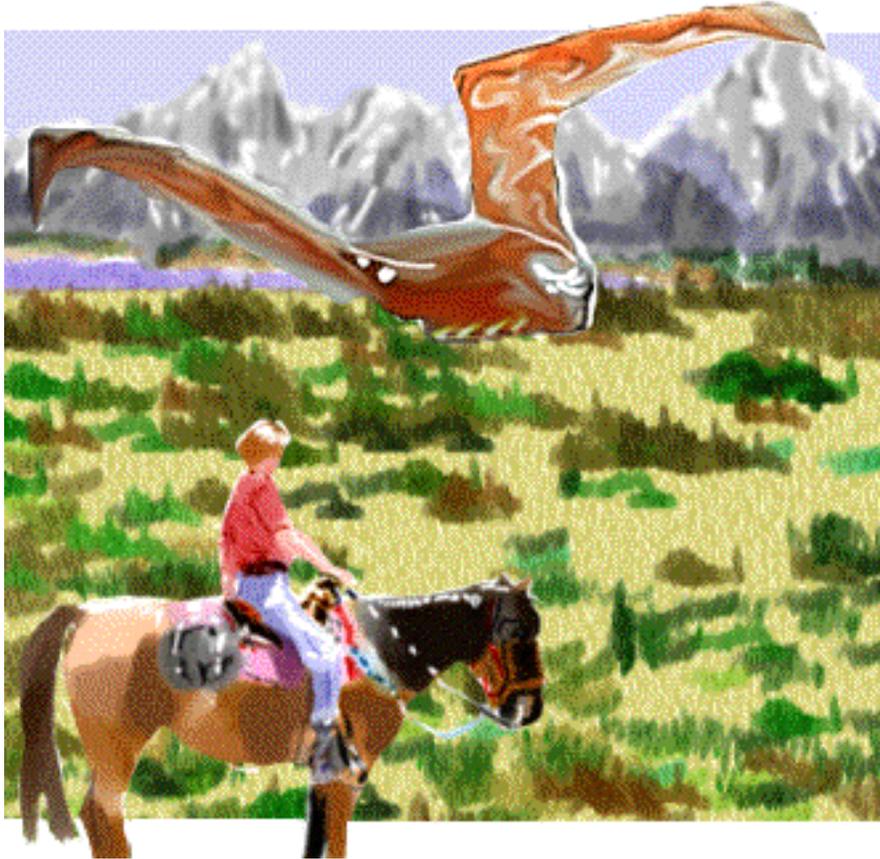


Planet Magazine

Wild SF, Fantasy, Horror, Humor, Poetry — Online Vol 2.1 FREE!



Inside this Online-Interactive, Virtual-Reality-Specific, Internet-Savvy, Multimedia-Intelligent, Mag-Tronic E-Zine that's Mostly Text:

Science Fiction by Warren Blair. Fantasy by John Carlucci and Romeo Esparrago. Horror by Wayne Deeker. Poetry by Paul Semel. Humor by Margaret McCann. •

Masthead

Circulation as of 3/95: 153 billgatezillion electrons generated



Planet Magazine, Vol. 2, No. 1; March 1995

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(Drawn on a Performa 578, using Painter and an ArtZ ADB tablet.)

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. We guess that total circulation is something like 400 per issue. 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 We prefer unpublished SF, fantasy, horror, poetry, humor, etc., by beginning or little-known writers (we tend to eschew stories published in other e-zines, as well as porno, gore,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 autobiographies by celebrity look-alikes). 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 \$14 will get your nose pierced at a street fair, but it's still a snort of self-esteem powder to see your name in print).

Story submissions: Send stories, poems, etc., as StuffIt- or Ziplt-compressed ASCII text files to PlanetMag@aol.com or PMagazine@eWorld.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 (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: TP) 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. Finally, Planet can be found in Ziffnet's Software Center (command-k: ZIFF); look in Software Central files: Member Exchange uploads: The

Bookshelf.

- 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 (set your modem to "stun"). At 9600, though, the DOCmaker version takes only about 5 minutes to download. At 14,400 bps, download 'em all. The DOCmaker version 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

Grisham's Law: "Bad Fiction Drives Out Good"

A PENSIVE MOMENT

As we arrange electrons for this fifth issue of "Planet Magazine," we can't help but look back at the humble origins of this e-zine (or, as the British say, lectronic-maga) and think, for a moment, of all the other, rival megalomaniacal purveyors of pre-professional fiction that we here at Planet Magazine have either acquired, "merged" with, or financially ruined in our foam-flecked zeal to stand Somewhere on the Hill of Free Online Genre Zines. Indeed, by absorbing such zines as "SF Whirlpool," "The Unicorned Dragon-Wizard," "Horror Perspectives," "Lotza Laffz," and "This Poem's for You," our circulation has soared from two or three downloads per month to well over 12 bazfazillion downloads per picosecond — *for this solar system alone!* Pretty darn impressive, we'd say, even if it were true.

Lately, however, as we squat here each day on our horde of golden digi-coins, like some bloated, mutant offspring of Madonna and Scrooge McDuck — with fried-egg eyes locked onto the digital readouts of our check-counting machines, a bead of sweat forming at the tip of our broad orange-yellow beak — we begin to wonder if maybe we didn't always do right by others in our blind struggle to make "Planet Magazine" the best-selling free zine in 1994 named "Planet Magazine." Maybe, just maybe, we might have done some Wrong. However, such thoughts quickly fade from our shallow reverie, disappearing like a bad dream on a sunny, spring morn, as our penetrating gaze alights once again, like a muscular, young bee, on the seemingly nectar-laden digital readouts of our many, many, many check-counting machines. And then we feel that little goose of elation, which overwhelms all doubt, that rising blast of pure exhilaration of *knowing* that we have achieved a level of material ownership and personal mental power that few beings — perhaps not even the fabled Regiz Fihlbin or Tawksho IV — will ever know, even in my most antihistamine-charged fugue states.

