


ESTRONOMICON

FANTASY ♦ SCIENCE FICTION ♦ HORROR

Issue 5 September 2006



Artwork

by Alan M. Clark
& Marilyn Flynn

**The Bringing
Of The Word**
by Bob Lock

Even now, in its dormant state, it was aware. It felt the great solar winds buffet the micro-meteor on which it rode ...

Distant
by Paul Ray

The Vessel
by Mark E. Deloy ⁷³



ESTRONOMICON
The Official SD eZine

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Published by
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Edited by
Steve Upham

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Cover Artwork

'I Love An Astronaut'
© Marilyn Flynn
1998

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Born Lucky?

by Steve Upham

Sometimes life can be difficult. When things don't go according to plan, or the unexpected happens, how do you cope? Are you one of those people who gets all stressed out and falls to pieces at the first sign of trouble? Or are you one of the lucky ones who can take the challenge head-on and win?!

The reason for this topic is that I've been hearing a fair amount of woes from many people lately. Life has been testing us it seems. Everything from creative dry-spells to negative feedback to computer troubles (and don't even get me started on that one as I'm having major hassle myself at the moment!)

So what's the best way to deal with times like this? I guess everyone has a different way of tackling their problems so I'd be interested to hear how each of you manage during the tough times. Do you grit your teeth and battle through, hoping you make it out the other end in one piece? Or do you take a break, go onto something else then come back to it later with a fresh mind? Just curious that's all. Get in touch with your thoughts on this subject anyway.

I have to admit that life has been pretty good to me so far this year, apart from the usual severe lack of time to work on all my projects of course! A few exciting yet unexpected opportunities have presented themselves, which is always nice. But it hasn't been without a share of annoying hurdles to overcome. I'm lucky that I've managed to get through them all so far though.

My grandmother used to say to me "*It's better to be born lucky than rich*" and that's always stuck in my mind. Probably because I wasn't born rich (and never will be!) but guess I've had more than my fair share of luck over the years. I've always been thankful for that.

Some may say that there's no such thing as luck. That you make your own destiny. And for the most part I believe that's true. If you don't make the effort yourself then no-one else will do it for you. Life is what you make it. But why do some people seem to get more '*lucky breaks*' than others? Why do some breeze effortlessly through life while others work hard and get nowhere? Makes you wonder doesn't it?!

Anyway, enough of my mindless ramblings for now. Catch you later.

The Bringing Of The Word

by Bob Lock

Even now, in its dormant state, it was aware. It felt the great solar winds buffet the micro-meteor on which it rode. Great waves of plasma bathed it, nourished it, as finally the great voyage was almost over. The energy absorbed by the tiny seed as its path crossed the system's star's outer corona was enough to tease it into germination and would lead to its whole reason for existing.

To bring The Word.

Of all the sentient beings that existed within the universe, it was the most benign of creatures, and the oldest. Born within the unimaginable chaos of the universe's birth it had been given the most precious of tasks; to bring The Word to all corners of the void; to answer the question most asked by every sentient being... why are we here?

The seed knew...

Landfall, and the micro-meteor ploughed deep within the regolith of the small planetoid and the seed was planted.

Eons passed while the tiny creature set down roots; roots so small that hardly any damage was done to the dusty carapace that served as the planetoid's soil. It sought out the essence it needed to complete its germination; its intrusion was almost on the molecular level. Deep within its being it knew that in the profundity of the small celestial body's core there laid the catalyst needed for its emergence... water.

Closer and closer the minuscule threads that served as roots weaved their way towards their goal and the seed prepared itself for flowering and its mission in life, to telepathically broadcast the secret it knew.

It had travelled vast distances and had 'heard' many voices during its voyage, however, of its own kind there had been pitifully few moments of contact. Perhaps the universe was too big, their species too small and the labour of love too demanding, but it would continue.

After its transmission of The Word the seed would self-pollinate and its

off-spring would spread. They would catch solar winds once more, snaring rides on comets, meteors... anything that would transport them to other galaxies, other worlds, and other beings that would benefit from understanding the reason why.

During its germination period the seed became aware of voices again. In the beginning they were faint and the seed knew they were not from its own species, however, it was content to know that the voices came from sentient beings; beings that would rejoice in The Word.

The seed struggled harder; it would not fail.

The day of flowering arrived and a bud, invisible to the naked eye, struggled through the sharp fragments of soil that tore into the soft flesh of the flower's protective covering. This was the seed's most vulnerable time. Whilst it could withstand the harsh radiation, extremes of heat and cold in its dormant state, when flowering it was at its most delicate.

Its life-span was almost over; it would flower, broadcast its message, spill its seed... and die.

Finally the last molecules of soil fell away and the opening flower tasted the freedom above the dusty surface. One by one the delicate petals opened and the flower's head turned slowly towards the source of the voices it had detected.

It was ready to give its message, to bring enlightenment to this far corner of the spiral arm in which it had found itself.

A swift shadow spread over the tiny flower and it hesitated in its transmission; the voices were closer than it imagined; for a brief moment it was confused.

It was its last moment; the shadow grew larger and larger until it took substance and crushed the life out of the fragile plant. As it laid dying, petals ripped apart, it 'heard' a voice once more, the last voice it would ever hear, and the voice said...

"This is one small step for a man... one giant leap for mankind."

* * *

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Find Bob online at : www.scifi-tales.com and bob-lock.blogspot.com

Amazing Space

Marilynn Flynn

This month's cover artwork has special meaning to me personally as it's one of the pieces that really got me hooked on *space art* many years ago and is still one of my all-time favourites. I first saw it included in David A. Hardy's *Visions Of Space* book and this particular image has always stuck with me since then. Here's what Marilynn has to say ...

'I Love An Astronaut' : Two affectionate astronauts in the ready room. This painting was inspired by a photo I saw of an astronaut's wife trying to give her husband a goodbye kiss thru his helmet as he walked toward the crew van waiting to take him to the launch pad for an Apollo mission to the Moon.

So naturally I am very pleased and honoured that Marilynn has kindly allowed me to publish this piece here on the eZine cover. I am thrilled to say the least!

I have chosen a selection of astronaut-themed images for this feature as I feel that Marilynn does such an amazing job of touching on the more human-side of space exploration. I trust that you will enjoy them as much as I do.

* * *

Marilynn Flynn was born in Ontario Canada, and shortly thereafter moved with her family to Detroit Michigan where she 'grew up with the space program'. At first she painted space and science fiction art for her own enjoyment while she began her professional art career working in theater as a scenic artist and a puppeteer. However she gave those up in 1978 to concentrate solely on space art painting.

She first began showing her space art at Sci-Fi conventions, and then her first published painting appeared in one of the early issues of The Planetary Society's *'The Planetary Report'*. Since then her artwork has appeared in numerous books, magazines, TV programs, DVDs, science exhibits, art shows and websites. A participant of the NASA Fine Arts Program, she was a member of the art team for the tragic Challenger 51-L mission.

While she has yet to achieve her dream of getting herself into space, the next best thing happened in 1995. Her painting of *'Cosmic Cauldron'* was selected as one of twenty paintings that were sent to the Mir space station, where it orbited Earth

for several months as part of the first group art exhibit in space. She has also done many commissioned pieces, most recently for The Earth and Space Foundation. Her paintings are in collections around the world and can also be seen on her personal website.

She has a graduate diploma in theater design from the Banff Center, Canada, attended the Ontario College of Art, the Academy of Art College in San Francisco, and in 1986 obtained her private pilot's license. She also paints 'Earth' landscapes, botanical paintings based on plants she grows in her own gardens, and occasionally does illustrations of other subjects. She has traveled extensively and has lived in the U.S.A., the Seychelles, the U.A.E. and Canada.

Currently, (after having recently moved once again!), she is working on space art landscapes based on the spectacular mountains and glaciers near her new home in the Kootenay Rockies of British Columbia, and is experimenting with painting in oil pastels.

* * *



'Bringing Life To Mars' : Copyright © Marilyn Flynn 1997

'*Bringing Life To Mars*' (previous page) : The astronauts are holding spheres representing Water, Oxygen and Living Organisms, the necessary elements for human life that colonists from Earth will bring to Mars.

* * *



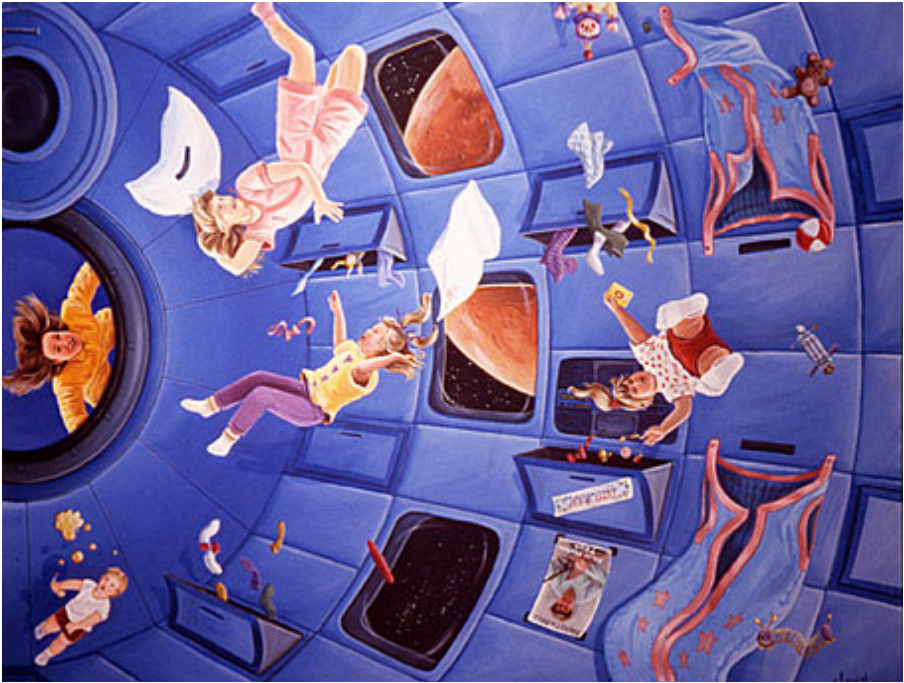
'*Don't Slam The Airlock*' : Copyright © Marilyn Flynn 1989

'*Don't Slam The Airlock*' (above) : A little girl gets help suiting up from her father, before going out to play on the carbon dioxide snow at the Martian polar cap.

* * *

'*Margritifer Chaos*' (next page) : Mom looks through the hatch in dismay as the kids tumble around during a zero-g pillow fight in daughter Margaret's quarters on board a research station orbiting Mars.

The *Margritifer Chaos* portion of Mars is visible through the porthole.



