

ESTRONOMICON

FANTASY ✦ SCIENCE FICTION ✦ HORROR

Interim 6.5 March 2007



**Defence
Mechanism**
by Lee Moan

"Our scans have picked up something on the surface of Vega III's moon." Jagers nodded at the sub-space display, where a red blip pulsed ominously in its centre. "Sir, I think it's a life-form reading."

1940

1975

2025

Artwork
by Barclay Shaw
and David B. Mattingly

Revolution
by Krishan Coupland

The world has become a strange place for me recently ...



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

'Proteus Operation'
© David B. Mattingly
1996

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Victims Of Success

by Steve Upham

Estronomicon certainly made its mark last year and I must once again say a big thank you to everyone involved for all their support along the way. In fact it's because that it proved more successful than anyone may have anticipated, that further delays releasing each issue became inevitable. Let me explain ...

When I first started to develop this eZine it was originally meant to be a fairly concise monthly publication. A sort of extended newsletter with the odd interview or showcase and the possibility of a short story now and again. I honestly never imagined that I would end up inundated with submissions from authors and artists wanting to be featured! So *Estronomicon* quickly turned into a larger project than I first thought, which meant each issue took longer to produce of course. 2006 saw six main issues released and one Christmas special, which in fact was a pretty good turnaround considering all the time that went into them.

All these issues received a great response from everyone and word seemed to spread quickly, resulting in a fairly wide reader-base for this publication. I have been very pleased with the positive feedback and aim to continue expanding on what we have all achieved so far.

Of course as the exposure and popularity of this eZine has increased, so has the rate of submissions! Which means I'm now finding myself in the position of having far too much content to try and fit into the main issues for this year. So I've come up with a solution for making best use of this extra material within my limited timeframe for the overall publication schedule ...

The main issues of *Estronomicon* will continue as planned, but I will also be releasing these mini '*Interim*' editions with just a limited selection of material (for example two artist showcases and two short stories in this issue), which enables me to bring you this additional content but in shorter batches. The regular features/columns will remain in the normal issues but won't be included here, purely for the sake of time.

I hope you will all enjoy these *Interims* anyway! All feedback is welcome as always so please feel free to get in touch at the usual address, thanks.

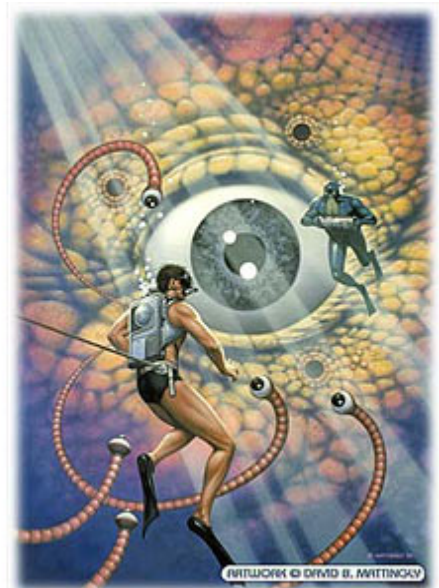
Paint To Pixel

The Art Of David B. Mattingly

It is with great pleasure that I bring you a wonderful Mattingly cover on this issue of the eZine! A huge thank you to David for being so generous, allowing me to feature his work here and for taking the time to answer my questions.

I have been a big fan of David's work for many years and am proud to have one of his original paintings hanging up on my wall at home! He is without doubt one of the top artists in the business and has successfully managed the transition from traditional media to digital tools in recent years, helping him stay ahead in this very competitive field. Read on to find out more ...

* * *



David Burroughs Mattingly was born in Fort Collins, Colorado in 1956, the son of John W. Mattingly, the inventor of the "**Water Pik**". David began drawing and painting as a small child, influenced by comic books, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and a wide array of artists from Jim Steranko, to N.C. Wyeth, to Jackson Pollack. After high school, he attended the Colorado Institute of Art , Colorado State University and later transferred to Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. After school, he worked at Walt Disney Studios, ultimately becoming head of the matte department. He worked on "**The Black Hole**", "**Tron**", "**Dick Tracy**", Stephen King's "**The Stand**" and most recently "**I, Robot**" for Weta Digital in New Zealand.