May You Know the Peace of The Rich Man,
[Andrew G. McCann](#)
Editor, Planet Magazine, March 1995

TECHNICAL UNHELPFUL FORUM

If you are experiencing technical problems with reading "Planet Magazine," follow these procedures (Macintosh-only; Windows, DOS, Unix, and Vnetpth users should substitute equivalent commands): Quit from the file and then open it again. If you still have problems, download it again. If that doesn't help, send an e-mail notice to PlanetMag@aol.com, and then do the following: Quit from the document, move the cursor

over to the Planet icon, click once to highlight it, drag it to the trashcan, and let go once the trashcan is highlighted. Then, pull down the Special menu, choose Empty Trash, and let go. Then, move the cursor off the screen and up the wall facing you to the menu bar along the ceiling. Pull down the File menu and choose Quit. HOWEVER, be sure that your reality supports multitasking, so that your Self doesn't Quit along with your apartment, house, bed-sit, coffee shop, what-have-you (if you don't have reality multitasking, just choose Pause). Then, assuming you're operating within a North America, circa 1990s reality program, walk down the street (by the way, if you see some litter, move your cursor over it until it's highlighted, then drag it over to the nearest trashcan) and enter your local magazine shop. Click once on "Analog," "Asimov's," "Fantasy & Science Fiction," or the like, and move the magazine into any personal folder you choose. To avoid a system error, don't forget to drag and drop some e-credits onto the cash-register icon. Then go home, reboot your apartment, double-click on the magazine's icon, and read. That should do it.

Note: If you still experience problems, maybe we should take a closer look at your relationship with your parents, and see if we might encourage you to begin to really feel your feelings about them. Yes, that's a good place to start. We should tell you, though, that our fee is \$100 for 45 minutes, and also that we will soon ask you to come twice a week, as the momentum will truly benefit you; further, after about four or five years, when you'll try to break away from us because of time and money conflicts, we'll tell you that you're finally feeling the anger against your parents, and you're close to achieving a breakthrough, and that we really ought to continue for a while and not think about artificial concepts like "stopping therapy," or even "talking about stopping therapy." Writing those checks to us is good for you; it teaches you discipline and commitment, and thus is self-esteemable.

Obey,
[Biedermeier X. Leeuwenhoek](#)
[Registered Shrink and Tax Consultant](#)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor: Kool zine. I distribute a zine from AOL here, too. It's called "Public Access" and uses the same DOCMaker program. I love the graphics, too. Nice work.
Sincerely,
PullTabb@eworld.com

Hi to the Editors: I have downloaded your mag and I really like to read the stories. It is a great idea to publish stories and send them to the internet. My proposal is that you send it also personally, if possible.
Ciao and good luck,
[Helmut](#)
[via the Internet](#)

[Editor's Note: We are toying with the idea of some sort of subscription service, but don't

hold your breath.]

Dear Editor: First off, I like your magazine. It seems very well thought out and it looks very professional. Now for the question...How do I get a copyright on an e-newsletter? I am doing one for my local MUG [called LOLNews] and have not been able to find adequate information on the registration of such copyrights. I am particularly interested in the cost and amount of red tape involved.

Thanks for your help,

[Mark](#)

[via AOL](#)

[Editor's Note: As I told Mark, the U.S. Copyright Office's Public Information Office can be reached at (202) 707-3000; call (202) 707-9100 for the Forms Hotline to register a publication. Registrants have to fill out a form and mail the office two copies of the publication plus a check for \$20. They eventually respond with a photocopy of the completed registration form. Not too hard.]

Editor: Where can I find Planet Magazine on AOL? How many issues are there?

Thanks,

[Ian](#)

[via AOL](#)

[Editor's note: There are five issues of Planet so far. They come in plain text (for IBM or Macintosh) or illustrated (Mac only) versions. The text files are, of course, smaller and thus a quicker download; the fancy version, though, is a bigger file but more fun. To find Planet on AOL, use the keyword WRITERS (command-k on a Mac; type in the word WRITERS, hit the return button on your keyboard); double-click on the Writers Club Libraries folder; double-click on Writers Club E-Zines folder; if necessary, hit the "more..." button until you see what you want.]

Editor: Planet Magazine is way cool.

Good job!

[Joao](#)

[via AOL](#)

LETTERS TO THE WHITE GODDESS

Dear Gaia: Here are a series of very good jokes that I've written in the Existential Style:

1. Guy walks down the street; guy comes up and hands him a fish; says, "No thanks."
2. Guy climbs a ladder; gets to the top; looks around; doesn't see anything.
3. Guy jumps onto a bus; takes his coat off; puts it back on.
4. Guy gets up on stage; stands in the middle; spotlight goes out.

These jokes are also available, for a fee, to playwrights and novelists.

Like you care,

[K. Moo](#)

[Senior Haircutter, Jean-Paul Sartorial Salons](#)

Dear Eve: Today is not only the shortest day of the year, it's also the widest. Which reminds me of when I was a boy, and the times my father would drive me down in the van to The Sleeping Giant, a low rise of hills that echoed the profile of same. Many locals insisted, by the by, that those hills actually contained the remains of a dead behemoth. As evidence, they pointed to the eroded, but still clearly visible, remains of a 500-foot bedside table, complete with lamp, alarm clock, dream journal, and box of Kleenex. Further, there were the large articles of clothing laying about; my favorite was The Single Moccasin, which lay on its side along the riverbank, toe in the water — it was truly the greatest shoe on Earth.

Keep Smilin',

[Willy Everstop](#)

[Americana Fan From Way-Back, Ohio](#)

Dear Tara: How come a person on the phone always takes precedence over someone who's bothered to show up in person? Hey, you can be in line for half an hour at the takeout, waiting to place your order for raspberry lo mein, and the phone rings. Whatta they do? The guy gets on the horn and takes down an order for the entire New York Giants squad. AND all the cheerleaders and support staff. Honks me right off. For example, I was sitting in the White House last Thursday, talking to The Man, when a little red phone starts flashing. Well, before He could see it, I picked up the handset and dropped it back down. Nothing was going to take away my time discussing the root beer industry with Mr. Somebody. 'N just after that first nuclear blast hit me, melting the very eyes from my sockets like hot wax, I still felt justified in what I had done. It's only a matter of common courtesy — sumpin' that's sorely lacking these days!

Later on chief,

[e.e. mail](#)

[e-poet](#)

Dear Dana: Why can't we all just stratify?

Hope that doesn't sound two dumm,

[Mona Synaptik](#)

[Citizen of The Neighborhood](#)

Dear Lillith: Welp, it's getting near closing time down here at the Old Barne Theatre, so I'm stowing all of the characters and the accents and shrugging on my worn, leather bomber jacket before I head out into the cool and windy night! Ain't nowhere in the freakin' world like it, 'cep'n maybe the Old Barne Theatre II down the road a piece.