'Margritifier Chaos' : Copyright © Marilyn Flynn 1989

* * *

Q : Does your interest in space art come only from the reality of actual space exploration, or do you also sometimes get inspired by future predictions in sci-fi books and movies for example?

A : Oh dear, I'm going to show my age right off the bat. There wasn't any space exploration going on when I first became interested in space art as a child! So when I was younger, I was inspired by speculative space paintings or articles that I found in books and magazines, and 'hard' sci fi stories in books or magazines like 'Analog'. I was also (well, I still am!) a fan of cheezy old sci-fi movies like "*Angry Red Planet*", but generally I don't find sci-fi movies inspiring as far as giving me ideas for paintings. Now with the flood of information from our current space probes, I get my inspiration from what is being discovered in the real world of space exploration, or from what might be out there based on the tantalizing glimpses of things we are just starting to see beyond our solar system.

Q : What other artists do you admire and which ones do you think have influenced your own work or style over the years?

A : Chesley Bonestell of course. Ron Miller's and Ludek Pesek's works were probably the biggest influences on me when I was first starting out. I thought their paintings showed space scenes the way I imagined they ought to look. I also love the way Pesek's works are realistic but still have a looser, more painterly look. Other artists whose work that I admire are Michael Carroll, David Campbell, David Hardy, Don Davis and Don Dixon to name a few. My favorite '*classical*' artists are Henri Rousseau and John Singer Sargeant.

Q : Did your formal art training prepare you adequately for the type of work you do now, or have you needed to learn any further skills to be able to create space-themed art?

A : No it absolutely did not. There weren't any specific courses designed for fantasy or sci-fi painters at any of the schools I attended, and I had to put up with a lot of teachers who didn't take '*space art*' seriously. The only courses I was able to take in college that combined science and art were anatomy, medical and scientific illustration. In addition to those, I chose courses that would at least give me a solid foundation in basic landscape and figure painting so I could build on that to create my space art. But as for any specific space art painting techniques, I either had to figure them out myself through experimentation or pick up tips from other space artists.

Q : With regards to media and techniques, are you producing more work digitally these days or do you still prefer to use a lot traditional methods? Do you find digital tools faster and more convenient now?

A : I would say that 95% of my work is done digitally now. Digital is waaaay faster and more convenient. You can't beat that 'undo' button! I really like the freedom to be able to push a painting as far as I can and then if it doesn't work out, to go back to a good version without having to repaint the entire picture. Digital painting also lets me experiment with different media without having to layout any \$\$ on new art supplies. And I like the speed with which I can create work, I can start painting as soon as inspiration strikes, without having to spend time fussing with gessoing a canvas or stretching a watercolor paper. I still get the occasional urge to paint something on a real piece of canvas, but not very often any more!

Q : How do you research and prepare your space scenes? Do you use real people as models for your astronauts? And do you use your knowledge of Earth-based geology as a starting point when painting other planet landscapes?

A : For science information, I now do nearly all my research online. I will gather all the relevant info I can find such as maps, data from space probes, photos etc. If I can't find what I'm looking for, I'll contact someone who can give me more specific information. If the scene takes place in the future or if there isn't much information available on a subject, I'll get as much info as I can and then try to make an intelligent guess as to what the surface, astronaut or vehicle might look like. Then I then check the science against the vision I have for the look of scene - like checking to see if a planet in the sky can actually be in the position I want it to be in as seen from the location I'm painting and so forth.

The reference materials I use for landscapes depend on which way I'm approaching the painting. If I happen upon an Earth landscape that I think will make a good analog to use in a space painting, I will take photos of it to use in that specific painting. I will then search maps of the target planet for a location that will have similar geology, land forms, etc. The other method I use is to look at maps or photos of other planets first and if I see a location that inspires me to paint a landscape of it, I'll go thru the huge collection of photos I've taken on my travels around Earth for anything analogous to use as a reference.

I have never done elaborate preliminary sketches, or grisaille paintings - I feel that would take away from the spontaneous exploration of a scene that I enjoy as I paint. When I get an inspiration for a space painting, I usually do nothing more than a few 'chicken scratch' sketches to nail down the best layouts. However if there is a planet in the sky, a vehicle or something that has to be drawn precisely - such as Saturn's rings - I will draft it out before painting so it's the correct size, angle, perspective or whatever.

Yes, I prefer to use real people as models for my astronauts, rather than trying to imagine the figures. On occasion I'll use a photo of a real astronaut for reference. But as I usually need a specific pose, I'll either ask friends or family members to model for me or I'll go thru my photo collection to see if I have any existing pictures of people that could be used. And sometimes I have to do the modeling myself!

I do look for places on Earth that have analogs, either visually or geologically, to locations on other planets. If it's just a visual analog, then I need to know what is different about its composition on the other planet so I can make the transformation in my painting accurate. I also find it interesting to compare how geologic features found on Earth look when formed under the different conditions of other planets, particularly volcanic features.

Q : Has the Internet helped to get more exposure for your work in recent years? Do you get much feedback from your website visitors?

A : Yes, the whole world can view my work now! I have gotten some really interesting feedback from my website, like the time I heard from an astronomer at an observatory in Italy who was emailing me from a desk that Schiaparelli once used.

Q : Has art always been your full-time job? What else do you do outside this field?

A : I basically live and breathe art. I actually started out working professionally in theater, painting scenery. And for awhile I was also a professional puppeteer. But I was always painting space art on the side. That was back when I didn't realize there was such a thing as a professional space artist. I was having a lot of fun, but I felt I needed to do something more meaningful with my art, and the thing that meant the most to me was the exploration of space, so I quit theater and started pursuing a career as a space artist.

However, being an artist doesn't always pay the bills, especially when you're just starting out professionally and have developed an expensive addiction to flying! So years ago I also worked for the flight schools where I was taking lessons - I was a ramp rat, did office work, flight scheduling, and later I worked as a dispatcher for an air ambulance service. Now after spending many years traveling, I'm trying to settle down in my new home. I started gardening and landscaping as a hobby and to give myself an outdoor break from the studio. However I ended up doing botanical paintings of the flowers I grew and they have sold so well it turned into another business in addition to my space art. I never really get away from art, it's in every part of my life.

Q : Are you actively involved in astronomy and do you own your own telescope? If so, do you find observing helps at all with your artwork or do you rely on more detailed images provided by NASA missions?

A : I used to be an avid amateur astronomer and had a couple of small telescopes. But as my interest in planetary geology grew, along with the increase in information being brought back from space probes, I found observational astronomy to be of no use in my artwork, except that I still enjoy looking at the night sky and wondering what or who might be out there looking back.

Q : You have a private pilot's license and obviously enjoy flying, so would it be a dream for you to fly the space shuttle?! If you were given the opportunity to go up into space yourself in future, would you go?

A : Hey, my bags are packed! I am not a big fan of the space shuttle, but I'd fly anything that would get me into space. I really loved that Delta Clipper ship, the one that could fly sideways. I was sorry when they shut the research program for that down. It would have been an extremely cool vehicle to fly. Spaceship One is mighty cool too, but short suborbital hops aren't very exciting to me - what I really would love to do is break orbit and fly interplanetary!



'The Best Job in the Solar System' : Copyright © Marilyn Flynn 1989

'The Best Job in the Solar System' : I had done a lot of work in coloured pencil and then I began experimenting with pastels. I eventually gave up on them for being too dusty and they didn't suit my technique of painting which involves a lot of layering of colours. So this is one of the last pieces I did in pastel.

I did this piece particularly for myself, to commemorate my husband and I flying together, only with a twist - since we wish we were astronauts flying spaceships at Mars, I translated one of my photos of us flying a King Air into this painting of us piloting 'the Mars-Deimos shuttle'.

Q : Have you ever met any astronauts or attended any of the shuttle launches?

A : Yes, I have met several astronauts, including Al Bean and Buzz Aldrin. I haven't yet had a chance to meet my favorite, though. (That's Gene Cernan).

Did I ever attend a shuttle launch? That's a loaded question. I sure did - I was at the Challenger 51L launch. I was a participant in NASA's fine art program, and I was assigned to that launch. It had a profound impact on me. When the program started up again, I received a pass to see Discovery's return to flight launch, but I couldn't bring myself to go. I also have seen two space shuttle landings at Edwards, and one shuttle-on-747-piggyback landing at the Cape.

Q: How did it feel when your painting '*Cosmic Cauldron*' orbited the Earth on the Mir Space Station? And how did you manage to get your artwork into this exhibition in the first place? Were you invited or did you have to go through a submission process? What other artists were included by the way?

A : Well I was, er, '*over the moon*'! It was the next best thing for me as a space artist, if I couldn't get into space myself. It still has a sort of surreal feeling to me - even though I saw my painting on Mir during a live downlink, I still find it hard to believe that it was actually on a space station orbiting earth. And I guess you could also say that sometimes I feel jealous of that piece of paper!

I don't remember how I heard about the call for artwork, I think someone emailed me or I read a news release about it. It was a juried exhibit, but anyone could enter. You were allowed to send in up to three paintings but they had to be done in a certain format using particular media so they were '*space worthy*'. The panel chose twenty paintings from all of the submissions to be sent to Mir, and my '*Cosmic Cauldron*' painting was one of the twenty chosen. There is more information, including a list of the other artists and thumbnails of the twenty paintings that flew on Mir, at this website: <http://www.arsadastra.com>

Q : What's next on your agenda for the future? Which direction do you think your artwork will take in the years to come? Any plans to explore other media ... film, TV, animation maybe?

A : For the near future, I am working on creating a better website to showcase my work. I'm also starting to get out and explore the mountains around my new home to get some fresh inspiration for space landscapes. I am trying some new painting techniques and media as I would like to achieve a looser more painterly feeling, instead of trying to nail down every last detail in my landscapes. I'm experimenting with using oil pastels and pen & ink. I also have some new

space-related creations (not paintings) in the works which I will be unveiling on my website later this year.

I hope in the future to continue to grow as an artist. I would like to do more paintings featuring humans exploring space rather than just the ol' rocks n' balls landscapes. I never found the shuttle or the space station to be very inspiring. Now that they've actually awarded new contracts for rockets and spacecraft to return to the moon, I'm feeling more optimistic about the manned space program again and consequently have some new ideas for astronaut paintings that I hope to start on soon.

As for the other media, I wouldn't mind having the opportunity to illustrate a book entirely by myself someday. I don't really have any interest in working in film, tv or animation. Not that I would turn down an offer to work on a project in those areas if something truly amazing came up, but generally it isn't something I'm going out of my way to pursue.

And of course, I still dream about sitting on a boulder on Mars some day, doing a painting 'en plein CO2'.....