'Life On Mars': Copyright © David B. Mattingly 2007

While at Disney Studios, David began doing freelance art. His first published piece was the album cover for "**The Commodores Greatest Hits**". His first sale of art for a book cover was for "**A Wizard in Bedlam**," by Christopher Stasheff, published by DAW Books. In 1983 he moved to New York City, and a year later across the Hudson River to Hoboken, New Jersey.

David has produced over 500 covers for most major publishers of science fiction and fantasy, including Baen, Bantam, DAW, Del Rey, Dell, Marvel, Omni, Playboy, Signet, and Tor. For Scholastic Inc, David painted 54 covers for K.A. Applegate's "*Animorphs*" series, along with the last 5 covers for the "*Everworld*" series.. He illustrated the popular "*Honor Harrington*" series for author David Weber. He painted the latest repackaging of Edgar Rice Burroughs' "*Pellucidar*" books for Ballantine Books. He is a two time winner of Magazine and Booksellers "*Best Cover of the Year*" award, and winner of the Association of Science Fiction Artists "*Chesley*" award. Other clients include Michael Jackson, Lucasfilm, Universal Studios, Totco Oil, Galloob Toys, R/Greenberg Associates, Click 3X and Spontaneous Combustion.



'The Wizard Of Camelot' & 'In The Heart Of Darkness' : Copyright © David B. Mattingly 2007

After 20 years of traditional painting, David bought a computer ten years ago and has mainly worked digitally since then, preferring the powerful new tools that working digitally offers the artist. Most of his work today combines digital painting, and elements generated in 3D programs.



'The World Of Cloning' : Copyright © David B. Mattingly 2007

David is married to Cathleen Cogswell, and they share their home with three cats, Annie, Jackson and Glinda.

* * *

Q : You have produced work for some of the top companies in the world ... Has this given you a sense of achievement and satisfaction?

A : There are 2 answers to that - one is that it is great to do work that a lot of people see, and to know that a painting is appreciated. On the other hand, what makes me happiest is doing something I am proud of, whether anyone notices it or not.

I did a series for Baen Books a number of years ago called "*Heroes in Hell*", and I still am very proud of what I did for the covers. However, the response was not

positive - people found the covers dark, disturbing, and uninviting. I guess the best an artist can ask for is a balance between doing work that people like, and work that is personally meaningful. The best outcome of all is when I do something I am really proud of that lots of people see - those are the moments when being an artist is most satisfying.

Q : When you first started using digital tools, were you sad to leave your paintbrush behind? Or did you welcome the new media without reservation?

A : I never was a painter who took advantage of traditional media as much as the "masters" do - I painted very flat, in acrylic, so I didn't get much in the way of transparent/opaque effects that make great oil paintings so dazzling. Artists like Monet, Norman Rockwell, Rembrandt, or Jackson Pollack took advantage of what paint does best, allowing the painted surface be a big part of the final project. What I always considered the strong parts of my work was the detail, the attention to the whole "environment" of the illustration, and interesting color solutions - all of which working digitally allows me to do even better.

So the answer is that I don't miss working traditionally - if I did, I would go back to that way of working. I still do sketches in pencil and gouache, then scan in the sketches and work digitally over those ideas, and that way I get some traditional media into my projects.

Q : What project has been your favourite to work on over the years?

A : My cover for Ben Bova's book "**Orion**" is one of my all time favorite paintings. It is a tribute to Jacques-Louis David and Ingres, two of my artistic idols, and a personal statement about what art means to me. I also like "**How to Save the World**", a digital cityscape I did that hit the mark in terms of what I would like my current work to look like. Other favorites are the covers for Edgar Rice Burroughs "**Pellucidar**" series I did a few years ago for Del Rey Books, and "**The Subway Wizard**", a cover I did for Amazing Stories Magazine.

Q : Do you ever produce artwork these days just from your own interest, or do you get bored with doing enough of it as your job?

A : I do a fair amount of experimental work, often in connection with learning new computer programs. I am love working in a 3D program called "**3D Studio Max**", and I am constantly challenged to keep up to date with the program, and stretch the boundaries of what I can do.

Q : Does the "fun" go out of the job after so many years in the business?

A : Not for minute - I love what I do, and I find it just as challenging today as when I first started.

* * *

Check out David's website at : www.davidmattingly.com



'Honor Among Enemies' : Copyright © David B. Mattingly 1995

Defence Mechanism

by Lee Moan

"Skipper, you need to look at this."

It was the tremor of concern--so unlike Jaggers--that made Captain Hollis sit up and suspend his analysis without hesitation. He crossed the control room to the pilot's console, and looked over his shoulder at the readouts.