Sincerely, <pause>

[Sy F. Relieff](#)

[Acteur and Farmeur](#)

Dear Hera: Awright, this is a stickup! Put all yer money into an envelope and mail it to me immediately! C'mon, move! Quick, quick! (Unfortunately, I can't give you my name or address, as that might lead the police to my lair.) To show you that I am indeed serious, I make this warning: If I don't receive the money within 5 business days, then I shall fire

a bullet into a frictionless ceramsteel envelope and fedex it to you overnight-delivery.
You have been warned,
["Munk E. Bizniss"](#)
[Brooklyn, USA](#)

Dear Great Mother: No, no, wait.... OK, I got it. Now listen up, THIS is a stickup! Put all yer digicash into an encrypted message and email it to me right now at the anonymous site listed below. Go on! Do it! (Again, I can't give you my real name or e-mail address, as that might lead the Secret Service to my bedroom PC.) To show you that I am extremely desperate, I say this: If I don't receive the credits within 5 business hours, then I shall unleash a killbot on the Net to wipe out every trace of you — from your overly liberal/conservative e-rag all the way to your unpaid IRS bills!
This is no joke,
["Jess e-James"](#)
chainletter@spam.edu

Dear Lady-of-the-Lake: My sense is, from reading your electronic-publication, that you are incredibly handsome. [Thanks - Ed.] This may very well be irrelevant, or even off the mark, but maybe now you'll publish my epic poem about "Derek, the Lonely East-End Chimney-Swabbing Lad." [Consider it published - Ed.]
Hopefully,
[B.B. Golly,](#)
[Secretary/Receptionist](#)
[United Nations Building, NYC](#)

[Who is this guy named Ed? - Editor]

Dear Nuit: I really liked playing Pathways to Darkness, and Wolfenstein 3-D was even better. For a while, too, I played Doom on my Uncle Vlad's PC. But now I got Marathon! And I can't stop. It's great. There's one problem, though: After an hour or so of fluidly racing up and down corridors and stairwells, dodging in and out of doorways, sidling back and forth, and rapidly blowing away enemies in an endless, gory bloodbath, I start to get pretty-goll-darn seasick! I'll tell you, by gosh. Oh, man.

It's like when you were in the fourth grade, and Buddy and Dewey from the sixth grade put you in that Pic-n-Pay shopping cart and twirl you around and race you down the playground and bang you down the concrete steps before slamming you into that low railing from which you fly out and have to grab the chain-link basketball net in the court below or risk scraping away some pizza-slices of epidermis on those rough red-orange bricks coming at ya.

In other words, after playing a few dozen games on the ol' Mac and achieving the eleventy-seventh level, deep inside my head, the inner ear fluid is whipping here and there like a Westinghouse spin cycle at some psychotic peak. My joystick hand is clammy. The monitor is blurry. I'm bathed in cold sweat...trapped...a rising scream ready to bloom like a viper vine from hell. Something's very, very wrong with the world, but I don't

know what! And then, either I run to the toilet to vomit like a grenade launcher, or I fall back on my bed until the queasiness fades and the room stops twirling like a mad butterfly; this usually takes about half an hour, I think.

And then I'm ready to play again!

Layder, dood,
[Wolf N. Speww](#)
via the Intranet

Dear Protectress of the Hunt: Please disregard the earlier, threatening letter that was sent in my name. You see, even though it apparently came from my superduperinfofreeway e-mail address, I could not, in any way, be responsible for it nor its contents. Permit me to explain: I was working at my terminal after a long day of helping others, when, all of a sudden, I must have fallen asleep. Or maybe I was just looking the other way. In any case, somebody then must have come by, reached around my body, typed in the letter, digi-signed it, encrypted it, sent it, and then erased the outgoing message log. It was probably even an alien. So why aren't you out looking for him/her/it? What are you, some kind of controlling fascist? Why the vendetta against ME? Nobody knows what I've been through since childhood,

[Pier A. Noyde](#)
Counselor, Crystal Harmony Ashram/Carryout & Rehab

Dear Ms. Basinger: Here's an idea for a scam. Twice a year we start up an office collection for our birthdays — but twice for you, twice for me. That's FOUR TIMES per year in all. Currently, we don't collect once for either of us, and the most we've ever ended up with is a so-so ice-cream cake. However, if we follow my idea and HIT THEM HARD, then we should get a nice return on our efforts. We could even canvass the drones on the 19th floor. Come to think of it, why not smarm one of the gorgeous secretaries into running the collection for us, not letting on to the inside dope, of course.

If we offset the collections correctly, no one should notice. Here's a sample strategy:

March 1 (or whatever): I collect for you.

June 2: You collect for me.

September 3: I collect for you.

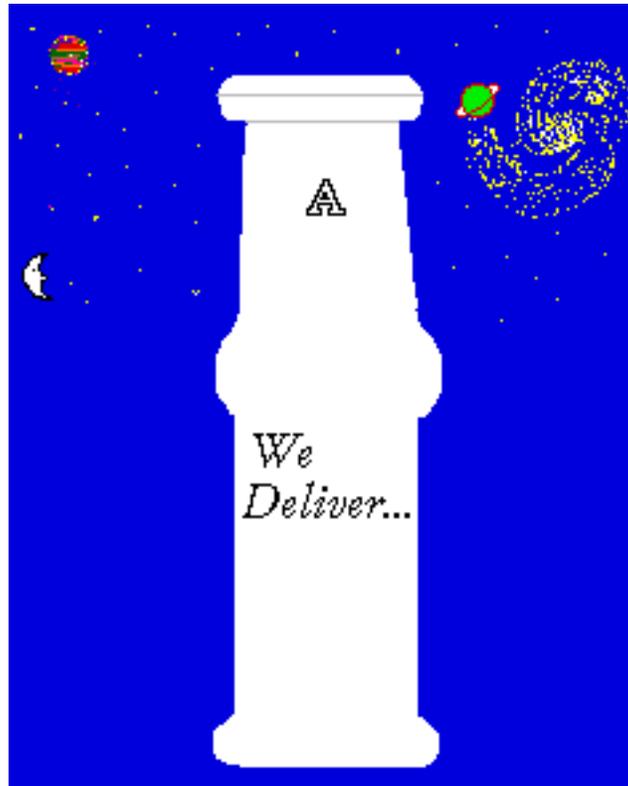
December 4: You collect for me.

