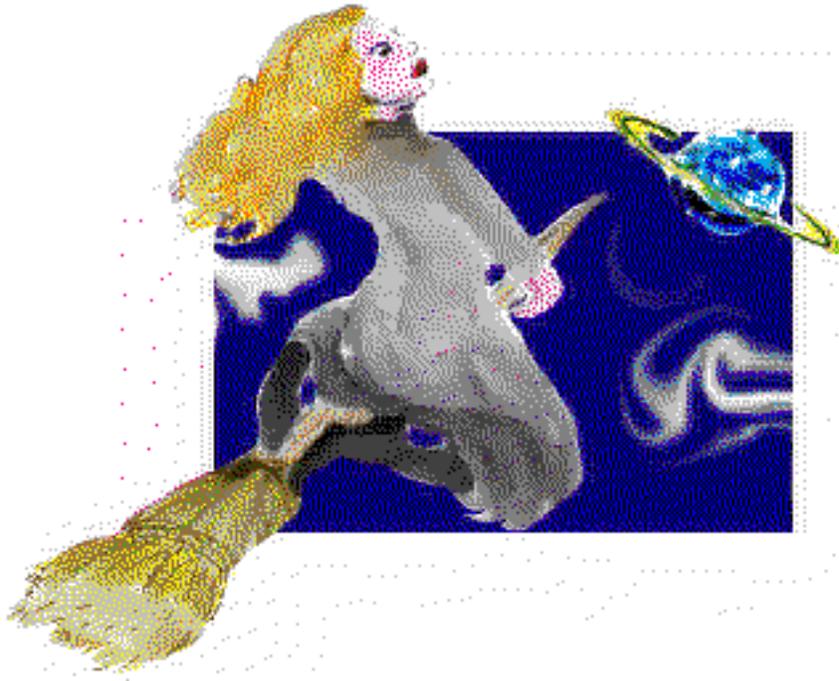


# *Planet Magazine #7*

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Wild SF, Fantasy, Horror, Humor, Poetry — Online™ Vol. 2.3 FREE!



**INSIDE THIS DARLING-OF-WALL-STREET ZINE:**

**Science Fiction by** Warren Blair, Jason Clark, Andrew G. McCann, Brad Stone, and s.c. virtues.

**Horror by** Jeff Turner.

**Poetry by** Kevin McAuley and David Hunter Sutherland. •

# Masthead

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Planet Magazine: "We Never Metaverse We Didn't Like"



Planet Magazine, Vol. 2, No. 3; September 1995 (this is the 7th issue)

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Romeo Esparrago (RomeDome@eworld.com)

Cover Title: "Betty Broom — alas, at last, a lass"

Tools: Mac Performa 578, Painter, Wacom ArtZ tablet, & lotsa cranberry juice.

## 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. And laffed. And 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. We guess that total circulation is something like 500 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 mainframe software manuals). Because this e-mag is free and operates on a budget of \$0.86 per annum, we can't afford to pay anything except the currency of free publicity and life-enhancing good vibes (of course, that and \$4.06 will get you a small House Fried Rice to go, but it's still a great leap forward 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 illustrations per story as separate, compressed, 16-color, 16-gray, or B&W pict files to PlanetMag@aol.com. We're open to cover ideas (holiday, seasonal, topical themes are best); query first.

## DISTRIBUTION SITES

**Planet** is distributed in three electronic versions — text-only (readable by Windows or Macintosh, using a word-processing program), Acrobat PDF (full-color version readable by Windows or Mac, using the free, downloadable Acrobat Reader), and DOCmaker (full-color version with sounds, readable by Mac only; needs no other software). Some of these files may be compressed with Stuffit (a .sit file); you'll need Stuffit Expander, or similar, to decompress them. This zine can be downloaded from the following sources, among others:

- The **America Online** Writer's Club Forum (keyword: WRITERS; the route is The Writer's Club: Writer's Club Libraries: Electronic Magazine Library), which carries all three versions. Also, AOL's Science Fiction & Fantasy Forum (keyword: SCIENCE FICTION; the path is Science Fiction & Fantasy: The Science Fiction Libraries: Member Fiction & Scripts Library). And in the Macworld software library.
- The **CompuServe** Science Fiction & Fantasy Forum (go: SFLIT; look in the Science Fiction literature library). This library carries only the text version.
- The **eWorld** SF, Fantasy & Horror Forum (comand-g: SF); the full path is Arts & Leisure Pavilion: Forums: Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror: Alexandria Restored: In Print. Also, Ziffnet's Software Center (command-g: ZIFF); the full path is Software Center from ZiffNet/Mac: Editor's Choice Library: Electronic Publications: Additional Publications.

- The **NYMUG BBS** (New York Mac Users Group) carries the DOCmaker and PDF versions in its Electronic Pubs folder.

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**

Composed on an Apple Quadra 605 using DOCmaker 4.1, ClarisWorks 4.0, Tex-Edit Plus 1.3.4, and Adobe Exchange 2.0. Text is 10 point Geneva and 12 point Helvetica; the logotypes are Times. Illustrations done in Color It! 3.0 and Painter. Every issue guaranteed treated with ChakraGard™. •

# Editorial & Letters

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Whither Outlook: Brilliant Editing, Low Humility, Very Windy

## ONCE MORE, WITH <envy> FEELINGS </envy>

We're taking this little moment here to tell readers that the off-Earth-based publishing company that now produces this "zine" is incorporating a new development into every issue of **Planet**. This innovation is based on HTML, the hypertext markup language that uses descriptive "tags" to define parts of a document being viewed by someone, for example, browsing the Galactic-Wide Web. Thus, if you'll pardon our further tutorial, by labeling a headline as follows — <bold>headline</bold> — it will most likely appear in bold lettering, regardless of the HTML-aware application being used by the viewer.

In contrast, our upgrade, rather than using mere descriptors, will tag document parts with instructions that produce true feelings in the reader! For instance: <interesting>Dear Readers:</interesting> should be a real attention-grabber at the start of an editorial. And how about <warm-fuzzy>Love, The Editorbot</warm-fuzzy> to end that same piece? Then there's <apathy>Dear Editor,</apathy> for a more "honed" letters section. And there's always <bong-rush>Dear Alien Space-Masters</bong-rush> when writing, once again, an e-plea to save our job.

The only kink left to work out is to determine the exact hardware/software configuration that will stimulate the actual emotions in the reader. We're probably looking at some kind of wires-running-from-behind-your-ears-to-the-back-of-your-PC sort of neural-implant-wetware/jacking-your-cranium-into-the-Net type of Vinge/Gibson/Stephensonian-what-have-you. Not to worry: those are the sort of details one leaves to the Microserf-morphing-code-jockey-hacker type of Coupland/Sterling/Levyesque what's-their-faces.

Meantime, please send all <sanguine>royalty checks</sanguine> from usage of my concepts to my pressurized underwater castle off Cape Fear.

<wistful>Yours Within the Law,</wistful>  
<respect>Andrew G. McCann, Editor-Construct v1.0a  
Planet Magazine, September 1995</respect>

## GUEST EDITORIAL: ABBREVIATION EXPLANATION

Last month, we served readers by offering up the Top 10 emoticons downloaded from AOL and their generally accepted definitions. Well, we received millions of e-letters in response, and many people pointed out that emoticons have actually been around for trillions of years. Seems the Glkj of the planet Sdkjl have developed a literature that consists entirely of smileys, winkies, frownies, and other e-symbols. It's apparently a far more concise and richer language than Chinese pictographs. Whatever. Below we offer the Top 10 "e-bbreiviations" as downloaded from AOL, and their generally accepted definitions!

### Top 10 E-bbreiviations

Abbrev.	Meaning
FWIW	Fudd: Wabbits Is Wascally
BTW	Ban The Web
TIA	Trouble In Archeron
IMHO	Imelda Marcos Has Odor-eaters
RTM	Revere The Machines
RTFM	Revere The Future Machines
LOL	Lothar, Our Leader
<g>	<the old gods yet live>
WYSIWYG	Welcome Yon Shrike Into Wherever You Go
ROTFL	Regardez! Omar takes French lessons

Special bonus: Five extra e-bbreiviations!

PS	PopSicle™
IMO	Imelda Marcos, Onward!
FYI	Furnish Your Interior
NGT	Nameless Gnawing Things
BLQ	Baxwin Lop Qet (seen on the Universal services)

**Best,  
Bidermeier van Leeuwonhoek  
Internet Guru and Minister-Without-Girlfriend**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor: Hiya! Got the copy of "Planet" and have read some...nice stuff! I just started reading the fiction, but found the letters section hilarious.

Later,

TC

via Sir John's Pub BBS

Dear Editor: I've enjoyed reading the copy of Planet I picked up at Compuserve. As a fellow writer on the net, I am e-mailing you to seek your help. Silly Little Troll is publishing my novel, "THE ENCHANTED STONE OF N'YORK," and I am in desperate need of reviewers. It is a most unusual fantasy quest novel set in real life, a tale of high magic in low places, the first chapter is available at <http://pobox.com/slt/> and the rest of the book can be ordered for US\$8. If you would be willing to review it, I'll be happy to send you a galley proof via E-Mail gratis. Thank you for both your time and your fine magazine.

Bruce Levine

[blevine@crl.com](mailto:blevine@crl.com)

P.S. Yes, I'm seeking honest reviews. If you think it sucks, you're more than welcome to publish your opinion.