* * *



Space art fans should now head straight for : www.tharsisartworks.com

Distant

by Paul Ray

Several months had passed since your ship fell from the sky. How long exactly, you couldn't be certain. The only thing you could be sure of was the desolate planet you had crashed on. Well, that and the knowledge there were only a few weeks of rations left.

Every day, you searched, but found nothing. There were plenty of jagged rocks and craters, but nothing of any use. Nothing that could be eaten, nothing with which to signal for help, nothing but wind-blasted wasteland, and the scattered debris of what used to be your ship.



Collecting the pieces for the makeshift shelter had kept you busy on the second day. The first had been spent looking for Carl. You found your co-pilot's body tangled in the half-opened chute. You buried him that evening.

What had happened? You were both seasoned pilots, and the take-off routine. It was hard not to blame your friend, but you just couldn't work out what had caused the ship to suddenly barrel and dive. Now, you would never know.

Only the rattling of the shelter keeps you company each night as the gusting wind pelts it with sand and dust. You think of your home more often than not. Your family, your friends. Even your dog. All that you had and all that you'd dreamed, now so far away.

Faces of old friends and memories of places long forgotten resurface in your mind from somewhere you never knew existed. Everything that was real grows more distant with each passing day.

Then, without warning, the rattling subsides. Pushing aside the heavy rubberized sheet, you step outside. A billion stars fill the moonless sky with alien constellations. You look towards the tiny star you have chosen to call home and watch it for a while.

The tiny point of light winks down at you and a single thought flashes through your mind. You wonder, are you too missed, or has anyone even noticed you are gone...?

The wind starts up again with its eerie moan, blowing clouds of dust as though it had never stopped. Turning back, you step inside the shelter and let the flap fall heavily behind you.

* * *

Story : Copyright © Paul Ray 2006
Illustration : Copyright © Steve Upham 2006

Paul Ray lives in the foothills of Mt Fuji, near Tokyo, Japan.

His short stories can be read in various publications including: *AstoundingTales*, *Alien Skin*, *Kenomazine*, *Anotherealm*, *GateWay S-F*, and the recent *CyberTales LiveWire* anthology.

'Distant' is his first story to appear in *Estronomicon*.

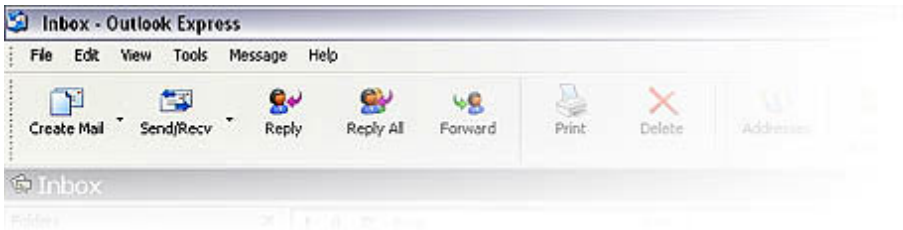
He maintains a blog at : paulxray.journalspace.com

Novelist Beware

Chapter Six

by Sarah Crabtree

Back to emails.



If you have acquired a few chatty types who insist on pinging back a response before your own reply has barely hit their inbox, then you do need to do some serious networking protocol before we all go bonkers.

Get yourself a hotmail address with a hard-to-hack password. If the stalker keeps sending you all this "Send this message back to me within five minutes or else we will all disappear up each other's arses" crap, then you can simply ensure it all goes into the Junk Mail. That way you don't even have to look at the stuff, and it will all be removed in time by that great dustbin on the Net. There. That was easy, wasn't it?

Of course some of you are blushing, aren't you? Go on. Hands up all of you who've sent all this stuff out just to make sure others suffer in the same way you're suffering for your art.

You should be ashamed of yourselves.

And moi?

OK, OK. I did give into the one where it was for a kids' science project. And then there was the one where I just had to send it back to let this person know I still loved her. And I've used 'just' too many times, and I've used 'and' too many times.

I hope you understand the point I'm making here.

If you don't act like a professional, then people won't treat you like one. They might think you're cuddly and friendly with your little messages of support and emoticons, but they won't forgive you lightly if you forward something with a virus embedded in it.



Some of the cutest emails contain the dirtiest bugs.



I've just remembered something awful I did when a writing colleague was hovering on the brink of finding out if she'd secured a book contract with a big publisher. I sent her a movie email of a chimp sticking its finger in an orifice and then licking it.

Jane, if you're reading this, please find it in your heart to forgive me.

Checklist:

You can never read too many grammar books. Concentrate on those things you keep getting wrong. Write them here and keep revising them.

* * *

Copyright © Sarah Crabtree 2005

Novelist Beware is a 12 chapter feature on the perils of writing novels. Watch for Chapter Seven in next month's issue!

The Artful Collector

Column 5

by Jane Frank

PRICING Part 1: How Art Gets Priced

Because PRICING is such an all-consuming topic for collectors, no matter what stage of collecting they're at, I figured....what the heck, might as well get this one out of the way early in the game, so that we can turn to less complicated topics, like "Should I buy it at that price?" <grin> Answers to that question will come in my next article, Pricing: Part 2: **How to Buy it for Less (And sell for more!)**

The valuation of **original ART**, and especially *contemporary* art is a constant challenge for collectors because it *seems* so utterly **irrational**. Put another way, uniqueness is an attribute that works both to the advantage, and disadvantage, of buyers and sellers. How else to explain the sale of great paintings for great prices, than to say it was for "passion's sake"?



Picasso Portrait Fetches \$95.2 Million

A portrait of one of Picasso's most celebrated lovers, artist Dora Maar, sold for \$95.2 million last night, the second-highest auction price ever paid for an artwork, Bloomberg News reported. The buyer of the unflattering "Dora Maar With Cat," from 1941, was seated in the back of Sotheby's salesroom but was unidentified. Picasso also holds the record for an artwork sold at auction: \$104 million for "Boy With a Pipe," sold at Sotheby's in 2004.

That irrationality, which affects the pricing of all original art, and the fact that the number of artworks produced by living artists cannot be predicted (but will continue to expand as long as the artist is working), are the prime reasons many collectors, museums and auction houses steer clear of it. We'll get back to that point later on, but first off, there's one thing we must get out of the way before any serious discussion can begin.

THERE ARE NO FIXED PRICES FOR ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES

Value **FLOATS**. “It’s based on time, place, and the individuals involved” says Harry Rinker, whose columns “Rinker on Collectibles” appear in *Antiques & Collecting* magazine (“The Selling Price” February, 2002). Like Harry, I have lost count of the number of times I have had to repeat this. But just like Rinker, I feel it’s essential to establish this point before proceeding with any discussion of pricing. I don’t care how rare it is, how fine an example it is, how determined the seller is, or what the item sold for before.

Q: “How much is my xxxx WORTH?”

A: “Whatever someone is willing to pay for it.”

Some of you smart alecks out there at this point will undoubtedly be thinking, yeah, but isn’t there such a thing as “Fair Market Value”? And if that exists, can’t we use that to place a value on what we own?

Definition

Fair Market Value: The price that an interested but not desperate buyer would be willing to pay and an interested but not desperate seller would be willing to accept on the open market assuming a reasonable period of time for an agreement to arise.

Sure there is such a thing as “fair market.”. BUT WHAT IS THAT PRICE? AND HOW IS IT ARRIVED AT?

Time? Place? These are very important, but when it comes to the *individuals involved*...Who is the most important person in the buyer-seller equation? Who wields the power? Who is first to set the price that the other party must “counter”???

Ideally, it should be both, as the “Fair Market Value” definition above implies.

BUT IN REALITY, it’s not. It depends on which side of the fence you’re on.

As Rinker states with enviable succinctness:

THE PERSON WITH THE MONEY IS THE FINAL PRICE ARBITER

Bear with me as I take you through the hypothetical life-cycle of a painting, to

demonstrate this all important point. I am using ART as an example, and I am going to use “time” and “place” elements that I’m hoping will be familiar to you, as fans of science fiction and fantasy. But please keep in the back of your mind that the basic lesson applies to **all objects** desired by collectors....whether it’s Greek antiquities or rare books.

The following is a chronology of prices and events in the life of a science fiction/fantasy painting.

The Beginning

All paintings begin in an artist’s head, and then take material form once they become “works of art.” If they are destined for commercial application, they may already have been paid for, as “jobs” commissioned by a publisher/corporation/business entity. They aren’t exactly *worthless* at this point (because there may be a collector who is dreaming of hanging exactly such an image on her wall) but *no price* has yet been put on the painting. This “time in the life of a painting” is of indeterminate length. It could sit on an easel for months, then sit in an art agent’s or art director’s office for even more months, before it’s returned and framed by the artist or stored with others in a file drawer or zippered into a portfolio and stored in a basement. Then, the painting may hang, or lean, or lay, *undisturbed for years, until one of two things happen*. Either nature (heat, cold, flood, insects, fire, cats or other calamity will damage it beyond repair), **OR** humans will intervene and do something with it. In that event, it could become a collectable painting. For the purposes of this chronology, I am going to focus solely on this latter path. [FYI: All prices, names, events are fictitious, but every step is based on real life situations or events that I have witnessed]

Price Evolution

A professional commercial artist, not particularly sentimental about the works he’s created solely for publication, decides to be philanthropic and donates a painting to a charity auction at a science fiction convention. He rummages through his closet and portfolios, and/or grabs whatever is handy on the wall (because it’s framed). The people who run the auction don’t know what it’s worth, and neither does the artist, so they put (what they consider to be) a nominal, obscenely low, beginning price on it, in hopes of raising money “for the cause.” Let’s say \$5. Minimum bid. A Collector spies it, thinks it’s worth *at least* \$150., but to his surprise, wins it with a bid of \$15. He brings it home filled with good intentions, only to file it with other such acquisitions: planned for framing “sometime soon.” Typically it will remain in this state for two or three years, until he moves, or his wife threatens to toss out all of the “junk” in the basement. **Market Price = \$15.**

Pressed into action by his anxious spouse, the Collector dusts it off for the first time since he bought it and decides it is still worth keeping even though most of the other artwork he won at conventions, he ruefully concludes, should have been left there. He trades the painting to another collector that can see through the non-acid free matting and accumulation of soot – and considers himself ahead of the game when he gets in exchange a “photoprint” (photographic reproduction) of a painting of a dragon by a well-known artist that he knows sells for \$25.00 at conventions. **Market Price = \$25.00**

The experienced, new owner removes the matte and replaces it with another, acid free one. With a damp cloth he removes the surface dust to reveal a pretty picture, and a ‘signature’ of sorts (initials which he can’t make out). It is now clean and nice looking, although not the kind of subject matter he really likes. So he lets his neighbors talk him into putting it into their garage sale. It sells for \$75. **Market Price = \$75.00**

New owner: A local book “picker,” on his usual Friday troll of garage sales for hidden treasures, who knows what illustration art looks like even if he is clueless as to its value – and soon sells it to a savvy book dealer at a local used book store for \$100. The dealer knows the hard-to-read initials “JG” stand for Jack Gaughan, and that the artist has recently died. Book dealer values it at \$250. The book dealer puts it on display on a top shelf above the books, along with others he’s bought in similar fashion, leaning against the wall. There it languishes, gathering dust, and no attention – the book dealer is focused on selling books, after all...the art is just “decoration.” **Market Price = \$100.00**

Seven years later, the book dealer sees an article in *Locus* Magazine reviewing the works of Andre Norton, who has just died. The article features well-known books and their covers. The painting leaning against the wall, on the top shelf, gathering dust, turns out to be the cover art for her last published book. The book dealer brings the artwork down to eye level, and doubles the price to \$500. (marked in pencil top right corner) and **mentally** slaps a label on it “Rare original cover art for a book by Andre Norton” in hopes of impressing the next Norton collector who happens by.

