drip pan, which somehow found its way over a pan and onto his hash browns. Perhaps accomplished by a series of small black holes. He ordered a chili burger. Don continued to eat his hash browns. He was big on life and was willing to take what life tossed him. If it was his fate that he was hungry and the food sitting in front of him could be mistaken for industrial waste, so be it. He sat there and ate. Don could not help but let a little of his food slide down the wrong tube when Death walked through the door.

Don was struggling to cough, all the while thinking, "Great, Death is here to take me. I'm going to choke." He looked around hoping that some trucker would do the Heimlich maneuver on him. No such luck, the place was empty.

Man chokes to death in restaurant. Don thought, I don't need this. Death was grinning at

him.

"Hi, Don," Death greeted. "What's that?" He pointed to Don's plate.

"Hash browns and gravy," Don squeaked, finally clearing his throat. "Try some."

"Do you mind if I sit down?" Death asked.

"Go away." Don said. "I deny you. You don't exist. I don't ever want to see you again."

Death sat down.

"Hey," Don said, "Didn't you hear me? I said shove off."

"Listen, Don," Death said. "Don't give me grief, Okay? I want to rest a bit before leaving."

"You don't exist," Don whispered. The hash browns had lost all their appeal; he shoveled them around his plate.

"Will you stop with the denial stage already?" Death asked.

"I'll tell you something," Death said. "You can't deny me because I am real. You may try to ignore me but you can't. You may try to escape me, but eventually I will find you. I am with you always. I'm as common as mold on month-old bread. Regardless of time or distance, I reign everywhere." Death looked pleased, and continued: "After looking at me for a while, some people find that I have charisma."

Don thought of bathrooms and razor blades.

"Some people look forward to seeing me," Death said. "They see me and they say, 'Hi, Death. How's tricks?' 'Time for departure Mr. Death? Fine by me.'" Death leaned back. "I picked up this old lady today. She said to me, 'Oh, it is you, Mr. Collector.' I thought that was cute. Don't you think that was cute?" Death asked.

"Huh." Don said, about to have kittens. In his mind he was scrambling like mad to find a way to elude death. He was turning over plans of skeletal dismemberment when Virtue walked through the door.

"Hi guys," Virtue beamed. "What's up?"

"An old lady called me 'Mr. Collector' today," Death said.

"These hash browns are visiting diplomats from Venus, and I just ate half their delegation," Don said. Death looked at the hash browns, so did Virtue. Don looked at the door, wondering if now would be a good time to run for it. "Have a seat," he said.

"Thanks." Virtue said. He sat down carefully, minding his wings. "Nice day." The waitress came out with the chili burger.

"Your order, sir," she said. She didn't notice Death. She might have seen Virtue. Don wasn't sure. He did not know how far the waitress's memories went back. "Are you done with this?" she asked, as she bent to pick up the hash browns.

"Yes," he replied. As the waitress left the table Virtue said, "There goes all communication with Venus."

Don smiled. He was beginning to feel better, and his attention went back to his chili burger. His appetite was back and he dug in with his fork. The chili burger was much better than the hash browns. He was very hungry and content in shoveling food down his throat. Remembering his company, he looked up. Death was eating French fries; Virtue had a piece of pie. Both had coffee. Don looked down. Such sights are not for mortal men.

Looking at his plate he saw that a feather had landed in his chili. Don felt a little queasy. Feathers reminded him of chickens. He had more knowledge than he cared to admit about chickens. He had been raised on a chicken ranch. He had lived with chicken, ate chicken, smelled chickens, hauled and fed chickens. All without a thought of complaint. That was until the great chicken massacre of '74. His participation that summer saw him in more blood and chicken guts than in all of his childhood years combined. When he slept he dreamt of what he did all day long. Slowly walking along, snapping chicken necks with both hands. At the end of that summer, some four-thousand, six-hundred-odd chickens later, he found that the smell of chicken cooking made him nauseous. He could not eat chicken without getting ill. He wouldn't eat fish because the smell reminded him of chicken. He looked at the feather on his plate and then at Virtue. The feather had fallen from one of Virtue's wings. Don wasn't feeling good anymore.