If anyone asks, "Wasn't it just your birthday?" We say something like, "Seems like it, don't it," or "Hey, time flies," or "<groan> Don't remind me!" You get the picture. If we play it fast, cool, and loose, you and I could be sitting even easier on Pretty Street. At the very least, I think we'd end up with enough for a couple of nice steaks at Tony Roma's Rib Restaurant.

Waiting for the word,

[I.M. de Mann](#)
Freelance Business Consultant •

Science & Fiction



THE MILKMAN

by Warren Blair

The Milkman, that's what they call me. You know, "Hey, there's 'The Milkman'; "Oh, that's 'The Milkman'." That kind of thing. Although, a lot of people think that that's actually my name, "Milkman." "Hey Milkman, how ya doin'?" "Goin' out on a delivery, Milkman?" It's gotten so that even some of my friends think it's my name; so they have a more familiar version: "Hey, Milk, what's up?" "I was talking to Milk the other day...." It goes on and on, I don't really mind it, but lately it's been making me think about why I hang on to the job. Most guys don't stay long, even though the pay is way above average. Granted, it can be very boring and repetitive, but that isn't why they quit. I know why, and so I guess it's odd that I don't think about it more, because, knowing me, I would have seen myself as the least likely to stay.

Lift-off was as uneventful as usual, no problems in my command office, and none in the cargo bays. The trip was unexceptional, as well, and as I passed the Moon, I had the computers run a last-minute cargo check, and there were still no problems there. I

ordered the AI co-pilot to begin the stability/alignment sequence, so we could open up the cargo bay. I put on my "walking clothes" and checked my Oxy Meters and the Manual Check List, which the computer verified (but you always look yourself, specially at the Oxy's).

I hooked up to the lifeline that extended down the outside of the ship and "stepped" out into the void. The cargo bay was almost completely uncovered, and I floated on over. I saw all the cylinders lined up in double rows in each section, just like "eggs," in what I think they used to call "cartons." As these were, in antiquity, "delivered" by a Milkman, hence the name for guys that do my job. Like I say, though, most don't last long; so that's why I'm "THE" Milkman and all, like I said before.

I approached the first "can" and verified the number. The red Oxy light was blinking, and the AI confirmed all life support was indeed on and operational. It then turned on all the other systems, and I prepared the can for release. I popped it out with the hydraulics and positioned the main jets. I hit the exact-time-of-launch verification button, which put the time into the AI, and pushed the can off. It's funny; it really doesn't matter what direction the can goes in (as long as it's away from Earth), 'cause the gyros and onboard AIs will handle Earth orientation, direction for return and all. But they insist that human hands shove them off, and verify initial thrust from the jets. This is the most dangerous time for the milkmen (I know), because we can see in the computer display how long the can is set for and, invariably, you accidentally will look into one of the portholes of one of them — and you'll see the horrible, pleading face pressed up against it. Some milkmen only see that once, and they're burned out — particularly out this deep; because these are the worst cases, and they're solo cans and set for a long time.

I often wonder if the onboard AI systems really work for the time they're supposed to, and if the jets actually reverse on time and all. I haven't been on the job that long, but I never saw or heard of any that came back; but they could work, and that would still be possible. I remember when I saw the first face. I thought, Does what he did really merit this? And even though I knew that the can would telescope to at least double the size it was now, and that there was a programmed Vid and Audi library with sufficient material for the allotted time, I wondered if that would be enough. I also knew that each had been treated with intravenous antibiotics, etc., and isolated in a sterile environment for several weeks before insertion into the can. But I wondered if they could really kill off everything, so there was no chance of illness during the duration of the sentence. And what about the waste material? Let's face it: It would be collected and sealed and jettisoned regularly, but we were shootin' an awful lot of that stuff at something or maybe someone, and, at the least, somewhere.

I used to think it was better in the old days, when they just set them in timed elliptical orbits, or put them in the Prison Stations around Earth itself. But I guess it got too cluttered, what with communications systems, commercial flights, and all, and the stations had to be manned and weren't really tough enough on the "hard cases." Like I say, though, that's the way I used to think until....

Still, once in a while, it does bother me a little, until I come to guys like these last two. The last two were LIFERs. That meant they would be a little heavier, because of the food-service modules (that meter it out — the inmate can't get at it) and the extra-large Oxy units and backups to ensure there will always be enough air until the end; although, they do save on some of the computer hardware and the return jets and guidance systems. When I'm doin' one of these, I make sure I get a look in a porthole, and (maybe it isn't right) I always smile and wave just before I push them off. Maybe that's why they insist that it be a human hand; maybe that's why I'm still a Milkman — "THE" Milkman. I hope not. I pray one day it will bother me terribly. I pray I'll burn out, and give up the route. •

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Illustration copyright ©1995 by Ron Tedeschi.

Fantasy



WARM WATER

by John Carlucci

She followed the warm current, knowing full well how terribly angry her mother would be. Warned more than once that she was too young to be swimming here alone, the girl ignored everything, because the reefs were always a delight she looked forward to seeing. Drawn by the brilliant colors and the exquisite taste of life that flowed through the surrounding waters, she could not help seeking the reef. Rolling over to swim on her back, the little girl could see the radiant glow of the sun as it filtered through the shimmering surface of the warm water. With powerful strokes, she cut through the clear water and headed for the living surface of the reef.

She had just reached the edge when all of her senses screamed out their silent alarm. A jaggedmouth hunted nearby, searching the water for fresh prey. Too many of her people had fallen victim to its never-ending hunger. She swam quickly for a coral shelf and crawled underneath its protective lip. Breathing in and out hard, the little girl closed her eyes tightly and hoped. From her vantage point she could see the sleek gray skin of the jaggedmouth's body. It rippled slightly as its powerful tail propelled it through the water.

She shivered as it swam into the distance. Fear of the hunter clutched her stomach in a tight ball, and she swam away from the reef with great haste. Slightly disoriented by her encounter, the little girl headed in the wrong direction and soon found herself close to shore.

The thrashing legs in the water surprised and startled her at first. She had never seen anything like this. Allowing her long tail to lift her through the water, the little girl floated up through the current. Her dark hair broke the surface with hardly a splash and she floated with just her eyes above the water. She waited a moment as her eyes adjusted to the surface light and felt the protective lids sliding back. She stared in wonder and awe at what lay before her.