Next day... the book dealer dies leaving his art inventory unidentified except for title and price (pencil top right corner). His heirs anticipate no problem selling off the book inventory, but have no idea what to do with the art. Another local book dealer, small-time but looking to increase their status in town, calls the widow and “in an act of charity” offers \$1000 for the assortment of art, and will come and take it away without charge. The widow is relieved. She could never understand why her husband bought those “ugly” pictures to begin with, when he was supposed

to be dealing in *books*. The local dealer ignores the prices put on individual pieces in making his offer; in fact, he considers these irrelevant because – as is typically the case when faced with objects one knows knowing about – there seems to be no discernable relationship between price and “perceived” quality. He figures, if they’re cheap enough, he’ll take the lot, counting on maybe one or two selling for enough to make the purchase worthwhile. The **market price** paid for each original painting, on average, **\$40**.

The painting, unlabeled, and with the initials overlooked, is advertised by the newest owner/book dealer as “paperback art” (that much he can surmise) and a \$150. price is assigned to it, along with the notation “American illustrator.” He sees the \$500. Price in pencil and suspects that the \$500. was “invented” . . . just ‘penciled on’ for show . . . in hopes of getting at least \$150. for it, after “hard” negotiation.

The art does not sell for two years. The small-time book dealer discovers there is no money in selling paperbacks, let alone paperback cover art. Decides instead to run a kiosk in a local mall store selling wire-wrapped Healing Stone pendants from India. He is *delighted* to sell his whole stock of original cover art for 20% of *the penciled prices* to another book dealer. He’s finally made some money on his investment! **Market price (again) = \$100.**

The new owner is also delighted. He is somewhat knowledgeable and recognizes the origin of the painting. He finds a nice copy of the paperback, researches the signature, and finds the Locus article. He make a clear copy of the article as a sales prop, puts it and the book into nice acrylic sleeves, places them both next to the painting, and prices the painting at \$300., hoping for the best.

An "instant" collector, who has just started collecting science fiction again, now that he finally makes enough money to do that, at age 35, buys the art on a whim for \$250. He is happy. He got almost 20% off!!! **Market price = \$250.**

Unpredictably, demand for original sf art from the 1950s – 1960s forces prices to climb. Art books call attention to artists who were previously overlooked, attracting attention to the genre. Due to rapidly increasing disposable income, and a perceived shortage of artwork from that “vintage” time period, prices for some pieces are re-set at levels that look like Alaskan zip codes....even though original artwork continues to be sold for \$15. at sf conventions.

In time, the market quiets down. After all, how many people are there in the world that will pay over \$10,000 for a Harold McCauley *Imagination* cover? *Everyone who wanted one, now has one.....and the thought of owning a half dozen is*

still foreign, because (don't forget!) *it's still an emerging collecting niche*. Prices level off and threaten to drop. Meanwhile our "instant collector" has decided to specialize, and only wants the original cover art appearing on books by his favorite author: Ray Bradbury. The Andre Norton cover art is quickly sold on eBay. The seller is satisfied; after all, he made \$100. on the deal and has had the pleasure of owning it. **Market price = \$350.**

The winning bidder takes delivery of the painting and immediately sends a digital photo of the art to an experienced collector who is organizing a museum retrospective of 1960s science fiction art. Together they write a brief history of the piece, and the new owner is invited to discuss the importance of the artist's work at a Symposium. An avid fan of Andre Norton books is in the audience, and recognizes the work. She introduces herself to the owner of the painting after the Symposium discussion is over, and asks to exchange business cards. Subsequently, she makes an offer the owner cannot refuse. **Market price = \$750.**

She trades it almost immediately to a fellow collector who wants only Ace cover art. In exchange she gets a painting he owns, that she has always coveted, and which she knows last changed hands at \$1800. The Ace artwork is re-framed, and placed in a position of honor in the new owner's collection. The image is republished in a book on Ace Double covers. The collector is offered \$1000 for it but he refuses to sell. **Market price still = \$750.**

As the collector's age goes up, so does the painting's value *in the owner's mind*. There are only so many Ace covers he can get...and finding them becomes harder and harder. Indeed, they become true rarities. But he also knows that he can't take them with him when he passes on, and he's single with no close relatives who would care about them. He sells off all the cover art through an auction house in New York, except for a handful of favorite paintings. Feeling magnanimous, he offers the last published Norton/Ace/by Gaughan cover painting to a local art museum for \$10,000. The museum has an annual acquisition budget of \$5000. They are still trying to find a suitable benefactor to purchase the art for donation to the museum, when the owner dies.

The heirs know nothing about his art collection – and would care even less about making donations to the local museum. They live 3000 miles away, and just want to take possession of the house, sell it, and "clear" the estate of taxes due. So after they divvy up whatever of the Collector's possessions look worthwhile, they hold an "estate sale" for what remains. You guessed it: the last published Norton/Ace/by Gaughan cover painting is propped on a chair with a sign reading "no reasonable offer refused." Any property not sold will be hauled away by an ambitious dealer advertising "we will buy entire households – no charge for

moving.” The painting is spared that fate. **Market price = \$150.**

And the cycle begins anew.

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This silly chronology illustrates that the price is determined in varying parts by aesthetics, rarity, location, associations, uniqueness, marketing, scholarly study, and timing . The value increases with knowledge of the subject. There is no absolute value. As a result there are no hard and fast rules for how to determine that. “Fair Market Value” becomes a matter of familiarity with the market, based on what comparable paintings have sold for, even though there are no true “comparables” for unique items.

If there were not mishaps along the way the **Greater Fool Theory** would prevail. That’s the theory that predicts price will always rise so long as there is another person willing to pay more than you. Eventually the piece works its way up the price ladder until it reaches a practical limit. At which point we claim that “Fair Market Value” has been achieved! As collectors, we try not to focus on the vagaries of time and place, because all that really matters is whether there is a bigger fool out there to pay more than we did. And that makes it all ok.

If we’re fortunate, there is.

JUST REMEMBER THERE WAS AN UNDERBIDDER FOR THE PICASSO, WHO STOPPED BIDDING SHY OF THE \$95.2 MILLION HAMMER PRICE.

So what is your art really worth? And does *the market* dictate the price?

Throughout much of the 20th century, *dealers* dominated the equation because (among other things) **they owned the art**. Or, at minimum, they *owned the channels for accessing it*. If you wanted what they had to sell, you either dealt with them, and paid their price, or you didn’t acquire the art. **Period**. Artists had no practical way of circumventing the gallery (dealer dominated) system. Those that dared, became *pariahs* - abandoned by their dealers, unable to get gallery representation (without which: no shows, no openings, no reviews, no status, hence no sales). For artists who had no talent for marketing themselves and their art, dealers/agents were the only option. As a result, dealers (quite literally) *made the market* (**and** the artist, in the bargain!). They not only **cultivated DEMAND**, they also **controlled SUPPLY**. If one buyer didn’t want to pay their price, they’d just go down the line and offer it to the next person on their “short list, until they found a willing buyer.”

The quintessential example of the type would be legendary gallery owner Leo Castelli – maker and breaker of artists’ fortunes. He was not the biggest dealer in contemporary art in his time, but he was certainly *numero uno* in terms of the power he wielded, according to Haden-Guest, “He was called both the pope of the art world and its *capo de tutti capi*. This was seen less a nod to his seniority than a tribute to his role in the careers of so many artists of stature -- Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Frank Stella, Cy Twombly and Bruce Nauman among them. It is fair to say that the story of American art in the second half of the 20th century would have read differently without Leo Castelli” (from “The Roving Eye,” by Anthony Haden-Guest, 8/23/99, published in Artnet online, See http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/features/haden-guest)

But times have changed. And I don’t think anyone believes that kind of power can be wielded today. THE biggest change in the world of collecting in the last 20 years or so, without a doubt, has been the internet and to some extent, television....which have encouraged collecting through “antique road shows” and home-shopping programs. There’s no end to websites dedicated to collecting, and search engines for seekers of special items....not to mention sources for framing, appraisals, insurance, shipping and lots more. Every major auction company now posts their sales and auction results, on line – and most welcome online ‘real time’ bidding. For collectors it’s been a bonanza....never have so many have had access to so muchBut as many dealers have noted, and some collectors also concede, new technologies have also altered the landscape in other ways, some of them not so advantageous to both parties.

On the positive side, On line auctions, and – especially – eBay, has brought “transparency” to the market, with regard to prices *realized*. This has been a boon to collectors, who historically were deprived of such information unless they had actually attended the auction, or subscribed to auction house catalogs, and got sales results as part of their subscription – which was an expensive way to gain the information. But the posting of auction results on the web is not useful for dealers buying on behalf of clients, and find their “trade secrets” exposed. To maintain secrecy as to the prices paid, many dealers now prefer to buy privately. Worse, for dealers who cater to specialist collectors, search services and portals have brought competition to markets which previously enjoyed exclusivity, such as rare books. Across the board, prices have fallen – sometimes dramatically – in collecting areas where formerly, the pricing was non-competitive and wildly varying pricing by dealers for identical items was the norm. This is also true for sellers, who suddenly realized that the supply can actually exceed demand, especially in the middle and low-end categories of collectibles. Just like the rare book market**WHAM**. Overnight, the door was opened to comparison shopping, and direct access to

multiple/dealers and individual artists' inventories, and *overnight*, collectors got savvy. *Overnight, they realized they were the Person With The Money.*

They started setting limits on what they would spend for X-type art, or Y-type books, and stuck to their guns. This was not only true for SF illustration art and genre books...but for most **ALL** collectibles, across the board. There was a lowering of the average secondary market resale value for many collectibles. So that today, the average selling price for original illustration on the Internet (auction or direct sale) is a far more reliable indicator of the art's secondary market resale value than field sales (convention art shows, galleries) or price guide values.