He glanced at Death. He was curious as to how anyone could eat without lips. It was a mistake. Looking at Death's mouth reminded him of the chicken farm. He drank some water; that seemed to help.

Don picked the feather from his food. He didn't want to be rude and leave something gross on the table. He folded it in a napkin. It still looked obvious, just like his sister's gum during Thanksgiving dinner. He stuffed the napkin into his pocket.

Now that his plate was tidy (nothing here to remind him of poultry), he finished off the last of his chili burger. Death was wiping up the last of his French fries. Virtue was putting some sugar into his coffee.

"Sugar and spice and everything nice," Death cackled.

"Pebbles and snails and puppy dog tails," said Virtue.

Don watched as the two apparitions had a fit of giggles. Don stared.

"I don't get it," he said. "What's the joke?"

"Death was kidding me about women," Virtue said. He tried to say more, but ol' skull-face started to snicker, and Virtue broke into laughter.

"A girl's stolen virtue?" Don asked. He was beginning to get the joke. "That type of thing?" This brought more laughter. Don was laughing now, too. Virtue was leaking tears, and Death was holding his own ribs.

Virtue raised his cup and toasted, "Death holds all men equal."

Death toasted back, "Virtue is its own reward." Another wave of lunacy gripped them. After it had settled, Virtue straightened his feathers. Don wiped the tears from his eyes. Death brushed some crumbs off his cloak.

"Well," Death said, "I guess it's finally time to go."

Don's food did a small flip in his stomach and lay there like a brick. His heart pounded, sweat broke out. He had that odd feeling that his body was doing everything necessary for running, yet was refusing to move. His thoughts were cold, white, and empty. He heard Death stand up. He could not see. Somebody had closed his eyes so tightly they seem to cut off the world.

At any moment, Don thought, at any moment I'm going to feel his icy grip on my shoulder. He waited for the moment. Nothing happened; he opened his eyes. There was Death with his hand on Virtue's shoulder. Virtue didn't look so good. His skin was pale. He looked like he was sweating.

"Ngrgh," Virtue said. The words were not coming out right. "There has to be a mistake," he finally said.

"No mistake," Death said. "You are dead, as in: kicked the bucket, pushing daisies, out the door feet-first, bought the farm, tits up, caught a bullet, growing frost. You're a card-carrying member of the dearly deceased."

"I can't be dead, I'm Virtue," Virtue said.

"Well, Virtue is dead," Death said.

"I'm not an old lady with a heart condition!" Virtue yelled. "I demand to know how I can be dead."

"Christ," Death swore. "Why the hell does everybody have to go through the denial stage? Listen Virtue, you have been stepped on, stolen, lost, found, bruised, tested, invested, borrowed, gained, shifted, and parted. There is more wear on you than a Henry Ford tire. You can hardly be recognized for what you are. It is not your nature to notice yourself, so

you could not see that you were dying. Now you are dead, and it's the happy hunting grounds for you."

"Wait a moment," Don said, "Virtue is right. He can't die, regardless of how much wear he has. There is still virtue in the world, so he must exist."

"Well," Virtue said. "I really don't cover the whole world."

"Huh?" Don was puzzled.

"I only cover Chicago, record companies, major burger chains, and the Paris, Colorado, High School Marching Band," Virtue said.

"Huh?"

"What he means," Death said, "is that he was demoted."

"I don't understand," Don said.

"The world got to be a big place," Virtue said. "Now there are several virtues, and between the lot of us we do pretty well."

"Well, you're dead," Death said.

"What about Chicago? What about..." Virtue was saying, when Death cut him off.

"You've been demoted again," Death said.

"Nuts," Virtue said. "What do I have now?"

"You are now responsible for one person," Death said.

"One?" Virtue asked.

"One," Death replied.

"Well, who is it?"

"Him," Death said. He was pointing at Don.

Once again, Don wasn't feeling so good. It would be a little much for anybody to have the Grim Reaper point his finger at you, then to find out you couldn't recognize your own virtue. His head hurt.