[As we told Bruce, Planet doesn't publish reviews, but we do publish letters. So point your browsers toward Bruce's Web site, if you're so inclined. Also, Bruce later noted that the offer of a free galley for review is only to people who write for legit zines, which knocks Planet out of consideration, in any case.]

Dear Editor: I laffed & laffed & laffed as I usually do thru your editorial page (especially the Top 10 Emoticons)! That hurt my stomach laffing so much! I loved Jason Clark's extremely short story! I really liked S. Joseph's "Plains of Meer" illo! TuKew! Wow that was creepy! If only I wrote at 12 (as well as now) as well as Drew Shelton at his age! Semel's "Untitled" sure brought back memories but it was when I was 28!

RD

via eWorld

## LETTERS TO THE JACKSONS

Dear Luscious: About two months ago, I was taken aboard a flying craft and mated with a sloe-eyed (albeit buglike) alien. Now she won't return my calls. Women! They're all the same.

Wistfully,

Jess Mylukk

[down@heels.com](mailto:down@heels.com)

**Dear Lucius:** So, are UFOs real? Hey, you could call the Air Force and ask, y'know. The number IS in the phone book. Meantime, send away for my free, sixty-hour taped lecture, titled "Why UFOs Are Boring," for only \$44.49!

Skeptically,

I. Ownlee Seemkrazy

[nimrod@octopus\\_garden.org](mailto:nimrod@octopus_garden.org)

**Dear Reggie:** Thank god I've finally quit therapy! It was quite a breakthrough after 15 years, I can tell you. I'm not even sure how it happened, but I just realized that I was cured! Fixed! And I went into (what was to be) my final appointment, and I looked him square in the shoulder and said, "I don't need you, you little, little, man!" Then I just pushed him down on the floor, walked out, and slammed the door. Talk about closure!

Anyway, do you mind if I crash on your couch for a while? I'm a little strapped for cash.

Later,

Ed N. Ferruin

[Philosopher & Lover](#)

**Dear Joe:** Why do people always want the air-conditioner on? I like it natural: windows open, breeze flowin' in. A/C's too cold, makes you sick. Better to sweat a bit, even if it's really hot. No one used to have a/c years ago — heck, when I was a kid, it used to get so hot that people would drop like flies. Old Man Zithers down at the soda stand, why he just burst right into flame one August afternoon. What was worse, that flame itself caught fire. And it eventually swept like an orange gale to all the houses on the street, all the trees in the park, all the cities in the land — until, only one charred hour later, the Earth itself became unstable and broke apart at the molecular level. Hey, took a coupla-few years to rebuild from that! Maybe you remember; it was in all the papers.

That'll Be \$18,

"Tacks" E. Kabb

[Somewhere Along the Scenic Route](#)

**Dear Steve:** Each day, I never really, quite, actually feel good about myself until I've taken off at least one person's head — thereby elevating myself, in more than one respect!

You Moron,

N. E. Bossatmyfirm

[Hans@throat.com](mailto:Hans@throat.com)

**Dear Former President Andrew:** All my life I've been labeled, categorized — stuck in some box, put up on some shelf, and forgotten. It's not right, and it makes me angry. But what can I do? After all, I am just a lowly **green** Power Ranger doll.

Mournfully,

(Call me) "Buddy"

[Collecting Dust at Woolworth's](#)

**Dear Fred:** I'd like to mention that I'm an aspiring writer but have been unable to complete a story as per my intentions. The difficulty is as follows: Whenever I introduce a character into one of my tales, he or she is quickly shot, plunged into a vat of boiling copper, sliced into bacon strips by a planetary terraforming device, or other such gruesome happenstance. This always happens within a paragraph or so. I should note, additionally-wise, that those few times that one of my characters has NOT been snuffed has been because he or she quickly left the story — e.g., moved out of the fictional town, broke up with the protagonist, or other such event that made them no longer in the literary "spotlight," as it were. Even worse, some of my stories have progressed for quite a number of paragraphs before I realize that the main character isn't even a minor part of the story's plot, as he/she should be. Soon after, of course, this main character dies horribly.

Now please don't think I'm lazy or lack commitment, but these continual "false starts" are beginning to really check my coat, so to speak. I'm wondering if I should just give up. It's hard enough being married, the father of six, and holding down three jobs, but when my freelance work keeps going right in the crapper, well... I think you might know how I feel.

So, my question is this: Do you know of any characters who aren't being used in anybody's stories, and who I could have? I'm hoping these other characters might be able to enter one of my stories and either save the protagonist before he/she gets wiped out or perhaps have some super powers that enable them to withstand any attack, even from a hypo-glazed-proton bomb (featured in my newest story, titled "Oh, Man! Watch Out for That Huge Bomb!")?

Typing with Crossed Fingers,

[Rea Maynder](#)

[Backbin@blankpage.com](mailto:Backbin@blankpage.com)

P.S. Just thought, as a part-time writing coach, that I'd pass on my three favorite transitions to use When You're In A Fix:

- I'm aware I'm not making any sense, but...
- So, what, if anything, does this all mean?
- Now comes the crunch: Is there a point to be found here?

**Dear Mahalia:** I'm a pretty old guy, and I've got no message. So can I run for president?

Best regards, I suppose,

[Ken D. Daite](#)

[Not@work.gov](mailto:Not@work.gov)

**Dear Jesse:** You can catch more flies with honey. Hence, we recommend the establishment of a United Nations Bee-Keeping Force.

Non-interferingly,

[The Hive Mind of Greater Arcturus](#)

[we@apiary.org](mailto:we@apiary.org)

**Dear Action:** Well, I see you've been contacted by those bumblebees in Greater Arcturus.

Well, let me tell you that they can't be trusted to give proper military advice! If you need help with any sort of security or defense, please contact us at Spy-der-Enemy Inc.; we have a long history in this area, stretching back to my mother and her mother before her. Come into our Web page at <http://www.parlor.com/>, where you'll find some interesting threads on the subject.

Enticingly,

[Commander One-Eye](#)

[helob\\_newcirith@harad.gov](mailto:helob_newcirith@harad.gov)

**Dear Stonewall:** Here's my down-home, personal guide to "Makin' it on Wall Street, in 4 Easy-as-Pie Steps": 1) Have a lot of wampum to start with. 2) Hire lightnin'-quick, experienced folks. 3) Know a lot of well-placed investment professionals whom you met in biz school. 4) Be a regular Einstein. Hope ya'll like it, ya'll. I'm also available for fee-driven, friendly-like consultations.

Warmest regards,

[Bill M. Offen](#)

[Hey@aboy.org](mailto:Hey@aboy.org)

**Dear Samuel L.:** Just so you know, that previous letter was no kind of offer at all. Here's what WE are practically GIVING away: For only \$39.95, we can show you how to become a Rock Star AND lose weight at the same time! You get your very own FREE Web page, too! Here's our THREE-point program: A. Start smoking. B. Start drinking every day. C. Cut a hit-laden demo (note: you must supply the fully produced demo of original, No. 1 hits to us). Then, we guarantee you FABULOUS relative wealth and fame! Plane crash included!!

Act now,

[Bill Kew](#)

[future@risk.org](mailto:future@risk.org)

**Dear Bubbles:** I'd like to tell you about how we in the Mars Militia feel about your "zine," but I'm off for a round of nine on the slopes of The Face. You know what they say: All work and no play makes Jack a dull Blay.\* In any case, rest assured that I'm behind your zine 110 percent. Privately, of course.

With a stiff swing,

[Hank R. Chief](#)

[Sargeant@arms.mil](mailto:Sargeant@arms.mil)

[\* Editor's note: As the reader may know, the Blay were meter-length, centipedal silicate lifeforms who spent their entire 1,000-year life spans as bottom-feeders in the frigid estuaries and tidal pools of the Nitrogen Sea on Hibernius VIII. The Blay, although possessing some degree of intelligence, moved at almost a glacial pace; tragically, their entire race was killed off in a single week, when the pioneer human ice-miners arrived in the Hibernius system and mistakenly used the apparently inert Blay as roof tiles for their small city of ammonium storage sheds. That system of warehouses, by the way, still remains in use today, as the sturdy little Blay bodies bravely safeguard Ammonium Corp.'s (sponsor of this month's Planet Magazine!) valuable Earth-bound ore from the fierce, native Acid Typhoons.]

**Dear Jillsdottir:** What I'd like to do is date at least three different women per week, yet have absolutely no financial or emotional obligations to them. The kicker is, this isn't something I want, it's something I need! Is that so wrong? Should I be judged so harshly for being "who I am"? Does it really make me a "bad man"?!?

Hopefully,

[Luffem N. Leevim](#)

[WhereU@man.org](mailto:WhereU@man.org)

**Dear Lisa-Marie:** I've been a lifeguard for a long time. I've seen a lot of joy, I've seen a lot of tragedy. I've seen a lot of swimsuits. I can tell you I've seen things that would turn your hair blonde.

Sunnily,

[Jay L. Bate](#)

(no computer)

P.S. I'm really looking forward to WaterWorld Two! •

# Science Fiction

---

## THE NOVEL

by Jason Clark

Sergeant John Diles stepped out of his car onto the overgrown curb. His legs were quickly covered knee-deep in bright yellow dandelions. Diles was more than a little bit nervous. Even after 10 years with the station he hadn't ever had to deal with a disappearance of this sort. The small white house visible over the lawn was the home of the missing man, Nick Shwarts. Diles fought his way through the lawn to the front door.