But will knowledge of secondary sales prices help you if you want what I have to sell? No. It will only make my job tougher. And will that help ME if I'm the buyer? NO. Because if I have the money, I'll buy it. **Whether I end up paying more, or less, than anyone else.**

That's why I say "Money" is the final arbiter. If I have complete control of the art*, and access to it, and I can afford to wait, and there's a whiff of demand in the air, *I've got the upper hand*. This is one of the prime reasons, incidentally, why so many collectors focus on vintage - classic or pulp art; control of the art is out of the hands of the artist (there will never be any more than already exists!), so prices are more responsive to market forces.

In sum, there's a lot to know when you are trying to figure out how prices are set for art (or anything you collect). While would-be buyers and sellers can't be expected to know everything, the more you are aware of the complex factors affecting *price*, the more easily you will accept that VALUE FLOATS.

If the artist can afford not to sell, they set the price; if the dealer can afford not to negotiate, they set the price; if the collector can afford to pay anyone's price, and resists the urge to do that, they can set the price.

That's the theory....now on to the practice! Because floating prices mean **NEGOTIATION**....and that means you'll need Pricing, Part 2: How to buy it for less (and sell it for more).

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Watch for Part 2 next month and visit Jane's website at : www.wow-art.com

The Vessel

by Mark E. Deloy

William Atwood woke to the dim grey light of early morning and the mixed smells of body odor and stale cigarettes. He looked through the scratched crystal of his Timex and saw that it was four-thirty A.M. In a half an hour the homeless shelter's occupants would be waking up to a meal of either rubbery pancakes or runny eggs.

In his past life, he had been Professor Atwood, graduate of Cambridge University and head of the Genetics department for Inova Laboratory. That was before his obsession.

It started off innocently enough. Inova had begun researching the existence of the human soul to see if it had any relevance to their research on the human genome. In Atwood's opinion, it was just a morality safety net in case the creationists called them out on CNN or MSNBC.

Inova was a global leader in Genetic modification for the betterment of mankind. They were very close to being able to predict the genetic markers that made a person predisposed to violence or rage. It was a major breakthrough and would put to rest the nature versus nurture debate once and for all.

During the course of his research, Professor Atwood discovered what he believed to be proof of the existence of the human soul. What's more, he recorded the exact moment mortuary degravitation occurred, the exact point in time when the human body loses 32 grams of weight during death. He discovered this anomaly took place thirty-three seconds before the actual body expired.

Next, Atwood deduced that if the soul departed from the body at a certain time, then surely there must be a location on the physical body from where the intrinsic "personness" leaves behind its corporeal shell. He tried all types of machines to record an image of the departing soul, including a Aura Camera and a Astral Recorder, but nothing seemed to record anything.

Then one afternoon, while sitting beside a terminal cancer patient, Atwood witnessed what he had been searching for. He had rigged a mass spectrometer up to a digital camera and monitor. The result was a video image of a slithery blue

light departing the man's abdomen just before death. Atwood repeated the experiment a dozen more times, all with the same result. Now, not only did he prove at least to himself, that man had a soul, but discovered it departed through the abdomen, just below the navel.

The next order of business was to try and capture the entity. He quit work at Inova, and got a private grant from a large and powerful church that wished to keep its anonymity. The money came quickly at first. Between his impeccable track record and his stellar education, religious groups were practically throwing money at him. He slept little and ate even less. The only thing that mattered now was the work. His long term goal was to capture the soul and prove to the world that it was indeed real.

Then his research assistant leaked his notes to the press. Overnight he was labeled a madman and dubbed a modern day Dr. Frankenstein. Donors said he had deceived them and made them believe he was doing God's work. His cash cows withered up and died almost overnight.

Using his savings, Atwood rented a private laboratory, hoping for the breakthrough that would put him back in the good graces of the scientific community.

He spent hundreds on test subjects, scouring the cancer wards and terminal wings for family members willing to make money off their dying loved ones. There were plenty of takers and plenty of those who just needed a little more convincing of the green persuasion.

He set up his equipment and waited sometimes for days or weeks for that one moment, thirty three seconds before death when he could try to catch the untouchable, capture the one thing men have been trying grasp since their creation. He met with failure after failure. He was having the same problem Edison did with the invention of the light-bulb; there was no medium which could hold the light.

He tried everything from vacuum sealed tubes to plastic Tupperware containers. Nothing could harness a human soul. He tried superheated mercury sealed globes and floating Lithium balloons, but the slithering, glowing light of existence seeped through every substance he could gather.

Soon the money ran out, and he was forced to ask old friends and colleges for

loans. Eventually, both their money and their patience ran out. He lost the laboratory and his equipment. The only things that remained were his notes and his sanity. He tried to get another job, teaching or lecturing, but word had spread about his lunatic ravings, so his name was basically mud in the scientific community. He held a few odd jobs, but none of them made him enough money to rent an apartment or replace the car he had sold so many months ago.

He carried his voluminous writings in a large ragged binder which he clutched to his chest each night while sleeping. He figured when the harsh New York winter came, he could rip out pages and stuff them into his coat for warmth.

Atwood sat up on his cot and listened to the other residents waking up. The sounds of their hacks, coughs, and farts never failed to make him nauseous. He rolled off his canvas bed and went over to the job board. It contained a plethora of minimum wage positions and clinical research studies that paid twenty dollars a day. He knew better than to try those. He'd be damned if he was going to become somebody's Rhesus monkey.

He looked over towards the office and saw Gus, the shelter's coordinator, talking to a man in an expensive suit. Then Gus looked around the shelter for a minute, spotted Atwood, and waved him over.

"Shit," Atwood said to himself. "Probably another bill collector." But he sighed, and walked over to the man. Gus ambled away, probably to check and see how breakfast was coming.

"Morning," the man said. "Are you Professor William Atwood?"

"Depends who's asking."

The man stuck out a deerskin gloved hand.

"James Lightman. Can we talk outside?"

"Sure." Atwood said and followed him outside.

"I work for a company called Greenwood Consortium. We do, among other things, Bio engineering, and Genetic research. Much like the type of company you worked for in the past, but we are relatively new to the game."

"I've never heard of you." Atwood said, still wondering what this man wanted.

"We are working on a project that is quite delicate. This project is, at present, at a standstill."

Atwood nodded. He could relate.

"We are losing millions of dollars a day and will continue to do so until we can find a solution to our problem."

"So why don't you tell me what you need me for?"

"I have been authorized to offer you a position, Professor. The type of research we do requires a certain mindset, and both my employers and myself believe you possess the altitudinal constitution that we seek."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so. I will be blunt professor. The Greenwood Consortium is attempting to produce the first human clone."

Atwood raised his eyebrows.

"Isn't that still illegal? I mean there is still a ban, right?"

"We believe success breeds acceptance. If we manufacture a viable human being, the government will have no other choice but to accept our research because that human clone will have human rights."

"So why do you need me?" Atwood asked.

"We have met with certain challenges throughout the course of our program. Challenges you may be able to help us with if you were so inclined."

"What sort of challenges?"

"In the course of our research, we have produced a cloned human embryo, brought it to full term, birthed it, and watched it live out the first three days of its miserable existence."

“What happened?”

“The children we created did indeed look human. In fact, they were beautiful, exact carbon copies of their mothers and fathers. But as they days went by, it was apparent that these children were dead husks. There was no emotion, no sparkle in their eyes, no real life, no —”

“No soul,” Atwood finished.

“Exactly. Now you see why we need you.”

“There is one problem with your little master plan. I never succeeded in capturing a human soul, and if I did, how would you insert it into a human embryo?”

“We can inject the soul into the mother’s womb after you have retrieved it. I believe that if you can accomplish the recovery, then we can handle the delivery. We have faith in you Professor.”

* * *

The next few weeks went by like a whirlwind. Atwood was given his own private laboratory, a virtually unlimited budget, and a three hundred thousand dollar salary. Not that he had time to spend it. He was in the lab night and day, taking quick cat naps and eating delivered Chinese and pizza. It felt terrific to be back in the lab again, to be working again.

Lightman showed him the video from the cloning trials, and it was apparent that the infants did indeed have something wrong with them. They were dull, slow things that only moved when they were given food or when a light was shined in their eyes.

Atwood thought it was strange how, when presented with a bright light, the infants reached towards the source as if trying to grasp the illumination itself. He wondered what had become of these manufactured children when they were no longer needed, but decided it was best not to ask.

Lightman also provided Atwood with a vast array of terminal patients. He chose not to ask about that either, although the men and women seemed to be very well taken care of. Atwood had a customized beeper that would go off when one of the

patients began to go into cardiac arrest. It was morbid but effective. Lightman must have had a similar beeper, because he always showed up in ICU a minute after Atwood , taking notes and watching death claim another potential donor.

Atwood was having the same problems he did back at his own lab. The soul could not, or would not be contained. He tried every container imaginable. Since money was really no object now, he tried space age polymers, every type of metal that existed, liquid nitrogen encased lead crystal, even the halogen light tubes from the lights in his lab. None of them worked.

He became convinced that, any day, Lightman would come to him and tell him he was fired. But his boss seemed patient and gave him daily encouragement and support.

Then one morning Atwood's beeper went off at three thirty A.M. He shot out of bed. Surely this must be a sign. He rushed to the lab to gather his notes and his latest containment device made of glazed wood in the shape of a pyramid.

He met Lightman at the door to the patient's room. Atwood was surprised to see that he knew the man, had talked to him. He didn't usually have any contact with the patients until their deaths, but the old black man had stopped him and asked him for a cigarette last week as he was going to the bathroom; another sign.

The two had talked for the better part of twenty minutes about life and death. The patients had no idea why they were really here and their families were being paid a hundred dollars a day, but they seemed happy to sign the no life support waver and resign themselves to a relatively painless end.

The old man told Atwood he used to be a fisherman off the coast of New Orleans. He talked about his life on the Gulf and how much he loved the water.

At first Atwood resisted hearing about the man's sentimental recollections but found himself drawn into the former life of a simple fisherman. It was a nice break from work. After the story, he was sorry to see the man shuffle off to his next round of testing.

Now the fisherman was dying. His vitals were slowing, and his breathing was labored. The old man saw Atwood standing near his bed holding his large wooden pyramid. He smiled through his pain and pulled at Atwood's shirt sleeve for him to come closer.

As the professor leaned in, he could practically smell death surrounding the old man. Giles whispered something that Atwood didn't hear right away. Then he said it again, a little bit louder and Atwood's eyes grew wide. All at once, he realized how stupid he had been. The answer was obvious. He had been searching for the perfect vessel in which to house a soul, when in reality, the perfect vessel had already been created.