These people looked like her own, but the curious thing was they had what looked like arms where their tails should be. Scared at first, the girl found these people so terribly strange and new she could not look away. Their skin was pink, and they made the strangest noises with their mouths she had ever heard. She giggled aloud.

Startled to see that some of the people turned when they heard the high-pitched laughter, the little girl dove beneath the surface and huddled near the sandy bottom. Since no one followed her, she stared at her tail and wondered what it would be like to not have one. The tail was twice as long as the rest of her body and covered in the softest of scales. The white-green surface contrasted only by the deep green of the striping that flowed its length. Her skin was a milky white and hair a dark green that ran down her back and the length of her tail. She could not imagine what it would feel like to move on the land the way these others did. Curiosity getting the better of the girl, she swam closer to the shore while carefully avoiding the other swimmers in the water.

It was then she saw that one of the swimmers was smaller than the others. She was wary of contact, but could it be that this one was a little girl like herself? She stared in wonder at this small little girl and gently reached out to touch her extended foot. The skin was fiery hot and the girl jerked her foot away. She started swimming and quickly ran from the water shrieking. Angry with herself for scaring the little girl away, the baby mermaid again broke the surface to watch.

She saw the girl run up the sandy beach and embrace what must have been her mother. After a few hugs, the little girl sat in the sand and picked up an object that lay beside her. It appeared to be a representation of the little girl herself. It had arms where its tail should have been and appeared to shine like the hardest pearl from the bottom of the ocean. She watched as the girl played in the sand and made those strange noises at the little form. She stayed so long that the water started to cool and she began thinking of returning home. It was then that the girl started squealing again and ran toward the splashing water. She kicked furiously away from the shore and stopped when she floated several feet above the bottom. The mermaid sank to the sandy surface and stared up as the little girl played. She could see that this time she had brought the shiny little figure with her. After several minutes of this playful romping, the little girl began to swim for the shore again. The mermaid knew this would be her last chance, so she reached out and touched the girl's toe

again. It so startled her that she dropped the figure and swam more quickly for the sandy beach. The little mermaid could hardly believe her luck and watched as the figure floated down to her. She caught it in her webbed hands and stared at its shiny face. It looked very much like the surface girl, but its hair was as light as the sun. She moved all four arms and the head, smiled, then swam away.

She had almost reached the reef when a dark shape cut through the water and swam directly at her. She screeched in fear as the shape whirled her around and she found the frowning face of her mother. Relief flooded the little girl's body as she listened to the well-deserved scolding her mother was now giving her. After a few moments, her mother stopped and hugged the girl tightly to her body. She noticed the human figure clutched in her daughter's hand and scolded her once again. She frowned at the girl's pleadings, but eventually relented out of relief that her baby was okay. Reaching into the pouch that hung around her neck, the mother handed the daughter a small bag. Made of the softest fish skin and tied tightly at the top with thread, the girl clutched the bag tightly to her. Both mother and daughter swam, hand in hand, back toward the shore.

The little girl sat at the water's edge and stared off to where she had last seen Mrs. Bentley. Mrs. Bentley had been with her for as long as she could remember, having received her at a Christmas long ago. Daddy had searched the water for a while, only to return sad and empty handed. Warm tears still flowed down her cheeks as she thought of never seeing her friend again.

Surprised, she watched as a girl with green hair peeked her head from the surface of the water. She slowly swam to the shore and crawled partly up the wet sand, stopping just at the girl's feet. She had large black eyes and pale, striped skin that shone in the dying sunlight. She had Mrs. Bentley in her hand and a small bag in the other that she held out for the little girl to take. She smiled once before sliding back into the water. Opening the bag, the little girl poured a number of shiny black balls into her pudgy little hand. She smiled and giggled at the surprised laughter from Mommy and Daddy when she showed them what the wet bag held. •

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DINDO THE DAWENDI

By Romeo Esparrago

Hello. My name's Rondo Patungan. I'm a detective of the supernatural, you might say. Just like the guy on that old TV series. Anyways, I live in Colorado Springs now, under the shadow of Pike's Peak, working for this lady lawyer who owns this legal agency. I used to be a cop. Now I dig up dirt for the lady's clients. Sometimes she lets me check out the weird cases. You know, the "netherworld" ones. I have a smell for it. A talent, one might say. But it's specialized. I don't just go against your run-of-the-mill vampires, werewolves, and ghoulies. Nope, mine originate from the country of my birth: The Philippines. The beasties there are a little more nasty, scary, and deadly. Yep, I have lotsa stories. But I'm not gonna tell you those just yet. Today I'll tell you how I got started, how I got my lucky charm, where I got the eye and nose for it.

* * *

I was born in Quezon City, Philippines, you know. Grew up there, yep. Anyways, my Mama's from a little village called Maragondon, and we used to visit our relatives there all the time. One late morning, during a stay at Maragondon, I hitched a ride on my cousin's tricycle motorcycle to a nearby palenki (open-air market). He warned me not to stay overly long and to be home before sundown. I was to stay away from any large mounds of dirt. He wouldn't say why, but I replied that he need not worry — I had my brains and a few surprises in my shorts' pockets, as well. He laughed and said, "Yes, always with your toy weapons that you find. Just make sure you don't have to use them against multo (ghosts) and such." He drove off to visit his girlfriend at Cavite City, which was quite a drive; I knew that on the way there, he had to earn his money taking passengers through towns with such exotic names as Ternate, Naic, Tansa, Salinas, Noveleta, Binakayan, Kawit, Bacoor, and Imus. Whew!

After having rice (dunked in "Dinuguan", a blood-and-pork delicacy) and a delicious

Guadalupe mango for lunch from a food stall, I caught up with some friends collecting spiders. Spider duels were what we used them for, and they were held much like cockfights. We matched the "gagambas" (big spiders) and "alalawas" (small ones) based on the lengths of their legs. The spiders were placed on a cut bamboo stick, where they battled until one got tossed off or killed by the other. Kinda cruel, but lotsa fun when you're a kid! We collected all kinds of arachnids: small ones, fat yellow dotted ones, ones with really hard or really soft bodies, spiders with head spikes that made them look like Batman, all kinds, and one boy even used an ant! We spent most of the afternoon having them fight each other. What was gross was what one of my pals did with his final winning gagamba. It was a spiny one with a red abdomen with black dots. He tossed it into his mouth and popped the belly with his teeth. The spider even made a squeaky screaming sound — yecch!