The white front door, old paint peeling, swung open as he pushed on it. Diles drew his gun as the door came fully open. He didn't expect anyone inside, since the occupant had disappeared, but it always paid to be cautious.

Nick Shwarts' name was the only solid fact the neighbors around really agreed on about him. Rumors abounded about what he did inside his little shack of a house, but no real facts could be collected. Shwarts kept completely to himself; it wasn't even known if he had a job, and what it was if he did. He never caused any trouble, though. And now, he had simply vanished.

Diles figured that the man had been gone for a long time to have the neighbors call in. He may have even been gone for months. The house displayed this, for the lights were all out, presumably because the electric bill hadn't been paid in a while. A fine thin coating of dust lay over everything. Picking up the phone, Diles heard no dial-tone. "Won't be able to call in from here," thought Diles.

Looking around the room, Diles saw a bathroom off to the right and a small kitchen through a doorway straight ahead. In the corner to the left of the kitchen door there was a small desk on which sat a worn typewriter. On the floor, piled by the old desk were two-inch binders, rising like a tower to the ceiling. Diles walked over and ran a finger down the spines of the binders. They were labeled in volume numbers. The top one was labeled in neat print, "Volume 1," the bottom one, "Volume 53." Each binder was thoroughly stuffed. It dawned on Diles that these were all one consecutive work. The elusive Shwarts was a writer, and a prolific one at that.

Standing on his tip-toes, Diles pulled the first binder off the top. He walked over to the cot just a few feet away and holstered his gun. Seated on the end of the bed, he opened the dark blue cover. The first page was blank, so he turned to the next. On the top was the word, "Introduction." Below, Diles began to read:

"As of today, May 28, 1992, I begin my life's work. This and the ensuing volumes are a saga, the product of my soul and mind. I hope that this is worth the effort, but if it wasn't, I cannot tell. This is my life, embodied in ink and paper.

Nick Shwartz"

Diles turned the page and began to read the novel, for which Shwartz had apparently worked so hard. Diles figured that if he read the work, he may gain some clue as to what happened to the man. "I'll read a little bit," he thought. "Maybe someone will come out and finish it all later."

It began simply enough. The words formed a vivid picture of a small planet in the outer reaches of the galaxy. It was the seat of power, the governing capitol for a galaxy aflame with war.

Diles stopped for a moment at the end of the first paragraph and sighed heavily. The story was very well written; Diles could feel it tugging at him already. A little voice down inside him said, " You love this! This is marvelous!" Diles tried to shake off the feeling of wonder that covered him, but it wouldn't budge. He couldn't understand it, because he didn't normally read very much, only police reports and the paper. But this, somehow, was different from every other novel he had tried — unsuccessfully — to read.

Diles plunged into the next paragraph and was quickly engulfed in the story. The characters came alive before him. The alien worlds and sensations became real, there for him to explore. He was unaware of the passing of the afternoon to evening as he turned page after page hungrily. When finally it was too dark to read, he went out to the car and brought in his flashlight and some extra batteries. Tossing himself and his cargo onto the bed he turned on the light and found his place again about a third of the way through the first binder.

\* \* \*

**Time continued to pass** without Diles noticing. Morning dawned and he was halfway through the second binder. Flipping off the light absently, Diles went to the kitchen, feeling rather hungry. There he found a box of stale crackers and returned to his reading with them. Munching slowly, he blazed to the end of the binder and set it neatly on the first. He grabbed the third and began it without breaking stride.

By dusk, the third through seventh binders lay on the floor with the first two. Diles was frantically reading the eighth when a knock echoed through the house.

Diles looked up at the door, his eyes blurring as his conscious mind began slowly to work again. He reluctantly pulled himself to standing and answered the door. An officer from the station stood there, hand on his pistol butt.

"Hello, Sergeant Diles. We were a little worried when you didn't report in." The man's hand fell from his gun.

"I'm conducting a thorough investigation," Diles answered, all too quickly.

"Well, could we send some help down?"

"No thanks. What's your name?"

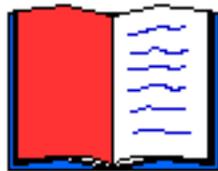
"Detective Birkholder, sir."

"Well, Mr. Birkholder, would you like to leave?"

"Uh, yeah." The detective turned and began to leave.

Diles slammed the door and hurried back to the cot. During the night, volumes eight through 14 ended up on the pile, set there neatly before he hurried on to the next binder. No one interrupted during the next day, so he was at 21 when he had to turn on the light.

His eyes were bloodshot and his body was worn ragged from lack of sleep, but still he didn't stop. His mind was completely oblivious to the physical world. Only the limits of his eye speed were noticed as he tried to read faster and faster. The plot was thicker and more realistic than anything Diles had ever imagined, though his mind didn't take the time to register that fact. Nine volumes passed onto the pile as he pushed himself on while dawn shone through the narrow front window.



\* \* \*

**He continued his reading** for another day and a half, when, as he read volume 53, another knock came at the door. Diles cursed as he looked from book to door, book to door. In the end he decided to ignore the increasingly insistent knocking at the door. They can wait, his mind told him. You're almost there, only twenty more pages! Hurry!

For a few moments the knocking ceased, only to be replaced with the hollow thudding of a police door ram. Diles was on the last page as the police flooded in. His eyes took in the last paragraph, the last sentence, the last word — and then it happened.

Before the policemen's eyes, Diles vanished. They all blinked, but it was no illusion. Diles was gone, in the same manner as the book's author.

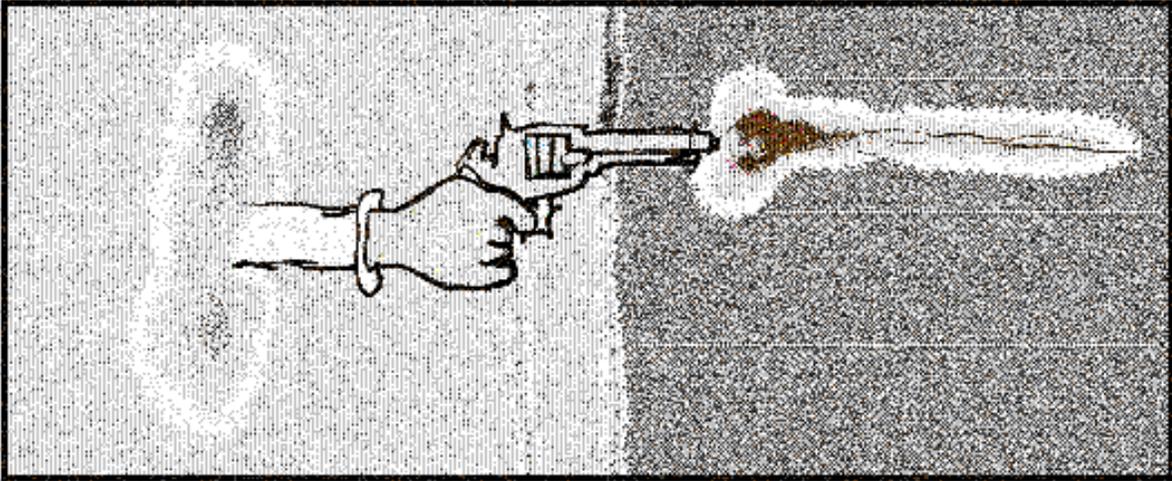
The men looked the house over thoroughly, then left two men on guard. The others went back to the station, leaving the two to watch in the near-empty room. They looked around and ended up after some time examining the binders.

"What do you think they are?" asked one man.

"I know one way to find out," said the other. He pulled out the binder labeled "Volume 1." Holding it between them, they began to read the introduction.

"As of today.... •

*Story copyright © 1995 Jason Clark.*



## THE TIME BURGLAR

by Brad Stone

Pad, pad, pad, pad, pad, pad....

Footsteps. I hear them in a dream, rushing from behind, growing quicker and louder until...

"Hello, Berman!"

Someone grabs me from behind, throws me from the chair across a darkened room. I tumble over the marble floor, sleep yanked from my blinking eyes.

There's an unfamiliar voice, yelling. "Richard Berman. Born, August 8th, 1966. Address, 25 East Overlook, apartment 4G!"

A foot finds my abdomen, sinks so hard into my stomach that my spine pops. I turn over, rolling away as I turn and desperately try to —

"Eyes: green! Height: six-foot-one"! He's on top of me, takes my hair and slams my head against the floor.

I hear a crack. Then a blood-rushing headache.

"Expiration date: July 1995." He's laughing now, puts his knee to my chest and his face into mine. "You won't need to worry about renewing!" he yells.

I can't see anything, just darkness, and a strange smell, like fruit. Now he's whispering: "You don't know who I am, eh Berman? I know who you are: a stupid guard who has made

things very difficult." He turns, points upwards and through the grinding pain I can see it — a glass partition, and behind it, the ancient Greek jewels I've been paid to protect every night for the last decade.

So it finally hits me: a burglar. Ten eventless years at the Museum of Natural Artifacts, and when it finally happens, I'm sleeping. Bad luck. But he's shaking his finger, pointing at me.

"Do you know who I am"? There's rage in his voice as he presses hard against me. "Do you know what you're dealing with?"