Atwood grabbed Lightman by the shoulder and swung him around.

"Lightman, do you have any newborns in the lab?" Atwood asked, frantic now.

"Well, yes. One was born this afternoon, but he's just like all the others. He has no cognitive—"

"That doesn't matter. Go get him, and for God sakes, hurry!"

Five minutes later, Lightman came rushing back into the dying man's room. The nurses were trying to comfort Giles as much as possible. They had just started a morphine drip in his I.V.

The infant lolled lazily in Lightman's arms. Blue eyes focused on nothing, and his mouth hung open like a gaping wound.

"Give him to me. Quickly!" Atwood said.

Lightman handed the child over to him reluctantly. Atwood knew his eyes must be wild and his expression frantic, but he didn't care. This was the answer. He could feel it in his old bones.

He laid the infant on Giles Murphy's stomach and held him there. The child offered no resistance. His eyes had glazed over completely and rolled back in his head.

"Oh my dear God." Lightman whispered. He finally realized what Atwood was up to.

"Not yet," Atwood replied. "But soon my friend. Very soon."

They watched as Giles Murphy's breath grew more ragged and labored. His wrinkled skin was ashy, and his eyelids fluttered as he dreamed his final dream in

this body.

The cameras and other equipment were focused on the child that sat on Murphy's stomach. Lightman sucked in breath, and Atwood knew his boss had just seen the soul leaving the old man's body and entering the infant.

The infant jerked under Atwood's hand, shivered slightly, became pale and grew cold. Atwood began to worry. Why would he grow cold? It's as if he is dying himself.

Then the baby started to heat up again. His skin regained some color. The shaking subsided. Giles Murphy's heart monitor flat-lined, and everyone in the room just listened to it. No one said a word. Then the baby cooed.

Atwood stared at the infant. It was as if someone had turned on some internal light. The child looked up at him and smiled, then gripped Atwood's finger in one tiny chubby hand and smiled.

He picked the baby up and pulled him to his chest, cradling the newborn who was now truly alive.

"We did it," Lightman said. "You did it. Atwood, you're a genius. You must tell me what the old man said to you."

Atwood just smiled and gently rocked the infant.

"He said, he wished that he was young again."

For the first time in a long time Atwood was truly glad to be alive.

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Visit Mark's website at : www.theghostsofsilence.com to read more of his work

Imagination Unleashed

Alan M. Clark

Alan M. Clark was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957. He graduated in 1979 from the San Francisco Art Institute with a bachelor of Fine Arts Degree.

Fifteen years ago, he became a freelance illustrator, and since has produced work ranging in subject from fantasy, science fiction, horror, and mystery for publishers of fiction, to cellular and molecular biology for college text books. He has produced work for young adults and two picture books for children.



'Censorship' & 'Siren Promised' : Copyright © Alan M.Clark 2000/2003

Clark has illustrated the writing of such authors as Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Joe R. Lansdale, Stephen King, George Orwell, Manly Wade Wellman, Greg Bear, Spider and Jeanne Robinson, and Lewis Shiner, as well as his own.

A major influence for his art comes from the Surrealists, particularly Max Ernst. He is fascinated with the use of what he calls "controlled accidents" and the possibility of '*finding*' images within the paint. A great advocate of collaboration, Clark has worked with many others in both literary and visual art.



'*Dark Plaid*' : Copyright © Alan M.Clark 2005

His awards in the illustration field include, the 1994 World Fantasy Award for Best Artist, the 1992 and 1993 Chesley Awards for Best Interior illustration, the Chesley for Best Paperback Cover of 1994, and the Chesley for the Best Unpublished Color Work of 1994. He is the recipient of the Deathrealm Award, as well as the first International Horror Guild Critic's Award for Best Artist.

He is co-author and illustrator of *The Pain Doctors of Suture Self General*, published by Blue Moon Books. Collaborating with Randy Fox, he produced the illustrated book, *Not Broken, Not Belonging*, published by Road Kill Press. He collaborated with Elizabeth Engstrom on the illustrated collection, *The Alchemy of Love*, published by Triple Tree Publishing, producing the interior illustration, the cover, and the book design. Also with Engstrom, he co-edited the anthology, *Imagination Fully Dilated*, of stories based on his paintings, which is available

from Cemetery Dance Publications. He has sold short fiction to the anthologies, *More Phobias*, *The Book of Dead Things*, *Dead on Demand*, and *Darkside*, and to the magazines *Midnight Hour* and *The Silver Web*.

In order to make available to the public the products of his many collaborations Clark created IFD publishing in January of 1999. He has said of the new company, "IFD Publishing is committed to the idea that art is never the product of a single mind but occurs instead when imaginations meet."

Currently, he and his wife Melody reside in Eugene Oregon.



'Amy Will Never Know' & 'Toll Taker' : Copyright © Alan M.Clark 2000/2003

* * *

Q : As you are an artist who uses '*traditional*' techniques, how do you feel about the increasing use of computers to generate fantasy art these days?

A : A large portion of everything I paint, I discover as I'm painting it. To some extent I "*see*" with the medium, which in most cases is acrylic paint. I push the

paint around with all kinds of things other than brushes to get odd textures and shapes from which I might "*discover*" through a process I call "*forced hallucination*" and bring out additional and unexpected aspect of the work. I want the element of chance you find in the real world in my work and so I allow the paint to have its way. "*Controlled accidents*" I call it. I have painted with computer programs, but with the digital medium you have to program the accidents and that kind of defeats the purpose.

Q : Approximately how many paintings have you created for book illustrations so far? (including covers and interior artwork)

A : Somewhere between 500 and 1000.

Q : How long on average do you spend on each painting?

A : As long as it takes as I tend to finish everything.

Q : You produce quite a lot of B&W artwork. Do you prefer working in monochrome or colour?

A : I like both. My originals sell better when they are color. This is disappointing as they take the same amount of time, but then I guess it's a bit like televisions - who buys black and white TVs these days when they cost about the same as color?

Q : Do you keep any of your paintings to display at home, or do you get fed up with seeing your own work all the time?

A : I get bored with even my best works if they hang on my walls too long. Actually "*bored*" is not the right way to say it. If I look at a piece to long, I can't see it anymore. Sometimes my wife, Melody asks for a piece, but then eventually she wants to trade it for something new that comes along that she like better.

Q : Do you ever collect originals (or prints) by other artists? If so, which ones are your favourites?

A : I have a few pieces of artwork by other artists. I trade for some -- makes it more affordable. I have pieces by Jill Bauman, Ron Miller, Glen Chadbourne, Todd Lockwood, Harry Fassl, Paul Groendes. I'm not sure I have favorites -- apples and oranges, you know.

Q : What kind of books do you enjoy reading most? Horror? Or do you prefer to relax with a completely different subject matter sometimes?

A : I read a lot of fiction, but a lot of it is not of my choosing -- manuscripts for jobs -- and some is good, some not as good. For a break, I like to read nonfiction -- history archeology, anthropology, crime and forensics.

Q : Most people don't know much about your writing. Can you tell us about recent sales of your fiction?

A : Last year a novel I wrote with Jeremy Robert Johnson, *Siren Promised*, was released by Bloodletting press and it was nominated for a Bram Stoker Award. This year I sold a two book series, *The Blood Of Father Time* (Books 1 & 2) to Five Star Books. These are a dark time-travel fantasy that I wrote with my cousin Stephen Merritt and Lorelei Shannon. We've been trying to sell these books for over ten years, so it was quite exciting. They will come out May and August of 2007.

Q : Tell us a little about IFD publishing. What was the original purpose behind forming your own book company?

A : I wanted to have control over some extreme illustration projects to promote my ability to conceive, organize and produce innovative literary/visual art creations. And I wanted to learn about the business end of an industry for which I'd previously provided only a service. This has broadened my understanding and opened up new possibilities. I have been able to provide a wider variety of services for publishers, in some cases being given control over nearly every aspect of the production of a project, such as the two children's books I did for cemetery Dance Publications, *The Halloween Mouse*, which I worked on with Richard Laymon, and *The Christmas Thingy* written by F. Paul Wilson.

I may not be doing a lot more publishing -- it is a hard business. The latest book IFD Publishing released is a over-sized full color book of my artwork. It has over 130 paintings in it and I wrote text for it to inform readers about my unorthodox techniques and my weird ideas about what makes for good illustration.

Q : What's on your list for the future? Any plans to branch out into other areas such as movies, animation or computer graphics?

A : I do some simple animation. I hope to sell some more writing -- I have a novel

with Beth Massie we're trying to sell now. Otherwise I'll just take what jobs I can get and see what happens.

* * *

To view more of Alan's wonderful creations go to : www.alanmclark.com



'Poe' s Lighthouse' : Copyright © Alan M.Clark 2005

Death Codex

Chapter Five

by Sean Woodward

For a moment there was no noise. A new moon hid in the December sky. In the next instant the blazing white banks of the ship's engines rocked the ground with their roar. Illuminated Al-Jin-Brewesque characters criss-crossed the underside of the massive ship like some cryptic advertisement from New Osaka. Far below the rose garden and front path of the house was illuminated with abstract shadows. From an upstairs window two bodies were being drawn horizontally towards the craft.

Shani woke with a start. It was the same dream again. The same black triangular ship, the same deafening roar of engines. It was that sound which had seemed so wrong. No ships made such noise. But then she had never seen ships of that design before. Ever since returning from the Abyss Monitoring Platform she had been plagued with these dreams. The world had looked like Old Earth but its people and technologies seemed so ancient and obsolete. After showering she turned to the mirror, invoked the hairstyle palette and began cycling through the styles. Today would be straight and dark she finally decided.

Armillo had spent six weeks on Ision7, studying with the Illuminst monks before beginning to meet with people of the Tribes of Nav. He wouldn't forget the journey planetside in a hurry. Without the protective fields of the tg-flexengines nothing would ever make it on or off this world. This had been one of the major arguments about the first Snow Games on Ision7. Some of his earliest memories were of time spent in the nearby Temple Militia in his childhood. Now the place seemed austere, almost like a prison but it was there that he had been educated. It was there that he had first seen a Pentacle ship of the Eternal Temple, rising through the Maelstrom of rocks that bombarded the atmosphere. It had been eerie, watching the great ship rise in its invisible protective bubble. Few would recognise Armillo now, wearing the dark uniform of Commander, his insignia able to grant him many privileges.

One of those was grudging subservience from the Illuminst monks. There were some qualities of their basic existence that he had grown to find quite endearing. Their near silence for one was a blessing. The way in which they copied the Sayings of Valqueth using handmade materials could only demand respect. However, it was still six weeks of having to endure their submission to the vampyre bitch Kuanji, six weeks he had to endure the filth of their ways.