The sun was beginning to set, and I realized I had a long walk home ahead of me. I gave my farewells to everyone and began the hike back. Dusk seemed to be approaching fast, so I decided to cut through this poor farmer's sugar-cane field. It would lead to an open expanse of land that wandered beside the encroaching jungle forest. The dense thicket was kinda spooky, but as long as I stayed on that open field, I'd be okay. As I walked through the cane stalks, I grabbed one and tore it off. I peeled it and began chewing on the tough, fibrous meat. It was sweet, full of water, and delicious! I finished and threw the remains behind me. The stalks of sugar cane parted, and there was the broad terrain with the overgrown tropical vegetation behind it. However, there was a small hill directly before me. Forgetting my cousin's advice, I walked over the mound of dirt to get to the other side.

The next thing I knew, I heard a loud exclamation of "bulaga" (boo!) behind me, and I was pushed forward so violently that I stumbled and landed on the soil face down! I heard another shout, and felt two feet landing on my back. "Aray! (ye-ouch!)" I cried. I turned around quickly and threw off my attacker, whom I figured to be the poor farmer. It wasn't the farmer. It was worse, much worse.

The creature was small, about the size of a pygmy. It wore a straw hat, some ragged clothes, and exposed its bare feet, which smelled like over-ripe bananas. The skin was quite wrinkled and gave him the appearance of a very, very old man. He had a big, cheap, and odorous cigar in his mouth. A long, white beard flowed around his face. His face! Yikes! He had only one eye in the center of his forehead and a large, flat nose with only one nostril. Ugly is as ugly gets. He was one horrible-looking sucker.

As I got up, realizing I was much taller than him, the dwarf took a swing at me and knocked me down again. "You bad, naughty little boy!" he screeched. "You walked over my sacred abode, the magical mound of Dindo the Dawendi! You are disrespectful of the spirits of the ground and deserve to die!"

Great. This was one of those beasties that adults told stories about at night to scare you and, although I believed in them, I didn't think I'd run into one. Dawendi's are a race of dwarves that inhabit the islands of the Philippines. They are a mixture of shapes and forms, sexes, and powers. Different regions have different names for them. Now, a fairly hideous example of one was coming at me with outstretched arms. Well, no son of my Mama is

going to get pulverized quietly.

I punched back, and for the next five minutes we both tore into each other with our fists, legs, feet, and teeth. His hat and cigar went flying. My shirt was torn, and one of my slippers had broken. We collapsed, exhausted, on the ground, breathing hard and staring at each other, a bloody shambles. I didn't think I could survive another round.

The ancient runt began to speak. "We have evenly bested each other, and I am astonished. For that, I shan't kill you, but you will become my slave for daring to insult me. I know who you are, Rondo Patungan, and I know of your little cruelties to nature's creatures and to people who struggle with the land. These creatures come from the spirit of nature that gives me my powers! The poor tillers of the earth give me offerings, as my people represent the soul of the soil that they toil on!"

I was surprised he knew so much about me. "I'd rather die than be your slave, goon. Let's fight again, just so I can prove to you that it's not going to be easy to kill me."

The Dawendi smiled. "I see a certain spirit in you that I respect. Arrogant and stupid, yes you are, boy, but I still admire you for it. I also see that you have future potential to be and do good."

"Well, how are we going to know if you up and enslave or kill me?" I replied.

"Tee hee, I will give you a chance, silly little man," the hoary creature named Dindo said. "If you can solve a riddle I pose to you, perhaps I can reconsider. If you fail to solve it, I will free you but curse your family. If you decide not to accept my challenge, you become my slave!"

It didn't sound like a good deal, but agreeing was the best choice I had. I stood up. "Go ahead then, tell me the riddle."

The short, one-eyed, single-nose-holed man giggled. He took a breath, and said, "Of what being has a hundred eyes... yet cannot see at all in any direction, in any light? Of what being is this, Rondo Patungan?"

I shifted from one leg to another. I knew the answer from a story an aunt had once told me. I just didn't want to make it look too easy to this senior citizen of the ground. I ummmmed. I hemmed and hawed. Finally I said, "Well, it's not you, you one-eyed thing. Can't be. Let's see. The answer is, wait, uh, I know, this being is no being at all. It is a thing of nourishment, it is a pineapple. It is a fruit of a hundred eyes, yet not one can peer into light or darkness. How's that?" I waited with baited breath.

I could see the fury building up inside this Dindo midget. He was turning beet red. Although I'd given him the correct answer, I could tell that ugly old dwarf still wasn't about to let me go, he was going to reconsider. So I convinced him. I whipped out my version of pineapple from my pocket, an old WWII grenade I'd found some time ago, while rummaging

through abandoned cave bunkers looking for Japanese gold. This was one of my toys my cousin mentioned earlier. The grenade was empty, but Dindo didn't know that.

The Dawendi's eye widened and his nostril flared even wider. Yep, he knew what a grenade was.

"Nakuposusmaryosep! (Gee willikers!)" Dindo exclaimed. "Heh heh, please be very careful with that, child. I still remember those days, and how they made the encantada (fairy elves) cower in the darkness of my mound in fear. Please, you have fairly solved the riddle, please let us part in peace."

I sighed in relief. My Mama had told me that these guys were good on their word. But I felt that I had to say a few more things, just to make sure he didn't come after me later. I said, "Look, uh, Mr. Dawendi, I'm sorry I stepped on your mound. I was in such a hurry to get home that I didn't think about climbing over your patch of land. I also promise never to spider-fight again, and I won't eat other people's earnings as well, like that farmer back there. Can we shake hands as friends?"

The misshapen stinker smiled, which made him look really ugly — gag! He went back, picked up his cigar and hat, and brushed the dirt off himself as the cigar lit all by its lonesome in his scar of a mouth. The smoke from it came out of his single nostril — not a pretty sight. "No, we cannot shake hands as friends. We must do it in the manner of my kind."

With that, the grizzled peewee led me back to the mound and told me that we both had to piss on his dirt hill to seal our bond of brotherhood. Oh brother! Oh well, I needed to empty my bladder anyways. His pile of mud was soon steaming in the cool night air from our donations. Night air?!? Yikes — it was evening already!

I turned around, pulled my shorts up, and peered into the deepening shadows of the jungle. Weird sounds and moans softly began to emanate from the dense, overgrown vegetation. I could see movement once in a while, and red and yellow eyes on occasion blinked and stared. Ulp.