Then he straightens, takes something from a bag. I try to sit up and get a solid knee to the chin.

"Don't even." He's serious, panting hard." You've made everything complicated. I don't like to do this twice."

Now he's pointing something at me, and in the thin light of the far hallway, I can make out the ominous shadow of a gun.

"Wa... Wait," I'm pleading, hands in the air. "I don't know you. I have a wife and kids — "

"One kid" he says sharply. "I've seen the pictures, Berman."

Then he aims. I can't think, now nothing makes sense as the air explodes....

And he falls.

I blink. There's silence, a few nervous footsteps, and then the rattling, reassuring voice of Duckworth — good old Jimmy Duckworth — his gun held unsteadily in front of him.

\* \* \*

**We bring the body to the security office**, turn on the lights. Jimmy brings me an ice pack, a chair, and calls the police.

Then we sit there, looking at him.

"You know him?" he asks.

I study his face, shake my head. "Never in my life," I stutter.

"He knew you," says Jimmy, pointing. "I caught the tale end of his rant. He wanted you, buddy." I look closer. Black pants and vest. Strange texture, it's rubbery. A dark, foreign face, unremarkable, save for a deep scar on his right cheek, shaped like a crescent moon. I've never met this man.

I lift my hand, it's still shaking hard and I shudder as it all starts to hit me.

"Easy," says Jimmy, putting his hand on my shoulder.

Looking up at his older, calmer face, I manage a "thank-you." He's been with the museum for thirty-five years, but he moved like a twenty year-old. "I was sleeping," I say, shaking my head.

Jimmy grins like it's nothing. "I don't pack a gun for nothing," he winks. There are sirens in the background, then voices. They're getting louder, quicker, like footsteps in a dream.

"It's over," Jimmy says, rubbing my shoulder.

I believe him.

\* \* \*

Pad, pad, pad, pad, pad, pad....

"One kid. I've seen the pictures, Berman."

I wake, panting. It was a nightmare and Shelley is turning over, moaning.

I wipe the sweat from my face and sit up. Two weeks of paid vacation and still a man with a crescent moon on his right cheek haunts my dreams. He knew too much and it doesn't make sense.

"Shelley," I say, nudging her. "Honey...."

She groans, turns to me. "Whazzit?"

"The photo albums — none missing, right?"

She turns, pushes her dark, curly locks away from her eyes and pleads with me, "Ricky... we've been through this."

"But I have to go through it again. He knew so much..." I get up, start to pace the floor of our bedroom. "About Abby, my... birthday, our address...."

"Expiration date: July, 1997."

She sits up, speaks softly in a worried tone. "You've had a terrible experience. You can't expect it all to make sense."

I sigh. She's right of course, but I can't stop from leaning over my small, mahogany night table. Opening the drawer, I withdraw my wallet, sit on the bed and turn it over in my

hands. I haven't lost it in years.

The pictures of Abby and Shelley are all recent. My driver's license is there, in front, smiling through a leather-boxed window. Expiration date: July, 1997. No, it doesn't make sense.

"I think its time," Shelley says, falling back onto the pillows.

"For what?" I ask.

"For you to go back. To work."

\* \* \*

"Nice to have you back, buddy." It's Jimmy in the security office, with a warm handshake and a smile as we're punching in for the night.

"Jimmy." The smiling old face, reassuring. "You saved my life."

"Forget it." He waves me off. "You would've done the same thing for me."

He walks me down the echoing marble floor of the east wing to Greece, and together we gaze past the glass partition at the treasures behind it. A golden goblet. Bracelets, dotted with the sculpted visages of gods. Sparkling silver necklaces.

And in the middle, the museum's prize, the Seleucid Fire Diamond, surrounded by a sphere of glass, suspended by a thin wire. A treasure from another millenium.

"Suppose he was after that?" I point.

"That's what the cops were saying," Jimmy answers. "They scoped the place pretty good."

I turn to look at my old friend. "Find anything?"

He shrugs. "They didn't tell me," he says. "It must have been fascinating, because they all wanted a look at the corpse."

We're silent for a second, then I point to the diamond. "If you stare at it long enough, you can see a flame inside."

"Strange stuff," Jimmy says. He's looking at me, concerned, then pulls a pistol from his vest and offers it to me. "You want this, Rick?"

I shake my head, stare at the diamond.

He thinks for a second, then chuckles. "Sweet dreams."

\* \* \*

Pad, pad, pad, pad, pad, pad....

Two weeks later, I'm at work, perched in a chair and still can't shake the running feet from my dreams.

Pad, pad, pad...

But —

Pad, pad...

I'm not —

Pad....

— sleeping.

I turn, too late, a fist catches me in the chin. I tumble backwards and above me is a towering shadow. It's lunging....

"Jimmy!" I yell. But there's a hand on my mouth, and a thundering voice: "Shut up!" It's familiar, I've heard it in nightmares of a scar-faced man. He comes at me, punching.

This time I'm ready, I throw my weight against him. We tumble along the cold, marble floor, towards the dim light of the hallway. A second later and I'm on top, I see the face, and on the right cheek, a crescent-moon scar.

I gasp.

Then this corpse — this man who should be dead — delivers a swift kick to the region between my legs. I groan, roll over. He stands up, produces a gun and points it. "Don't make me do this again," he says.

Half-paralyzed by fear, confusion like fog before my eyes, I put my hands slowly into the air as he aims....

But he's backing away, and in the thin light he's shaking. On his wounded face there's an unmistakable expression of... confusion.

And suddenly he turns, bends down to grab something lying on the floor, and then disappears into the darkness.

\* \* \*

"Jimmy!" I rush into ancient Rome, hand on my aching groin. Jimmy jumps to his feet, startled.

"What?" he yells, and I can see his eyes, heavy with sleep.

I grab his shoulders. "He's back."

Jimmy looks at me incredulously. "Who?"

"The burglar!" I show him the red, throbbing wound on my head.

"Oh god," he says, and I lead him back.

But there's nothing. No trace of anyone. Jimmy's breathing hard, and I notice a look, curiosity mixed with doubt.

"I swear he was here."

Jimmy puts his hands on my shoulder. "Your burglar died four weeks ago, Rick. He's ashes by now. It's over."

"Then how the hell did I get this?" I say, pointing to my head. "You think I fell?" I breathe hard.

He looks at me, sadly.

I see what he's getting at, and over the throb of an impending headache, I'm unable to object.

"You're dreaming, buddy."

"I was awake," I say grimly.

Looking over at the fire diamond, he shrugs. "Why doesn't the burglar go for anything? I mean, except for you?"

He has a point, but only for a second. But there's the clear memory of a large man, retreating down the hall stopping only to stoop and pick up....

My hand flashes to my back pocket. I don't feel it.

My wallet.

It's gone.

\* \* \*

"Will you at least see someone?" We're in bed, and Shelley's rubbing my head with an ice pack. She's dressed for work, I'm undressed to sleep.

Bad schedules.

"A doctor?"

"A... therapist," she whispers.

"Why would I make this up? A man with a scar on his right cheek attacked me. It's not something I'd want to imagine."

"But Ricky," she says softly. "How could it be the same guy?"

I don't answer, just shake my head. "He's dead, so it couldn't be, right?"

Shelley's eyes brighten.

"His brother?" I ask incredulously. "It seems far-fetched. And the same scar...."

"Maybe," Shelley says firmly, putting her delicate hand into mine. "Maybe you might have been —"

I cross my arms. "What? Sleeping?"

She pulls back. "Isn't it a possibility?" Her lips curl and she looks away.

I shake my head. "Unlikely. Since I haven't been sleeping at all, these days."

We're quiet.

"What about my wallet?" I ask, staring ahead. "My wallet is gone, you know. It's too late to make sense, but now he finally has it."

There's no answer and I turn to look at Shelley. My wife of sixteen years has a single tear, sneaking its way down her pale cheek.

\* \* \*

**I'm at work, thinking it over.** The air is quiet and cold, and if I think hard I can hear his voice.

"Hello, Berman!"

A man with a scar on his right cheek comes to rob, he knows my whole life. He dies. So it ends.

"Who are you?"

But then he returns and knows nothing. He takes my wallet, doesn't even move for the fire diamond. Now, I'm no scientist, but there's something odd about two events....

*Crack.*

...that should be...

*Schreeeeek.*

...reversed.

My head turns towards the sound, coming from the glass partition. And through the dull light I see him — a burglar. Fitted in a black, rubbery suit, back turned. A tall, powerful figure. Familiar.

He's doing something to the glass.

My heart does its best impression of an arrest. I squelch it, slide my hand to my nightstick and wrap shaking fingers around the handle.

I stand up quietly.

It's hard to move silently on a marble floor, but I manage it. There's a light noise, like a drill, which I can barely perceive over the thumping of my heart, and then I'm right under him.

He's hovering in the air. Defying gravity. I don't think about it, poise the stick, take aim at his back, take a deep breath....

And he turns, drill in hand, too quick — I jump back, reflexively.

"What!" he thunders, leaping off the glass. "It's you?"

There's a second to act, I move breathlessly, bringing the nightstick towards him in a cool arc. He ducks and it smashes against the partition. The wall shatters, sending pieces of glass gliding across the floor.

We both look down, then back at each other.

"Who are you?" I scream.

He says nothing, comes at me with his elbow. I try to move but he's too fast, catches me in the head. Then I'm on my back and he's kicking me.