Her shrine dominated the small Fellar lined temple. Every entrance had been designed to lead to her. Every day he stayed here he had to endure her gaze staring down from the huge floating statue of The Oracle. To them and the Tribes of Nav she was the Scarlet Goddess.

To Armillo she was just another woman plying her tricks. He longed for the familiarity of his private quarters aboard the Starchaser ship. Although he had spent much of his youth on this world, he had never truly felt he belonged here. But at least planetside, due to the uniqueness of this world's ecosystem he was beyond the reach of Axis Templum and its transmissions from his superiors. Today, he decided would be different. He turned to his companion.

"So this is where the offworlders landed?"

Armillo looked out once more across the bleak landscape, trying to make out the makeshift spaceport. In the far distance, blurs the size of moons blocked his vision. A vast multitude of rocks danced before his near vision. Damn this world and its lost moon he cursed inwardly. Once there had been regular seasons, tidal waters and an atmosphere free of these pounding planetoids. That age has been a millenia ago. Now the planet was a crater-littered landscape punctuated by the snow belts. Why anyone continued to live here was almost beyond his understanding. Except of course for the legends of Valqueth which had been so tightly woven into the fabric of the place. It was for that reason alone that Axis Templum maintained the outposts here, using the place as a world of mystery to a billion Temple worlds. Touching his glove-comm he raised the personal tg-shield around him. He turned to his companion, Vrak's body was ample example of the evolution his world had been through. A grey mesh of armored panels covered his skin, fresh plates morphing across his shoulders, bearing the impacts that rained down from the stars.

"Why have your people never moved below ground?" he ventured to Vrak.

"For the same reason we would never join your people. It is forbidden to brothers and sisters of the Nav".

Armillo shrugged inwardly and refocused on the distant spaceport. The ship core flashed in his hand, the small ring of glyphs indicating systems readiness. He knew he was running out of time, that the Pentacle ship would soon have refreshed tg-drives. Soon be able to make the jump back out into deep space. He had to retrieve the ship and its precious cargo of TG-Ice before then. If that cargo was ever traced back to the raid on the Combined Worlds BCorp Archive there would be repercussions he didn't want to even start thinking about. and then there

was always the hope that he might run into Anjers Kral on more time - time enough to repay him a double-cross debt.

"There, look. That ridge is where you can gain access".

Armillo turned and scanned across the horizon, trying to distinguish between real landscape and the tirade of rubble falling from the sky.

Anjers sat down at the table in the corner. From here he could see the main door and down the length of the bar. Outside he could hear the pounding waves of rock hammering down from the sky. He had calculated the elliptical orbit of this world, knew its path was now taking it through the most dense parts of the asteroid field. All about him devout Nav were making prayers over their drinks, becoming more and more entranced in their holy rituals. Pretty soon the Oblivion would come upon them. Hundreds would take to the streets, allow their morphing body armour to halt and bewhisked into the storms that blew across their world. Holy martyrdom they called it. The devout would pray for weeks, abstain from their usual pleasures and believe, with one act that they could wipe away all the atrocities they had committed. Anjers wished it could be that simple. How easy to just step out there and be absolved.

He noticed movement at the bar. The man was taller than the average Nav, his body marked with inky purple patterns that marked him as one of their holy men. Immediately the finest bottle of gruupleworm was put before him. Anjers could swear they even found a clean glass from somewhere. The Nav acknowledged the barman with little more than a nod, the expression of his mouth hardly changing. A separate crowd within the bar was starting to grow around the man as people began to realise what he was. Drinks were put to one side immediately and people began clambering for blessings. The holy man quickly began the ritual touching of armour plates which marked the Season's festivities. Anjers wondered how those who couldn't get to him would react in such a confined area but all seemed to stay peaceful. Anjers sipped some more of his own drink, looking around for someone who actions betrayed him as a fellow outsider.

There was little other activity outside the spectacle of the Nav holy man to attract his attention so he settled down to watch the spectacle. As Anjers looked closer he saw a subtle shift of footing of the man, saw the Flexor at his side. He was both shocked and surprised - this had to be his contact. No Nav would readily wear a weapon unless they were frequent offworld travelers. Anjers began to get up.

"Stay where you are!" barked the Nav, turning from his stool and raising a palmed hand towards Anjers.

"This is the Season of Oblivion, why would you leave so soon?"

"The Goddess wills it friend" replied Anjers, using the pre-arranged response.

"Then let it be so." The Nav himself got up and walked towards the corner Anjers was occupying alone. Smaller Nav tribesmen quickly moved out of his path.

"But let me accompany you, you don't look ready for The Outside"

"I have all I need" replied Anjers, pointing to his glove-comm.

"As do I. I am Graff, Elderone of the Nav." A large hand reached out and slapped Anjers on the back, almost knocking him down. That damn body armour he thought, regaining his footing.

"Come, let me show you our Grove".

There was little left of the surface life of this world. What little remained was either wrapped in perpetual tg-fields or existed in the Groves of the Goddess. These naturally occurring protective zones were some of the few places where some semblance of normal life remained. The one before them was wrapped in a purple tint. Some said this was due to the purple crystals that ringed the Groves, others that it was a sign of the presence of the Goddess herself. Anjers had some ideas of his own. The early tg-fields had used crystal harmonics and colour vibrations to generate their own gravatons. Could it be that this world had been one of the first test places of those technologies? He could never share such thoughts with the Nav. They relied on their own ways. Often their reluctance to embrace modern ways became violent.

"Do you have the co-ordinates?" asked Graff as they walked amongst ancient Fellar trees in the Grove.

"When I have the ship, Honoured Nav". He hoped using the submissive tone would be noticed by their holy man.

"Perhaps I could take you there?" He saw the expression change on the face of Graff. It was as if a thousand thoughts had suddenly joined to form a picture of such stunning clarity that the Nav was totally absorbed. And then he broke free of the enchantment. Thoughtfully he turned to Anjers.

"For millenia our people have believed The Oblivion to be final. What you have shared with me will change our world forever".

"Only if you let it. Your people are out there in the stars Graff. There are whole worlds colonised by your ancestors. I know you've been offworld, how can this be so hard to comprehend?"

"You know nothing of our ways mercenary! We have been taught the finality of The Oblivion all our days. Generations of Saints have been beeseched by our people in their darkest hours. Would you destroy all that?"

"So where is the ship Graff? Are its engines functioning yet? Branches from one of the Fellar trees unwound and reached down towards Anjers.

"Come, the Grove is awakening". Graff pulled Anjers with him towards one of small shelters. Sitting, looking out the arched doorway they watched as one by one the Fellar trees began to sway and unravel. Multicoloured pulsars of rainbow light erupted from their leaves, filling the air with the scent of the intoxicant Absingle. Graff breathed deep, taking in the spores. Immediately his skin began to change hue, the mass of armour plates shifting, strengthening, the inky tatooes glowing purple. When he opened his eyes again Anjers could swear that Graff had grown. It was a secret that the Nav holy men passed from generation to generation. This was why the Groves were so important to the Nav for it was through their interaction with the Fellar trees millennia ago that their metabolisms had first begun to transform in order to cope with the continual bombardment from space.

Graff took a battered Flexpad from inside his sepia robes. Activating its holo mode he passed it to Anjers. The Pentacle ship lay in a bed of harsh white snow whilst all around was the movement of engineer Nav on skis attending to the ship's repair.

"How old is this?"

"Two days. We first found it in the snowbelt and it's been undergoing renewal since".

"The tg-engines?"

"You know how well those ships were built mercenary. Triple backup systems mean they've never failed. But then you know what would happen to the crews if they did!"

Sure Anjers knew. Without the protective fields of the engines all living beings would be consumed by the Karmaflows. It was one of the strangest acts of the universe. Somehow the tgfields interacted with Karmaspace. Once living creatures

had been exposed to them they were liable to be trapped in a spatial cage of their own karma! It was such a terrifying prospect that it was kept hidden from the masses. Some of the Dojons of the Temple had used them to torture enemies it was rumoured. When Anjers had obtained a BRCorp portal for his old apartment the Bcorp engineer had intimated that these were powered by the same technologies. The thought had entered Anjers' mind everytime he had used that portal and the prospect of it becoming a spatial cage had severely limited his usage. Anjers knew that if it wasn't for the Qubes then mankind could have eliminated this feature of tg-fields a long time ago. It was no wonder that Qubes were outlawed on so many worlds. They appeared to drag their energies from Karmaspace and in conjunction with the templargrams could unleash world destroying potencies. It was by taking one with him through the portal to the temple on Ision7 that he had first worken its AI - much to the fear of the monks. He had seen their terrible powers for himself when BCorp created The deep space Abyss Monitoring Platform as a laboratory to research the effects of the Qubes.

He had been hired by the Combiners to steal that research. Knowing he wouldn't be able to obtain it remotely he'd spent weeks traveling to the Abyss zone, dismantling and assembling his weapons for days at a time, briefing the small team again and again. In the end the influence of the Qubes and the karmaspace was so strong that close to the galaxy Abyss that several had been trapped in their own spatial loops. The visions he witnessed were terrifying. A dozen times he watched pictures of his own past unraveling. A dozen times he saw the myriad path of alternative events, each culminating in his death rather than escape. In the end it was only by using the gene markers of his old sword and the bloodchips that he managed to trap the Karmaflows within them and sidestep the spatial cage that was emerging from Karmaspace through the Abyss to imprison him. The only other times he had felt so afraid was when Kuanji was overcome with her Dawnlust. It was so hard for her people to contain the forces of the tg-fields when piloting their Nightships that sometimes the energies just escaped them. Without Bloodchips to harness those energies their destructive powers would rip through the fabric of time and space as easily as Flexor lines through skin.

"What about the Ship-Core?" asked Anjers.

"It was nowhere to be found. We are seeking the guidance of the Goddess".

"You'll need more than that!"

Anjers realised almost immediately the error in his choice of words. Graff rose sharply, turning to face Anjers, a hand reaching down towards the weapon at his

side.

"Today she must laugh at you. An offworlder reduced to this game of exchange!"

Anjers stood.

"That may be so but without the Ship-Core there is no exchange."

"Do you think we have to rely on your infernal machines?" Graff rolled up his left sleeve. The purple patterns on one of his arm plates looked to be different. Anjers looked more closely. It was a Corejack! He hadn't suspected for one moment that this Nav's offworld travels had been so great.

"Where did you get that?" inquired Anjers.

"The Ways of the Goddess are mystery. Many years ago I knew a young Illuminst apprentice. I accompanied him to Octaine. It was a dead world. Yes, more so than here. A Ship-Core had been used to store the records of the Temple. It had been severely bio-modified and bonded with its discoverer. Which of course, I was."