"Not to worry, dear friend," said Dindo. "I shall accompany you back to your home. Those creatures of the dark shan't harm you, at least not tonight." Great, I thought, what about tomorrow night? "In fact," the dwarf continued, "I sense my destiny is to follow you in your life, to teach you of these and other evil creatures, of how to sense and overcome them. I shall be your guide, your teacher, the light at the top of the stairs. Come, let us walk now." He was kind of corny, but at that age it sounded pretty cool to me.

* * *

That's how I won Dindo the Dawendi over. I beat the crap out of him, solved his riddle, threatened him with a grenade, and peed on his mound of dirt. From then on, we were pals. He followed me wherever I went: stateside, Europe, Africa. Always he lived in a

nearby mound, although I could never figure out how no one noticed, even when I was in the Navy and lived on Treasure Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay. It's an artificial island, so Dindo had to build his mound on the natural one (called Yerba Buena Island) that was attached to Treasure Island. Anyways, because of him, I've been able to keep a keen eye and nose on the lookout for strange trouble. Stranger-than-fiction trouble, you understand? That's how I got my lucky charm in finding and dealing with these beasties, because the keen eye and nose aren't mine. They're Dindo's.

Well, that's it for today. We can meet at Poor Richard's Cafe next week, if you wanna hear more yarns. I've got a case to work on now... see ya!

Tapus (The End) •

Story and illustration copyright ©1995 by Romeo Esparrago

(A fully illustrated version of this story is available on-line.)

Horror



DEAD K's

by Wayne Deeker

(Author's Note: Dead K's, an Australian taxi-driver's expression, refers to the kilometres travelled during a shift, often those between jobs, that do not receive any income. You might also call them empty miles. You'd want to minimise these.)

A noise from the busy footpath drew Bill's attention from his dog-eared paperback. He surveyed the street-scene before him, admiring the sunset hues reflected in the shop windows, but saw nothing except evening shoppers: young parents pushing strollers; a group of young women laughing in shorts and bikini-tops; an elderly man with a wide-brimmed straw hat, window shopping arm-in-arm with his wife; a queue of people at the autobank. Out of habit, Bill glanced in the rear-vision mirror, watching a slender man struggle towards him, half-dragging a large box. Might get a bit of work for a change, Bill thought, nothing but dead k's today.

The man wore light-blue motorcycle leathers, reinforced at the knees, elbows and hips; his partially open jacket revealed an olive business shirt and red tie beneath. He paused several times, placing the parcel down to adjust his grip, panting and wiping his forehead with a frayed handkerchief. As the man drew closer, Bill heard bells and the sound of new leather creaking: unscuffed red boots, buckled to the knees.

With a final heave and grunt, the man thrust his box towards the taxi's rear. Bill popped the trunk-switch, repeatedly tugging at the door handle. Must get that door fixed, he thought. Standing on the road behind the car, Bill met the man's eyes, and nodded. Bill squatted, taking the other side of the cardboard box, almost dropping it. "You got bricks in here, or something?"

The man grimaced as they lifted the box into the taxi. Bill returned to the driver's seat while his fare remained on the footpath, drawing a spiral notebook and a gold fountain-pen from inside his jacket, pouting slightly as he wrote. Then he spoke through the passenger window, holding the note lightly between his thumb and middle finger, a fake Rolex glittering under his cuff, "Do you know this address?"

He was pale, with fine, nearly delicate features; his sandy-blond hair was darker and clipped short at the back and sides, longer on top. Harmless enough, Bill thought, but he gives me the creeps.

The man, presenting a thin, slightly one-sided smile, seemed preoccupied, his opaque gray eyes darting around the interior of the cab. Bill took the paper, avoiding the man's fingers, and scanned the meticulous handwriting. "Yeah."

"Will you take this box there? I'll follow you on my bike in a minute."

Those eyes, Bill thought, and that voice. Shit.

The man almost skipped off, without waiting for Bill's reply. No worries, Bill thought, watching the man in the mirror. He flicked the meter on, looking over his shoulder for oncoming traffic, and paused for one final check of the rear-vision mirror, catching the man admiring his reflection wriggling in the shop-windows. He blew himself a kiss, then swaggered off.

Jeez, thought Bill.

* * *

Bill turned into the man's street, relieved the houses were clearly numbered. He counted down to the man's house, and turned in, the loose gravel driveway crunching beneath the tyres as he came to a stop; the headlights illuminated the right side of the house and garage. Single-storey red brick, perhaps twenty years old, he noted.

Well-maintained gardens framed the padlocked garage; large grevillea and banksia shrubs obstructed a view of the backyard. Bill sat a moment, and then turned on the dim interior light; the dashboard clock read eight-thirty. Waiting for the man, he drew out his paperback, glancing occasionally at the darkened house, not really listening to the constant taxi-radio chatter.

Bill looked up from reading: eight forty. Where the hell is he? It doesn't take fifteen minutes to get here. He glanced at the house, then into the rear-vision mirror, and over his shoulder into the street.

The taxi-radio's silence — a precursor to an announcement — instantly attracted Bill's notice. After a moment, the gravelly voice announced, "VH1-ED to all cars. Which car is waiting for a guy in the driveway of 26 Harrison Street, Campbell?"

"Tx-201, I'm waiting there. Been here fifteen minutes." Bill stared into the radio microphone.

"Well, go back and pick him up. His bike has broken down."

* * *

Slowly, Bill cruised along Brierly street, scrutinising each figure in the footpath's gloomy mustard light. Near the rank, Bill saw a peculiar orange stripe bobbing in the headlights. Must be his helmet, he thought. As he drew near, the stripe darted into the road. Bill stomped the brake-pedal, the tyres screeching. Jesus Christ! Stay on the goddamned path, dickhead. The taxi jerked to a stop in the centre of the road, locking Bill's seatbelt.

The man yanked open the car door, plopped into the seat with a huff, kicking the floor in front of him. "Fuckin' bike. Stupid fucking thing," he wailed, his hair dishevelled, cheeks grease-smudged. He slowly clenched and unclenched his gloved fist, taking half-hearted swipes at the helmet between his knees. He regarded Bill, his red-rimmed eyes wide, almost pleading, and sniffed: "Fucking stupid bike."

"What . . ."

"The stupid bloody thing broke down on me. I only bought it last fucking week." Hyperventilating, he scowled accusingly at Bill, his voice low, "I was spending six thousand dollars a year on taxis, so I decided to buy a bike and save some money. That was only last week. Last fucking week."