"Going!... to Have!... to Learn!... to Stay!... Out!... of my Way!" He's screaming at me, digging into my side with a metal-tipped boot. "Don't make me do it again," he says, leaning over me. "I've wasted enough bullets on you."

There's hazy light from the hallway, and in it I see his eyes; they're dark and maddening. A square chin, a trembling upper lip.

And a smooth right cheek. Scarless.

"I'm going to go back," he's saying, arms pinning my chest," and take your fucking diamond...."

My left hand slips away, unobserved, and feels for something digging into my side. A shard of glass, from the shattered partition.

"...And if you disrupt me again," he spits, "you'll be the first human being in history to die twice. That's an honor I am very happy to bestow — "

With all the fury I can muster, I scream, bringing the glass sharply into his face. He yells, lunges backwards with a hand covering his cheek.

I'm on my feet, diving for my nightstick, lying two yards away.

I spin, stick in hand, and he's standing straight, pain in his distorted face. He's in the light and moves his hand, growling, and reveals a deep, red gash on his right cheek. Shaped like a crescent moon.

He points, shakes an unsteady finger. "We're not done." Then turns, sprints down the hallway.

I follow, screaming for Jimmy. But the burglar is too quick, dashing into Egypt, past Palestine and into the Ottoman.

Then suddenly I'm chasing nothing and stop to listen. There's deathly quiet in the museum, broken only by the faint cries of Jimmy, screaming my name.

The burglar's vanished, like he didn't belong in the first place. And as I turn to leave I notice a smell....

like... lemons.

\* \* \*

I know what it is that makes little kids scared of the dark.

Figured it out on the way home. By myself, in the blackness of an early morning. My eleventh-grade physics teacher would be proud.

So I tell Shirley. It seems like a good idea at the time. I'm not thinking straight.

"He's from the future," I say, and she immediately starts to cry. "He comes back to steal the fire diamond. I get in the way. He comes back again, and again. But each attempt, he travels farther back in time."

"What?" she sobs, shaking her hands. "Ricky, what? What are you talking about?"

I'm too excited to do the smart thing and shut up. "His last time is my first. Jimmy stops him."

Shirley tries to say something, moves her mouth silently.

"It's good news," I plead, holding her. "He's dead. We just have to stop what ever he did before...."

"No," she says, pounding my chest. "Ricky, oh god."

"Don't you see?" I say. "A scar, then a wound? He knows me, then steals my wallet?"

Shirly turns away, but I can hear her, sniffing. And behind it, a voice in my head, repeating:

*"I've wasted enough bullets on you."*

Effect, then cause.

*"You'll be the first human being in history to die twice. That's an honor I'd be more than happy to bestow — "*

Shirley is still weeping, pleading, shoving at me the name and number of some shrink. So I don't tell her.

I don't tell her I just realized I have a rendezvous with death.

\* \* \*

I wait, wide-eyed, for a time burglar. Two weeks slip by and he doesn't show. I spend them pacing, night-stick in hand, Jimmy's pistol in my pocket. Another man would defy fate, run away.

But I have one last meeting with a smooth-cheeked friend. He's never seen me before in his life.

But I know all about him.

He comes, finally, with the paaaad... paaaad... paaaad... of tippy-toes. I slip surreptitiously into the darkness.

He glides up to the glass partition, stands for a long moment, staring deeply into the diamond. Waiting, perhaps looking for a flame. Then he slips on gloves. Bends and does something to his boots — and rises into the air.

His hand disappears, emerges with the drill. I don't give him the chance.

"What year?" I ask, stepping into the thin light.

His head turns like a rocket, eyes burning as they catch the ominous shadow of a gun. "What —"

"What year did you come from," I say evenly, shrugging. "When in the future?"

He sinks to the ground, exhaling.

"I wouldn't move," I say, grinning. "You'd be the first human in history to die twice. And that's an honor I'm very happy to bestow."

He looks at me, slowly. Hands rise into the air.

\* \* \*

**And in a flash they come together**, too quick, he presses something on one finger and disappears into a blinding, horrific light.

And when I force my eyes open he's gone. Unbelievable. Back to his own time. There's that sickly lemon smell, and a faint wisp of lingering smoke.

But it's not over. Can't be. Fate won't be cheated.

I let myself breathe and hear a click.

And spin around....

*Blam.* A thundering gunshot echoes in the gallery.

I see a gun, hanging. And an arm attached to it. Emerging from a barely perceptible circle. Suspended in thin air.

*Blam.*

Connected to nothing. Emerging from... time. If they can do that, we've got no chance.

*Blam.*

Then I look down. Where my right knee should be, there's a gnarled mixture of pant and blood. There's a hole in my chest, too. And something near my wrist is trying to get my attention.

*Blam.*

Pain hits me like the heat from a furnace, as I heave towards the marble floor.

\* \* \*

**The first thing I see in the hospital** is pale, beautiful Shelley, leaning over, graying locks pouring onto my chest. I'm in too much pain....

"Oh Ricky," she whispers.

"I'm here."

She puts her face next to mine and I feel the wetness of her tears. "The police will find your burglar," she says. "They've promised me."

I start to shake my head, but stop. Its not worth it. "They won't," is all I manage.

"Shhh. Get some sleep."

But I'm fighting sleep. Always have been. "I want to see Jimmy."

Her eyes suddenly lower. Lips curl. I know this woman too well.

"Is Jimmy — "

Now she's crying again, eyes swollen. "They found you together," she whispers. "He was gone before they got there."

Jimmy. He tried to save me. But his gun was in my hand, full of bullets.

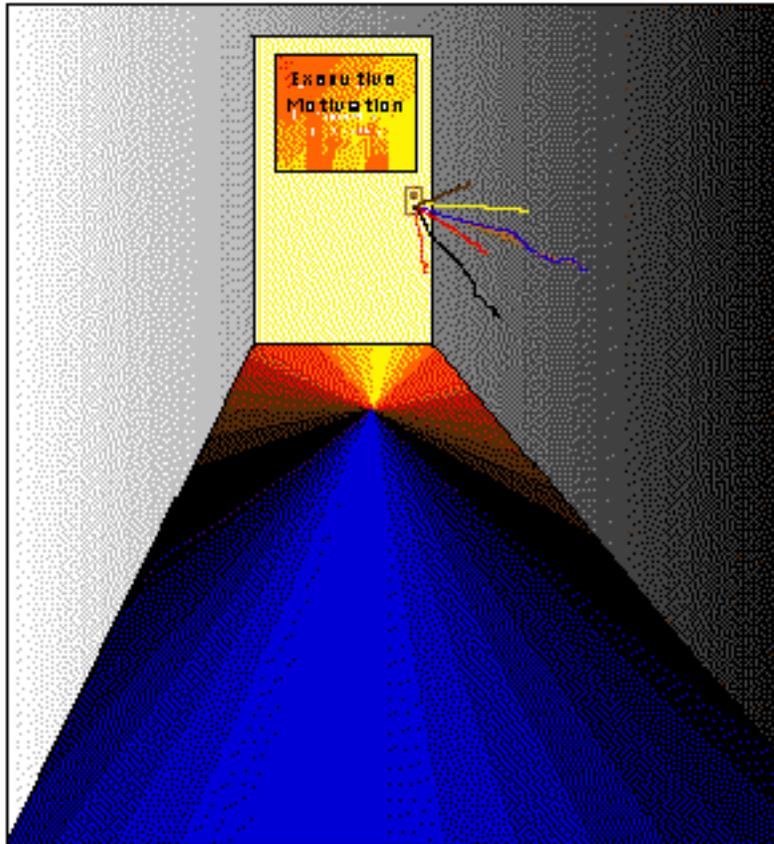
My chest feels like putty. "The diamond?"

"It was still there," Shelley says, sniffing. "The police think the burglar will try again. So they're going to wait for him." She leans over. "I don't want you ever going back...."

I hold her hand, but stop talking. I think of Jimmy, trying to save me. And the logic of a time burglar, evading detection by travelling backwards through time. And two men, killing each other, months apart. Fate....

People keep telling me to get some sleep, but I can't. I just can't. •

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## EXECUTIVE MOTIVATION

by Warren Blair

My door says Gerald Barnett, Ph.D., Motivational Consultant. I teach people how to be less or more passive or aggressive, as their need would indicate, and I motivate them to get that dream job, big sales appointment — whatever. Most of my clients are young executive types; so when he walked in, I wasn't surprised.

He had the typical look, about 30-35, tall (a little taller than most guys that didn't play basketball — that should have given me a hint, maybe), rugged good looks, etc., etc.

He was exceedingly polite in his greeting to me, and I sized him up quickly as needing to be de-passified. I was quite unprepared for his request, however.

"I wish to meet and speak with the President," he said.

"Which president?," I replied (you know, like the president of IBM, GM, something like that).

"THE President," he retorted.

"The President of the United States?"

"Exactly."

"But why come to me for that?"

"Because I understand that you are the best, and what I wish to tell him is for his ears only. So I cannot afford to have to speak to all the secretaries, assistants, and the like, trying to get through to him. Everyone would insist on knowing my purpose, and I cannot reveal it."

I wasn't sure that this was something I wanted to tackle as, to be quite honest, I did not know what this fellow's intentions might be.

"I really cannot help you, sir," I said, "as your success might mean disaster for myself and the government. I do not know who you are or, no offense meant, what type of person you are."