Don looked at Virtue, and asked, "Where have you been?"

"Oh, just out wandering around with a marching band," Virtue replied.

"Good, you're dead now," Death said. "No more wandering around for you." He started Virtue toward the door.

"He can't die," Don cried, "he is my virtue."

"My, but the lad is bright," Death said sarcastically. "My, but he is quick." As Death led Virtue out of Mable's, he called back, "I'll be seeing you."

Don sat quietly. Death had left a tip of two coins. Don thought of bathrooms and razor blades. It was a while before he smiled, remembering a feather in a napkin. •

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Poetry



I AM ALARENA THE ASWANG

by Romeo Esparrago

i am an aswang

i have come
from the depths
of tropic heat
and jungle

i am an aswang

i am one who has
swallowed a black chick
from the mouth
of a dying other

i am an aswang

i am one who can
cleave my body in two
and float my upper half
in the darkness of the night

i am an aswang

i am one whose tongue
can stretch
to an infinite length
and a thread-like thinness

i am an aswang

i am one who feeds
on the innards of babies
of pregnant women
of over-eager men

i am an aswang

i am one that suckles
on the voided discharge
of the sick
and elderly

i am an aswang

i am one you need to fear
for i am far more beautiful
far more cunning
and far more deadlier than you

i am an aswang

i am named alarena
and i hate
and love
what i am

and i am an aswang •

Poem and illustration copyright © 1994 by Romeo Esparrago.

QUICKSILVER

by Martin Burwell

Caught
for a moment
by something beyond gravity's
neo force
The world stops
catching the news
once upon a time is back
Imagine
once upon a time
back •

Poem copyright © 1994 by Martin Burwell.

Humor

THE MEANING OF LOST SOCKS

by Biedermeier X. Leeuwenhoek

Abstract: From the Proceedings of the 49th Convention of the American Datatician Society Meeting, Akron Hilton, Akron, Ohio. November 1994.

Excerpt from author's remarks Professor Bingham S. Tewksbury: "We of the ADS are pleased to announce that the mystery of where lost socks go has been quantitatively pinpointed subsequent to a lengthy and rigorous double-blind study.... We believe that the results, shown in the accompanying [table], contain no surprises, and in fact conform quite closely to what is called 'common sense.'"

Table

Lost Socks: Where Do They Go?

Percentage Lost Explanation

26% Left in Washer

25% Left in Dryer

21% Dropped on way to/from laundry

14% Stuck, through static electricity,
to corner of fitted sheet or other article of clothing

13% One sock thrown out because other is "missing"

100% Total

Note: Margin of error plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Source: ADS •

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About the Authors

Martin Burwell ("Quicksilver") is essentially a working musician/music director. He is also a poet, who has been published in literary magazines around the country, and a visual artist represented in several galleries and private collections.

Romeo "Rome Dome" Esparrago ("I am Alarena the Aswang") lives in Sacramento, California and has played miniature golf with Konen the Barbarian and Biedermeier X. Leeuwenhoek. If you'd like to send greetings, get on the Internet Highway, and exit at romedome@aol.com.

Jeff Gilbert ("Two Werewolves") lives in Seattle and is regionally known for borrowing beer change. Some of the more famous people he's hit up for drinking funds include Soundgarden, Alice In Chains, Candlebox, and assorted members of Pearl Jam. He is also the West Coast Editor for *Guitar World* magazine. When he's sober, that is.

Biedermeier X. Leeuwenhoek ("The Meaning of Lost Socks") is former Chairman of Self-Nuking Projects Inc. of Ohio. He is wanted by the Venusian Overlords (never you mind why).

Andrew G. McCann ("Astrobeast") is a writer and editor in New York City.

Mark Monlux ("Don, Death & Virtue") is a freelance computer illustrator living in Tacoma, Washington. A perpetually happy and optimistic morning person, he occasionally writes stories from his life that take on mythic proportions and also makes an odd stab at horror. He can be reached by e-mail at mmonlux@aol.com, or just MMonlux for AOL subscribers. •

If you can read this you're too close to the screen.