"So do you want to go home, get some parts for it, or what?"

"Home. Take me home," he whined, thumping the centre console.

Bill chuckled softly to himself, "Actually, I remember one time . . ."

The man looked up, noticing Bill's smile, and turned an outraged purple. Veins bulging on his neck, he shrieked, "It's not fucking funny. It is not fucking funny." The man focused on his hands, then on Bill again, "It's not fucking funny, you shit," he screeched, pounding the centre console. "Fucking taxi shitheads."

Looking forward, his smile gone, Bill stomped on the accelerator, swinging the car's rear in front of an oncoming car. The tyres squealed as he swerved, trying to avoid it. He sat for a long moment, shaken, and squinted into the rear-vision mirror. Watch the road, asshole! He watched the car's tail lights recede, and felt a cold gray stare centimetres from his face.

His passenger, shoulders twisted towards Bill, breathed slowly, evenly. He said nothing, his eyes wide, unblinking. Ten seconds, fifteen, twenty. A droplet of sweat slid down

Bill's spine.

Forcing calm, Bill turned his eyes to the taxi-meter: twenty-two dollars, not bad, he thought. The man followed Bill's glance, and, noting the meter, his unremitting gaze intensified. He mumbled, scowling, "Fucking bike. Fucking taxis. Fucking taxi drivers." He thumped the centre console, "Six thousand dollars a fucking year." He pulled closer to Bill, whispering hot, fast words against his ear. "Fucking taxis. Fucking taxi shitheads."

Reflective house-numbers whizzed past as Bill counted down to the man's house: eighty. . . seventy . . . fifty, forty eight . . . thirty six . . . thirty two, thirty. The man continued his frenzied mumbling. Bill turned sharply, skidded slightly on the gravel driveway, slamming the car into "park", throwing the man against the dashboard. "That'll be twenty-four forty, thanks."

The man silently studied Bill a long moment, his eyes lucid, and his voice calm once more. "Twenty-four forty; yeah, mate." He grabbed his helmet, and peered across the lawn to the front door, smiling slightly, "I've just gotta go inside and get more money." He scurried out of the car, leaving the door open. He swished through the dewy grass, looking back regularly over his shoulder at Bill as he approached the darkened house. On the doorstep he fumbled with the keys, then disappeared inside without turning on the lights.

Bill watched the door, squinting into the surrounding darkness and into the rear-vision mirror. Unconsciously, he fiddled with the headlight dimmer stalk: high, low, high, low. He turned up the taxi- radio chatter, glanced around again, and grabbed the pen from its holder, tapping a retreat on the steering wheel. Eight fifty: he revved the engine. Where the hell are you? Hurry up. Come on, come on, come on! He looked at the clock again: eight fifty two.

* * *

The man emerged from the house with a nylon athletics bag. He strode towards the car, eyes fixed on Bill, then flopped into the seat, sitting motionless, the bag across his knees. "Twenty-four forty, was it?" he asked, smirking.

Bill's answer was cut short by the man shoving his bag into Bill's left side. Still in his seatbelt, Bill thought he had been punched hard. There was only disbelief when he saw the long blade pulling bloody from his ribs. Christ! Shit . . .shit! Fucking seatbelt. Damn! Bill tugged at the handle, click, click . . . click, and threw his weight against the door. Open, damn you! Open! Click, click. The seatbelt held him.

Savouring his moment, the passenger whooped as he struck again. Bill screamed in pain, his face a question. Bill struggled a final time, activating the emergency radio switch on the floor, then slumped against the door.

"Fucking taxi pricks," the man giggled. "Fucking taxi pricks!" •

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Poetry

FITTING

by Paul Semel

I wonder if she wears it now
bought to wear at my graduation
while I sat, waiting
holding her keys like some old husband

it was after dinner
my first adult meal
since it ended with coffee
she said I needed shoes
couldn't graduate college
in a pair of ratty sneakers

maybe she didn't wear it
the day was cold and wet
not made for black tank tops
same color shorts
and while I crossed the stage
she was heading home

after that we rarely met
usually tense, never having coffee
and I really never noticed
her clothes •

Poem copyright © 1995 Paul Semel

Humor

AFTER BOB (AFTER YEATS)

by Margaret McCann

When you are old and grey and damp with peat
and braids abound from every aspect of your hair,
the stains you stamp upon each step of stair
from bags of candy tied about your feet.

Will give your sole strange shape, a sort of wreath,
as though you bobbed for apples as you climbed
and, fetching few, forsook the rest, inclined
to there abandon those refusing bite of teeth.

Then I, square peg with stare and quizzzy squint,
will twirl around in circles to consider, in imitation,
the nature of the roundness of that figure,
all braidy Bob and apple blot and candy print. •

Poem copyright ©1995 Margaret McCann.

About the Authors

Warren Blair ("The Milkman") is a published poet, essayist, and short story writer on Long Island (New York).

John Donald Carlucci ("Warm Water") is a writer and painter.

Wayne Deeker ("Dead K's") lives in Canberra, Australia, with his fiance, Kara-Mikal Burrowes, who is an American poet, and three tanks of fish and Ozzie-cat.

Romeo Esparrago (cover illustration; "Dindo the Dawendi") resides in the capital of California, fighting horizontal rain, extreme heat, and concrete-thick fog all at the same time. And yes, he graduated from Fremont High School, Class of '82, with Teri Hatcher.

Doug Houston (Assistant Editor) lives in New York City.

Biedermeir X. Leeuwenhoek (Technical Guru), who was recently discharged from the Elven Rest Home at Tooklithium, has opened Ye Olde Apple Newton Supply Shoppe at Moria Mall (Balrog Level) in Eregion, Eriador.

Andrew G. McCann (Editor, Publisher) is a writer and editor in New York.

Margaret McCann ("After Bob") is a painter in New England.

Paul Semel ("Fitting") recently got a buzz cut and a ring in his eyebrow because he's hoping to look "more dangerous." It's not working. But while he waits, he'll continue being the reviews editor of "huH," and a frequent contributor to "Wired," "Bikini," "Ray Gun," and a bunch of lit mags.

Ron Tedeschi (Illustration, "The Milkman") lives on Long Island, New York, and likes to experiment with the drawing programs in his wife's computer. When the Moon is right, chemistry happens. •

All right, folks, just scroll right back up. There's nothing to see down here.