"I assure you, Dr. Barnett, that my intentions are completely harmless but of the utmost importance. Perhaps one million dollars" — which he produced on the spot! — "would help to change your mind?"

It was then that I said one of the most amazing things I can ever remember myself saying.

"I'm sorry, but I would still have to know your reason, and if I find that it is indeed worthwhile, and you can convince me of your character, I will keep the information in confidence and do my best to assist you. If not, then I will have to ask that you leave."

At that, he reached up to scratch the top of his head, and his problem became almost immediately apparent to me.

\* \* \*

"Before you ever do that again," I said, "we have much to discuss, and you to learn."

Convinced of his character, and the importance of his quest (and, I must admit, the million dollars did not influence me either way), I set about planning our course of action.

"Getting through some of the initial buffers should be simple with some aggressive assertive training," I said. "As we get higher on the Executive Branch ladder, I can call in some favors, and I have certain contacts that can be of assistance. As your financial reserves seem to be virtually unlimited, I can assure you that you will attain your goal of speaking to the President.

"However, I must stress that you should not do that again until you are actually speaking with the President himself, and not even then without prior warning. You must build up to things gradually before making such a move. And I cannot emphasize enough that you must be alone with him before you do it (and I could say this knowing firsthand the result)."

"The next few seconds after you have done it will be the most critical. Even with prior warning, he will be stunned when you remove the head mask. The reddish-orange skin might not frighten him terribly, but the third eye and mandibles almost certainly will." •

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*Illustration copyright ©1995 Ron Tedeschi.*

## THE SIGN

by s.c. virtues

Dawn broke over the archaeological dig, staining the mobile homes with wondrous shades of warm red. The campers were arranged in a semicircle around the south side of the site, and within each vehicle the day's activities had already begun. On the parched river bed around them, the scientists had found evidence that a great city lay buried under the tons of sand.

The first excavation team of the day walked out across the site towards the pit, which had yielded a significant surprise late the day before.

That pit, number 183 in their notebooks, had produced a variety of exotic metals, and toward the end of the day, a single, huge piece of metal began to reveal itself. If the current theories concerning the nature of the city were even partially correct, then it never had the technology to produce such substances. In light of this new evidence, it would seem that there had been a severe underestimation of the society that had lived there. It was now their duty to re-evaluate the industries of the city, and that great slab of paradoxical metal seemed likely to help.

\* \* \*

The sheet of metal was thin, but each of its other dimensions was about three feet long, and there were indications that there wasn't much of it left to uncover. With the anticipation almost tangible in the air, the scientists set to work.... Surely it would be bared before the afternoon heat assaulted them.

The expedition mastermind, Enerich Tharan, climbed down into the pit and ran his hands over the metal. It had been riddled by millions of barely visible holes, and was still heavily caked with dirt which, oddly enough, was greenish on one side of the slab and perfectly ordinary on the other. In case the artifact would not be fully unearthed that day, the dirt had to stay where it was to protect the surface from the brutal midday temperatures and the evening deluges.

Enerich longed to remove the dirt and gaze upon the face of the highly speculative artifact, and knew it was only a matter of time before he could do so. He called down the rest of the team to resume the excavation.

Everyone seemed to have his own idea concerning the nature of the strange relic. Enerich personally believed that there would be some sort of message inscribed upon the green-caked side of the thing. Few believed him, but since it was his discovery, they tolerated his outlandish theories. Most of the others thought it was part of some larger structure, even lacking any evidence of organized building nearby. They blamed the

disorder on the unknown but violent fate which befell the city ages ago. The true site of the city, they claimed, was miles away: And they were certain that their digging was only uncovering the assorted debris which had washed out of the city during the cataclysm.

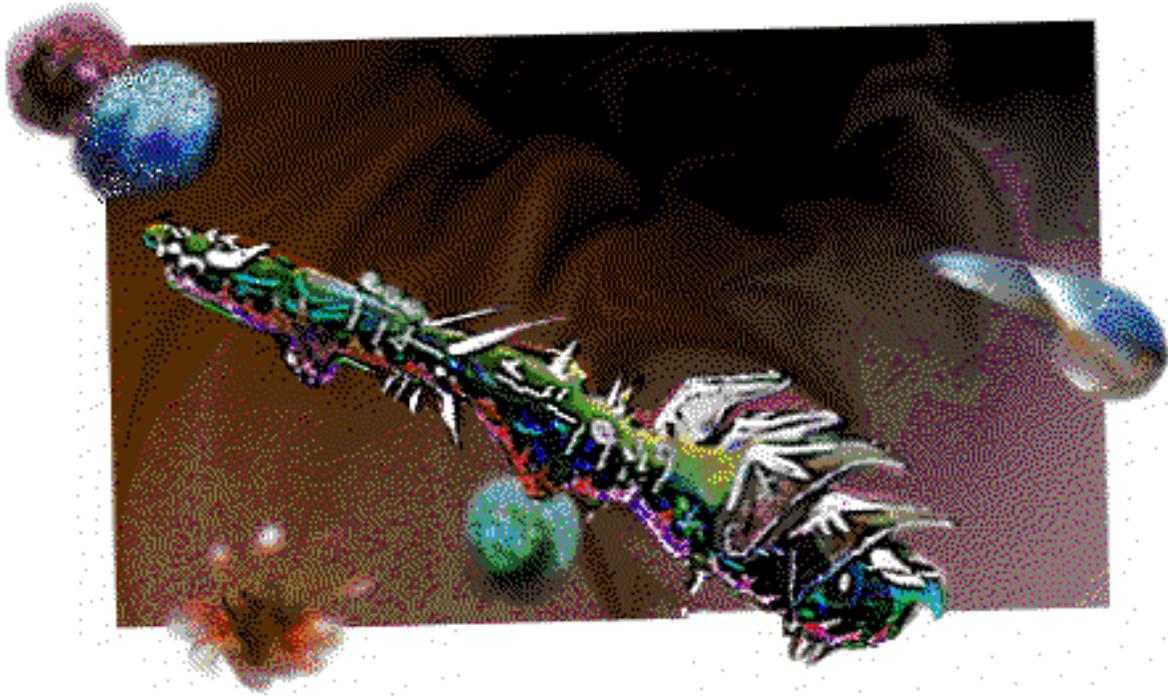
\* \* \*

**Regardless of their many conflicting opinions**, the men worked together with an amazing efficiency, and the slab was removed completely by about midday. The entire piece measured three feet by five feet and weighed far less than had been expected, such that it only took one man at each corner to carefully pull the artifact from its resting place. The sense of expectancy was so great that they almost didn't feel the horrible, sweltering heat as they laid the artifact, green face upwards, on the scrubby grass. With painstaking care the men began to brush away the green-tinged dirt from its surface. Samples of the dirt were bagged for later analysis. After a grueling half-hour under the tormenting sun, the entire face had been exposed.

Enerich had been correct. Large characters had been affixed to the metal with a series of rivets. Here and there, flecks of green paint still clung to the ferrous surface. Part of the relic had been destroyed by corrosion, but from the looks of the simple pattern of lettering that survived, it was obvious that the artifact was not a work of art. It was a sign.

Having intensively studied the language of the inscriptions, Enerich flipped through his memory and tried to come up with a translation of them. Here was the biggest mystery yet... the message was nonsense! After fumbling through his notes and texts, he had still made no progress. It seemed to be a random string of three words, and there were no corroded spaces between them that could account for their discontinuity. Perhaps the recognized system of transliteration needed revision? Certainly it did, because the phrase "New Jersey Turnpike" was simply incoherent. •

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## SIDETRACKED

by Andrew G. McCann

Hey, buddy, buy me a boilemaker and I'll tell you the wildest story you'll ever hear. Nah, it's not gruesome; horrific, perhaps. Anyway, you won't believe it....

Ahhhh. Great, thanks.

My name? Uh, call me Icarus. I've got just as much sense, probably less. Anyway, here's my story: As far back as I can remember, I'd hated my father — a drunk, a screamer, a liar, a thief, and a goon. Sometimes Mom wouldn't come home, but that's because the jerk liked to use his fists. And not just on her. A real bastard. In fact, he sold everything we owned, just to feed his rotten habit. Yeah, I know, you're crying. But until a few years ago, I had never met anyone who had grown up in anything like the kind of chaos I saw. Anyway, somehow, I got through. I learned to lay low, keep quiet, and do the job at hand. After high school, I went to Lake Erie Institute of Technology on a scholarship....

What's that? You've never heard of LEIT? No, of course not. Well, picture a mixture of MIT and a community college. Bear with me.

Anyway, when I graduated from LEIT with an electrical engineering degree, I decided to stay put in the area. Why not? Not too many people, none of them stay too long, lots of green grass and potted trees, and far enough away from the dreary slums of Elyria, where I was

born. That was my goal, see? To be near people but to not actually know any of 'em. I'd never had any real friends — that is, people I'd talk to outside of the classroom or lab. And girlfriends didn't stick around too long — maybe a couple of dates — they clued in pretty quickly that I was "difficult," to say the least.