"So you could fly the Pentacle ship yourself?" Anjers reeled at the thought. The ships normally had a command crew of thirteen. Three of them alone were needed to pilot the tg-engines on system entry. Regulations demanded that this was never performed with less than two pilots. Only Kuanji's Breed were able to attempt such a feat with their Nightships and frequently the resultant Dawnlusts wiped out their kind.

"Yes, I can fly that ship. When you give me the co-ordinates to the Oblivion world."

Armillo's comm-glove flashed.

"Commander, we're picking up strange readings"

"Tg-engines?"

"No sir, more localized."

"OK, I'll be aboard tonight, I want a full report waiting."

"Yes sir" the comm channel went silent.

Once more the Grove was becoming subdued, the violent dance of lights fading to the subtle purple that characterised the groves. Inside the shelter Anjers was becoming frustrated. He knew they couldn't leave until the Fellar trees were dormant once again but was quickly Growing tired of waiting. The prospect of Graff piloting a Pentacle ship all by himself was something Anjers still couldn't quite believe. He was half envious of the Corejack, the possibilities were endless - weapons interface, world probes, system archives all via neuro processing! He wondered how many of these interfaces existed or if Graff was unique in his interaction with the modified Ship-Core from Octaine. Graff woke him from his thoughts.

"Come, the Fellars begin to tire"

Wearily he walked back out into the Grove, straining his eyes to accommodate the new light.

"So, when do I get the ship?" asked Anjers, starting to walk back towards the comforts of Ision7's notorious bar.

"Soon mercenary, soon. But tonight you spend with the Nav, come, come."

Smiling, he slapped Anjers heavily on the back for the second time this day and he reluctantly followed Graff out of the Grove towards the little Nav settlement.

Armillo stepped out the silver shuttle and proceeded straight from the Starchaser's docking bay to his private quarters. Rinsing his hands he took pleasure in the abundance of generated water, something lacking on Ision7. To his left the viewstat was set to show mode and he could see the curved beauty of a lagoon nebula. Deep in its hourglass depths clouds of material that would form new stars were already collapsing. All across the galaxy immense change was taking place as he stood in quiet solitude, glad to be in familiar surroundings once again. He stroked a hidden sensor on an overhead compartment and waited for the panel to slip open. Reaching in he took out the small Absingle Antidote Hypo. A moment later the biogenic was doing its work preventing Armillo from developing the body plates that long-term exposure to Ision7 would induce. He knew that without the Oblivion Rituals performed by an Elderone they would never be strong enough to deflect the atmospheric debris but still he did not want the stain of their modification to taint him at all. He had spent too many years away from the Ision system and had grown used to his unmodified body. He wanted to stay that way. He stroked his hair back and reached for the report waiting for him. On the table the Ship-Core's ring of glyphs were pulsing ever stronger, a constant reminder that the lost ship was getting ever closer to being

flight ready.

The Nav settlement was at the far end of the Grove. It was easily identified by the lack of Fellar trees. A small ground cover of grappleworm bushes encircled the labyrinth of tents. Once more Anjers was shocked by the contradictions of this world. Eighty percent of its surface was afflicted by the continual bombardment from space and yet these people were living in the flimsiest of dwellings. He guessed the contradiction was not lost on them and Graff explained how the Tribes of Nav were a nomadic people, moving from Grove to Grove. The woman pulled the bread from the small fire on the ground. Grappleworm's small branches produced high temperatures whilst its berries gave the potent drink for which it was better known. Anjers ripped a piece off the large disc of bread and joined the other Nav in spitting out the tiny pieces of rock that had been baked into its surface.

"This is good" Anjers said, as the flavouring from the grappleworm branches began to saturate his senses. The Nav woman smiled, looking towards Graff. He rocked in his cross-legged position, a rosary of crystals passing through his hands. From the back of the tent a small girl came forward to bring more of the bread. Standing before Graff she turned her large green eyes upon him, pleading silently and then spoke.

"Please tell us again the story of the Oblivion Saints" Graff's fingers stopped moving the crystals and he looked up at Anjers.

"Perhaps you too should hear this story offworlder."

Anjers would remember the story for a long time to come. It was in the time of Valqueth when the Illuminst order had first come to Ision7. For many ages the planet had been isolated from the politics of deep space empires. Out here on the edge of the galactic rim, beyond the almost un-navigable recesses of the lagoon nebula, continually bombarded by the remnants of planetoids that formed a huge belt on the edge of the system. Ision8 and Ision9 had been visited by long range probes but the combination of journey and planetoid belt had prevented anyone from establishing colonies. Until the time of Valqueth. Everything changed following his vision of the Scarlet Oracle, whole worlds were committed to a search that would last generations. Those later generations would see the Codex of Valqueth as little more than myth. Some even called it the Death Codex as so many had perished in those darker centuries looking for it. The Oblivion sect was peculiar to Ision7. They inhabitants of that world had their own visions of a Scarlet Goddess. They came to believe that the secrets of Valqueth and the Codex were now forever in Her care. As if calling to her devotees, the first of the Oblivion

Saints had walked out into the fierce starstorm and willed their body armour to cease protecting them. Thus they believed they would enter the realm of the Goddess, escape whatever woes or boredom they found in their current lives.

"Who was the first Saint Elderone?" the Nav girl had asked.

Rolan the Blind had long tired of the small pleasures to be found with his tribe. Every year that had walked to the further Grove before the snowbelt. And with each passing year he had found less and less reason to be obsessed with the living. At first he had inhaled vast quantities of Absingle dust, his body mass becoming huge, his skin plates capable of stopping the worst of the projectiles falling from orbit. With the huge intake his own visions of the Goddess increased until the point where he discovered the meaning of her deepest mystery. She held the Codex in hand and was able to warp reality at will, instantly changing genetic makeups and extending lifespans. Rolan the Blind was not interested in that, only to enter the realm of the Goddess and worship her.

The pounding his body received when he stepped into the starstorm should have obliterated him.

Some thought the massive new bodyplates must somehow have protected him still. But no-one could be sure as his body was never found. One moment he was in the middle of the howling storm, the next he was gone. One moment Rolan the Blind, the next Rolan, First of the Oblivion Saints.

"Where is he now Elderone?" Anjers remembered every question she asked. He knew Graff wanted him to and wondered if there wasn't some form of biogenic in the bread that he'd eaten. Slowly he cast his mind back for the memories. He knew the Nav wouldn't be able to share his new insights about the Oblivion Siantis with his people.

"He is with the Goddess now" Graff had answered Let us give homage the Rolan the Saint." All around the tent became hushed as the tribe cast their thoughts skyward. Graff once more had the crystal rosary in his hand, muttering the litany of the saints. Anjers found it all very touching, but a lie nevertheless.

As he walked in the grove night descended. He tried to make out stars but as always was thwarted by the falling rocks of the starstorm. This was one world he would be glad to be rid of, though he was starting to like their holy man. He wondered what worlds Graff had already travelled to and what wonders his bio Corejack would reveal. Just the thought of one man piloting a Pentacle ship was wonder itself. It would feel good to finally prise that ship from the clutches of

Armillio and the Temple. Good to put that TG-Ice to proper use. Anjers smiled deeply.

* * *

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Many thanks to Sean for providing this on-going story. If you've missed any of the previous chapters then remember you can still read them in the back issues of this eZine which are available for download at : www.screamingdreams.com



www.myspace.com/gothickknowledge

Sean's talents are not just limited to his writing either. One of his other passions in life is creating music. Check out some of his latest offerings at the above link. You may also like to view Sean's other sites too ...

www.seanwoodward.com

www.dragonheartpress.com

Worthwhile Web

Here are a few of my favourite places online. If you would like to advertise your own website or store here then feel free to get in touch. Please remember that I will only include site links that are of relevant content!

* * *

Renderosity

I have been a member of *Renderosity* for quite a few years now and it's certainly one of the most visited links in my bookmarks! Anyone interested in digital art, with particular emphasis on the 3D side of things, should join this fantastic art community. You will find galleries, forums, a marketplace and much more.

If you use any graphics software such as Poser, Bryce, Cinema 4D, Vue Esprit, Terragen, Photoshop or Paintshop Pro and are looking for add-on resources then you should check out the '*Free Stuff*' and '*Marketplace*' sections. There are literally thousands of useful goodies available to help you with your digital work.

You should also take the opportunity to show-off your latest creations in the '*Gallery*' section and browse the '*Forums*' for help and advice from other users. So what are you waiting for? Surf along to Renderosity now!



www.renderosity.com

MySpace

I'm guessing that most of you have already heard about *MySpace*? But for those who haven't yet discovered this powerful networking tool then I'll fill you in on the basics of what you need to know ...

MySpace has become a huge online resource for those wishing to connect with other like-minded people. At first glance it may appear somewhat like a dating site, and while I'm sure some people use it for such a purpose there are a lot of users who are taking advantage of it more for the networking and promotional opportunities. Or you can use it just to make new friends of course.

Bands and musicians in particular have really started to make their mark online using *MySpace* as a way of reaching a larger potential audience. It's a place where they can upload their MP3 format songs, list their upcoming gigs, keep a blog of the latest news, and network with other bands and fans.

Other users are also starting to realise the potential of *MySpace* and you can now also find many fantasy/SF/horror authors, artists, publishers, film-makers and more on there. Even this eZine has it's own *MySpace* page to try and attract new readers! Check out : www.myspace.com/estronomicon

The layouts are pretty basic and as it's a free site you have to put up with the usual selection of adverts, but as a promotional tool it has proved to be very useful indeed. So if you are looking for a way to help advertise your own work or website then it's certainly worth signing-up and making use of this site.

Anyway, I hope you find *MySpace* as useful as I have so far. Let me know if you decide to join and don't forget to add me to your '*Friends*' list on there!



www.myspace.com

ArtZone

Following in the footsteps of both *Renderosity* and *MySpace* is *ArtZone*. This service is provided by DAZ, who create some of the best add-on resources for Poser and DAZ|Studio plus sell other popular 3D apps such as Bryce.

With *ArtZone* their aim is to offer digital artists a place to share their work and ideas with other graphic users online. While not as feature-rich in some respects as the previous two sites mentioned, *ArtZone* is another valuable online tool that is worth looking into, especially if you are interested in 3D graphics ... although this site is not limited to DAZ's own programs of course.

It's free to sign-up and the site is well-organized with a much nicer default layout than *MySpace*. You can create your own profile page, upload artwork, keep your own blog, browse the forums for useful info and much more.

There are many similar art community sites online these days so it can be difficult to choose which one to sign-up with. But as most of them are free then my advice to you is to join several of them! After all, it's cheap extra exposure for your work and worth taking advantage of these services while you can.



artzone.daz3d.com

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Remember, it's FREE!

See the eZine page at [Screaming Dreams](#) for more info