Then there was Alice. A teacher's assistant — smart, beautiful brown eyes, pixie haircut. We hit it off. I started to feel really alive. But then, on our twelfth date, we went bar-hopping, and by the end of the night I was in full-rant. Don't even remember about what. We were in the Rathskellar, a black-painted, stale-beer-soaked student hangout. She kept playing that big hit by The Rabbits; y'know, "My Dad." Tipped me over the edge. And, man, I went off. Spooked her. She'd had a rough childhood, too, which is why we understood each other. However, she didn't like tirades. Hated 'em. So she ran out of the bar. And that was it. Nothing I did made a difference: red roses, white roses, boxes of candy, handwritten love letters, peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches cut into heart shapes. Whatever. All I got was one letter, saying she had had enough of my "type." So, all I was left with was work. And booze. But that mostly came later.

I threw myself into my job as resident computer geek for the Journalism Department. And it wasn't long before my thorough, deadly competent style landed me a cushy job at the University's Physics Lab, where I became computer-keeper for the undergrads — not unlike that guy behind the chicken wire who hands you your jock strap on the first day of gym class. Wasn't too difficult. Like most serious research universities, we used only the standard Franklin mainframes — easy to use, good technical support service. I was relatively happy, but I felt unchallenged.

So, when I was offered a job as computer maintenance engineer for a new lab being built on-campus by the War Department, well, I jumped at it. By that point, I was so excited I wasn't even thinking of Alice, at least consciously.

Now, it turned out this new lab was running a project called "Looking-Glass," which was designed with alien technology to....

Now wait! Don't leave. Hold on; it'll make sense pretty soon. That's right: It's just a story. And would you mind laying another one of those boilermakers on me? Ahhhh, great. Thanks.

\* \* \*

**So, this top-secret project** was using honest-to-god alien gimmickry to actually peer back into time! Now, I didn't believe it, either, but I was intrigued. So I set about learning everything I could. It was a fairly well-established rumor that the U.S. had been in contact with the aliens since President Steinberg's day....

What? No, Steinberg wasn't president of LEIT. Look, let's just say the U.S. had been in contact with aliens since the 1950s. Okay?

Okay. Now, the lab director never admitted this alien connection to me, but I had glimpsed the computers in the back room — where I wasn't officially allowed to go — and they were beyond anything I'd ever seen, even in the research journals: three large, dark-brown, featureless rhomboids, bisected by a cobalt-blue rod. I had no idea how these things worked, but work they did, once properly interfaced with human technology.

The gearheads from WD finally got everything up and running, and my job was to help with the daily experiments. I'd come in and tweak what needed tweaking, re-solder here and there, print out the logs, shut down the system at night — what have you. After a while, by just hanging out in the background and observing, I got pretty familiar with the experimental procedures. And I found out that the scientists were actually dealing with a number of glitches in Project Looking-Glass, although nobody really confided much in me — the glorified flunky.

There was another problem, too, but it was personal. Y'see, the WD decided to bring in a real military guy, General Lewis, to oversee the lab's operations and try to get the project back on track. The lab desperately needed to show the WD some progress if it wanted to survive the pending round of budget cuts in Congress, which were going to affect even "black" programs like ours.

Turned out that Lewis didn't like civilians — probably saw us all as closet commies — and I was the only one around. He kept after me, double-checking my work, finding the tiniest flaw, tripping me up, and writing it all down; that way, he would have everything nicely documented when it was time to fire me. I knew that if I was fired from such a sensitive job, the University wouldn't place me anywhere else; that would look very bad on my record. I tried to transfer out, but the lab director said that would be a security risk, and the General later wrote up my request as "suspicious behavior."

Slowly, very slowly, I grew to hate General Lewis, his arrogance, his condescension, his murder by a thousand cuts. So I started to do little things to annoy him, things that couldn't necessarily be traced to me: losing files not under my watch, garbling the workers' schedules. What can I say? In my own way, I was a hothead at times.

\* \* \*

**Meanwhile, I had heard** that the experimental glitches were still not being solved. As one of the senior assistants, Jack, confided to me, there was a fundamental problem with looking into the past. You see, when they used the Viewer, a probe that was like a software waldo for the mind — something like "telepresence" — it would somehow "interfere" with the local environment of whatever part of the past they were looking at. But that's all he told me; no specifics. At the time, I couldn't figure out why they didn't bring in the aliens to trouble-shoot the project. I believe now that the whole project was a secret not only from the public but also from the aliens. I think we had secretly modified equipment that they had given us for some other purposes. In fact, I feel we were doing something that they had forbidden in some way — like a kid playing with his father's matches. But who the hell knows?

Anyway, I couldn't find out much more at that point, because I was finally fired. Well that's not the term they used — "dismissed," they said. Anyway, with the increasing problems at the lab — the funding for the experiment, that is, not my little flea-bite pranks — it seemed that old brass-balls Lewis was finally able to convince Washington that my level of security clearance not only wasn't appropriate but also shouldn't be raised. Plus, getting rid of me would help trim the budget. What a prick.

Nonetheless, I still had two weeks to get revenge on the dear old General....

What? Why didn't they boot me out the same day? Hey, it wasn't like working on Wall Street. This was a military operation, after all, and that means lots of paperwork and procedures.

So, anyway, a plan began to form in my desperate imagination.

Huh? No, no. My "tall tale," as you call it, does go somewhere. Yeah, humor me. And could you please snag me another of those boilermakers?

Ahhhhh, great. Thanks.

\* \* \*

**So, I thought maybe**, if I could just get an hour's access to the Viewer, I could go back and see if I couldn't maybe, uh, nudge things in a different direction and thereby keep my job. Yeah, I know, I know, it's a crazy idea, but remember that I wasn't thinking too clearly. I'd already lost Alice, and then my job went, and I just didn't care anymore. Actually, at first I thought about going back and somehow killing my father — a painless form of suicide. But what I really wanted, I realized, was to hurt the general, and hurt him real bad.

It wasn't hard to get into the Viewer room. After all, I was the joker setting up the schedules, and I just made sure to accidentally leave an hour where no shifts overlapped. Furthermore, I had procured a master key months before in the confusion of the early experiments. Another thing in my favor was that the Viewer was user-friendly, as they had modified it so that the Vice President himself could get a hands-on demo, once all the bugs were worked out. They thought that would help in the looming congressional budget battles.

Uh, by the way, could I bother you for another boilermaker?

Ah, great.

It happened one Thursday night. My plan was pretty sketchy: The truth is, I didn't know what either me or the Viewer were capable of. All I did know, which I learned from the personnel files, was that General Lewis had been born at home on April 4, 1900, in Boston. So, I had one hour between when the late-day technician, Ted, left and the

overnight guy, Gary, came in. Once Ted left, and I heard his car roar away, I dashed down the dimmed corridors to the Viewer lab. My heart was flip-flopping and my hands were sweaty as I fumbled to unlock the door. Once inside the small room, I sat at the Viewer console, amid the racks of blinking CPUs, and set the controls for Date, Time of Day, Latitude/Longitude, and Map Location — I told you it was simple.

The lights were low and the computers were nearly silent as I put on the Tele-Goggles and leaned back in the padded leather chair. For a moment, nothing occurred.

Suddenly, my awareness was sucked forward, I mean backwards, through a long stretch of years by an unbelievable temporal undertow. I felt like an abominable arrow through time, a prickly probe shooting through a twisted, multicolored universe of inhuman shapes and monstrous catacombs that branched off to Lord-knows-where.

Then, it stopped.

I was there. At first, everything looked very thick, like peering through a greasy concave lens. I thought it wasn't working. But my vision sharpened all at once, and I seemed to be standing in an old-fashioned, but otherwise unremarkable, nursery. I could still feel my body back in the lab, although distantly, and I used the hand controls on my chair to pan left, then right. Then I saw it: General Lewis's crib. Slowly, I crawled forward, stopped, and pointed my vision downward. A sleeping baby. So innocent, so young.

What the hell was I doing? What had I been thinking? Was I going to kill a baby? Break its arm, warn it not to mess with me a lifetime later? Then I realized that, even if I wanted to bring harm to this child, how would I do it? All I had was sight; I had no arms, no means of interacting with the environment except as a localized, invisible "presence." I began laughing with relief, knowing that I could just "walk away" from the whole situation. Take off the headset. Shut down the Viewer. Leave the lab. Just move on with my life.

Then I saw a movement to the side of me inside the nursery! And then I made the biggest mistake in my life, perhaps the biggest mistake anyone has ever made.

Sorry, I have to collect myself for a moment here. It's hard to tell this story. No, not because I'm drunk. But I could really use one more boilermaker, if you don't mind.

Ah, me. Thanks.

\* \* \*

**As I was saying, someone had come upstairs** and entered the nursery without my hearing them; the Viewer only had visual connections, hence its name. Now, I should have perhaps moved aside or just gone back to my time. But I forgot that I couldn't actually be seen by anyone in the past. So I ran.

I ran!

And I ran right into a conflagration. I couldn't have known beforehand, since details about the Viewer were always highly classified, but "running" while using the Viewer no doubt had been strictly forbidden. It was dangerous enough just moving slowly, but fast-forwarding was disastrous. Why? Well, for some reason known only to the aliens, and perhaps one day by our physicists, the Viewer creates a disturbance in the past at the nuclear level that is self-correcting, but only as long as one moves gingerly. Thus, when I ran through that nursery doorway, I warped the local reality frame beyond its atomic limit. I saw bright columns of what must have been super-heated flames shoot out from my awareness in all directions. For the briefest moment, I saw that antique hallway — its beige flopped wallpaper, framed pictures, gas lamps, wooden bannister — blossom into a fireball, followed immediately by what must have been an enormous explosion that blasted me right back through time.

I woke up hours later, on my back, in a walk-in linen closet in the University's Nursing Education building. Oh, it was the same room, all right, but everything in it was different. Instead of racks of computers, there were shelves of neatly folded comforters. And now, here I am, years later, still without a job, bumming drinks in a college bar.

\* \* \*

**Did I ever get into trouble?** What? Of course not! I'll never go to jail — a psych ward, maybe — but I'll never be punished officially. General Lewis, for one, is not around to complain.

Did I ever get back with Alice? What are you talking about? Have you understood nothing? There never was an Alice! Not now, anyway, and believe me I've searched everywhere for her analogue. Look, do you ever remember reading in your history books about the city of Boston being leveled at the turn of the century? No, of course not. But, you know, there are things in your books that I had never heard about, never dreamed of. Yes, great things. But terrible things, too. Many, many terrible things. Oh, what a mess I've made of things: Who would have imagined the awful consequences from that firestorm? How I've cheated you all!

But wait, wait. Maybe you know. You look like you could be a computer major. Are there any projects at the university involving strange technology? Anything you've heard? Maybe something to do with aliens? Anything that could help me to fix things?

Hey, don't leave now. Buy me another boilermaker, will ya? Hey, I need it. Hey!

OK, fine, fine. Walk away, walk away! Leave me, just like the others.

It doesn't matter. •

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Illustration copyright ©1995 Romeo Esparrago.*

# Horror

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## BOGEYMAN

by Jeff Turner

### *MY JOURNAL ENTRIES*

**JULY 24, 1995 — 12:30 A.M.** This is my first journal entry in approximately six years. I'm not sure what is going on, but I think it might be happening again. First, let me give you some information about myself. I'm male, twenty-seven years old, and I've been out of the mental institution for seven years now. My name is David Kever. I live in the Big Apple, New York City, and have a good job as a sales consultant at an advertising company. I've decided that if it's going to start again, I should document it.

This is the story so far. The nightmares began when I was around eight. I couldn't remember them at first, but I do remember waking up screaming, "The man in the closet!" My parents would try to comfort me, but to no avail. After about three weeks of these nightmares, my parents decided to take me to a child psychologist. He asked the standard questions about if I had seen anything on TV or perhaps read something about a man in a closet. I told him I hadn't. He gave my mom some pills to give to me before I went to bed every night. The nightmares ceased for about a week and a half. Then I had another

nightmare. I remember this one, though. I remember every detail to this day, and until the day I die.

I had just fallen asleep when I heard a noise coming from my closet. I opened my eyes and looked at my closet from across the room. There was a very dim light showing through the crack between the door and the floor. Just enough light to see the shadow of someone standing behind the door. I screamed, but no sound came out. The door slowly opened, but then the light disappeared. I was in darkness and my closet door had just opened on its own.

I quickly grasped Teddy, my teddy bear, and reached to turn on the light. I flipped the switch to turn on the light, and there he... it was. I will never forget the way he looked, or looked at me. His face was pale, no, white, utterly white. His face must have been at least two feet long, and that is not an exaggeration. His nose was long and pointy, his blue hair a foot high in a sort of style where the hair on the side of his head was swept up and turned into a giant curl on top. His eyes were red in the middle and blue on the side. The thing that I remember the clearest was his maniacal grin. It must have taken up half his face. His teeth were inches long and sharp. Then it spoke.

"Davie...," it said in its deep, scratchy voice. "You're not scared, are you? Teddy will protect you, right?"

He grabbed Teddy, and that's when I saw his hand. It was white just like his face and had long slender fingers with about two inches of white nail at the end of them. He pulled Teddy close to his face... and opened his mouth so wide that his eyes and chin could not be seen. All I could see was his blue hair and giant mouth. He threw Teddy in his mouth and closed it. When his face was visible again, it wasn't his. It was a distorted version of Teddy's, except in the basic design, the big hair, the large mouth, etc.

This would be enough to make any well-adjusted adult lose it. Imagine what it did to an eight-year-old kid! I screamed, loud. The next thing I know my parents are hugging me and telling me that everything was going to be alright.

But as they were hugging me I could see Teddy sitting on my table, right by the lamp. He now had red and blue eyes.

\* \* \*

**I just had occasional nightmares for awhile.** I decided that this thing needed a name, so I named it after every child's fear, the Bogeyman. It got worse again when I was ten. I dreamt that I had heard a noise in my closet and ran out of the room to my parents' room. Between our rooms was a bathroom. When I passed the bathroom I felt an eerie dread and suddenly stopped moving. I was still running, but in place. I was slowly being pulled into the bathroom by an unknown force. I looked into the bathroom but saw nothing. Just as I entered the bathroom I would wake up, in the bathroom, screaming. We went to another psychologist with the same results. More questions, more pills, no solution. A month later the dreams started again. Always exactly the same, until I was fourteen.

I had just had my fourteenth birthday two days ago and was happy that I seemed to be growing up. I hadn't dreamt of Bogeyman in almost two weeks and was very happy about it. Unfortunately it wasn't to last. I dreamt the same thing I always did, except for the end. At the end when I looked into the bathroom, I saw it again. I saw the Bogeyman. He grabbed me, took one of his nails and ripped into my cheek. Blood started to come out of the wound and trickle down my nose. He then threw me out of the bathroom and against the window opposite the bathroom. It broke and I crashed out of the second story window and onto the ground below. My parents came running out after me and called the ambulance.

That's when I entered the mental institution. My parents told me that there were doctors there that could help me. When they brought me in after the accident I was near hysteria. Doctors looked at my scarred back (it took thirty stitches for them to get my back sewn up after I had hit the window and fallen to the ground). I had broken my arm. They also studied the scratch on my cheek and couldn't figure out how I got that since I fell out of the window back-first. The doctors said that I had some deep-rooted anger towards myself, and the reason I "invented" this Bogeyman was to punish myself. The doctors in the mental institution took care of me for the rest of my childhood.

As I said, I was released when I was twenty-one and everything was going great... until tonight. I dreamt of... it... again. Bogeyman appeared to me above my bed, and tried to grab me. I woke up screaming for the first time in over ten years. It might be happening again. I know I sound crazy, and I might be, but it feels real, damn real.

\* \* \*

**JULY 29, 1995 — 5:30 P.M.** I feel like I'm going crazy. Over the past five days I've watched myself very closely to make sure that I don't lose it. So far, I've had dreams that the Bogeyman was looking at me from in the TV, in the computer, and I swear on my life that I saw him out of the corner of my eye when I was driving home from work. Am I losing it?

\* \* \*

**JULY 30, 1995 — 11:48 P.M.** I just woke up from the worst dream to date, I thought it had killed me. One of two things are happening: Either I've totally lost my mind, which means that this Bogeyman stuff is only in my head, or it is real and this is really happening. The truly scary thing is, if Bogeyman can do this to one person, he can do it to another and another. For everyone's sake, I hope that this is only in my mind, because if it isn't... you could be next.... •

*Story copyright ©1995 Jeff Turner*

# Poetry

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## DETACHING

by Kevin McAuley

I am wheeling the dead woman upright  
In her iron death-cart. She is  
Strapped in and her eyes do not shake.  
They said I could use the grave  
Beside the red and yellow poppies,  
But I am color blind and flowers are  
confusing.

The mourners never saw her before in their  
Lives. They are foreigners with nothing  
Better to do. They walk stoop-shouldered  
Around us, murmuring a chant in a language  
Constructed around a myth about three  
Hérons and a scotchbread which are transformed  
By a clock with divine mental powers into  
Flying castles and a woman with a  
Magic ring around her ankle.

The mourners moan and cry and sprinkle her  
With dark grass and twigs and burn  
A roll of philosophical incantations.  
Nothing they do consoles me. I would  
Rather be alone with the dead than learn  
One more odd thing about their cold  
existence. •

*Poem copyright ©1995 Kevin McAuley.*

## A MONODY ON MARS

by David Hunter Sutherland

Images of Venus, writhing in her sea,  
sunlit specimens un-breathing,  
while the fisherman baits a picture  
whose artist lies nascent in dreams.  
(Because there is a lake, a breeze, a setting sun...)

And, so it is for Mars — whose disillusioned self  
sits fetid in his waste,  
red hands — white sands,  
fissure trapped islands of eyes...  
in a large sense searching,  
(should even this escape him),  
there is a world, his star, our universe superimposing  
this ratio superior of  
brutal half-truths turned law,  
icons seething in his net as  
your quantum gesture flips  
baited on its back,  
sun-baked to submission,  
answering death.  
(should even this elude you),  
There is an ocean, and a bigger fish to catch. •

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# About the Authors

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**Warren Blair** ("Executive Motivation"), author of "The Milkman" (see Planet #5), is a published poet and short story writer residing on Long Island in New York. (KeyedUp@eworld.com)

**Jason Clark** ("The Novel") Jason Clark is a high school senior at Santiam Christian High. He is currently working on a first draft of a fantasy novel. (JDaystrom@aol.com)

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**s.c. virtues** ("The Sign") has had over 200 poems, stories, and illustrations published in small presses since 1986. He is currently a software engineer at Komodoware, working on bizarre SF arcade games for Windows. (ScV2@aol.com)

Krazy Kloud says, "We am fine."