"What is it, Jaggers?"

"Our scans have picked up something on the surface of Vega III's moon." Jaggers nodded at the sub-space display, where a red blip pulsed ominously in its centre. "Sir, I think it's a life-form reading."

Hollis felt a momentary thrill pass through his system, but the greater, rational part of him quickly took over. He looked out through the viewing screen above them, studying the grey surface of the moon.

"Impossible," he said. "Earth astronomers declared Vega III and its moon barren a long time ago."

"I would agree, sir, but the readouts say different." Jaggers looked up at his captain hopefully. "What are you going to do, sir?"

Hollis was staring into the dim glow of the viewer's images. "Inform the Earth Exploration League, of course. They'll send a team out here--"

"In about three months!"

Hollis glared down at the young pilot. It was not the first time Jaggers had challenged his authority. "You have a better suggestion, Jaggers?"

Jaggers continued quickly. "Sir, I just think that if we leave it to the EEL to investigate, whatever it is down there may be gone by the time they get here. And that means we won't receive any reward for its discovery. I suggest we go down to the surface and investigate ourselves."

"But Jaggers, we are not scientists. Nor are we explorers. We're cargo-haulers, and I for one am homesick."

Jaggers looked up at his captain with a roguish grin. "Skipper, I beg to differ. We *work* in space. In that sense, sir, we're all explorers."

Hollis smiled. "Well put, Jaggers. Very well put."

"Also, sir, the reward for bringing an unidentified species to Earth is much bigger than it would be for just reporting it."

Hollis sat down slowly, giving Jaggers his full attention. "Really? How big?"

"Well, let me put it this way. We'd never have to haul cargo again. Wouldn't that be one hell of a bonus to take home to Anna and Jake?"

Hollis stared at the image of the moon's surface for a long time. Being away from his wife and growing son was something that was always uppermost in his mind. Leaving them was like a physical wound.

"Okay, Jaggers. Set up the automatic orbiting sequence. I'll ready the *Broken Arrow* for landing."

* * *

Unlike the modern cargo-haulers which were fitted with molecular transporters, the *Alexa* was still equipped with a drop-ship. The *Broken Arrow* had been in service for a long time; the network of meteorite-impacts and carbon-scarring on its hull paid tribute to this fact. When landing a freighter the size of the *Alexa* proved difficult, drop-ships were used for ferrying large quantities of cargo off-planet. Its storage area in the rear could hold up to fifty tonnes of merchandise at any one time. Hollis and Jaggers had used the *Broken Arrow* on a number of occasions and it had never let them down.

As they settled into the cockpit, connecting their space suits to the chair restraints, Hollis noted the fixed grin on Jaggers' face, distorted somewhat by the bulge of his visor.

"You look like a kid who's just been given the key to a candy factory," he said.

"You'll have to excuse me, sir. I always wanted to be an explorer-"

"So you're always telling me," Hollis said.

"Well, this is probably as close as I'll ever get to discovering a new life-form."

Hollis laughed. "Don't get too excited, Jagers." He released the manual clamps and the ship began to slide towards the release doors. "It's probably just a bug."

"With respect, sir, the readings indicated a massive life-form. It would have to be a pretty big bug. I mean *huge*."

Hollis handed him a pulse-pistol. "Then we may need these."

With that, Hollis hit a button. The release doors rolled open, and the ocean of deep black beyond rushed up to meet them.

* * *

The *Broken Arrow* swooped gracefully across the moon's skyline, following the trace co-ordinates of the life-form scan. During their descent, the two men studied the terrain below, looking for anything that might be visible from the air.

Hollis shook his head. "I don't see anything in this sector, Jagers. If it's as big as you say it is, surely we'd see it from up here?"

"It's down there, sir. I can feel it." Then, in the shadows of his helmet, Jagers' eyes suddenly flared bright. "Look! There, sir!"

Hollis followed the line of his finger, squinting into the gloomy landscape. Yes, there was something there, a thick black something, crescent-shaped; but it was so far away it was impossible to make out any further details. Hollis sensed that double-beat in his chest again.

Switching to manual for the final arc, Jagers landed the *Broken Arrow* on the rocky surface with hardly a tremor. They sat in silence for a moment, looking out across the dark terrain. From this position, there was nothing that broke up the moon's skyline.

Then Hollis said: "Jagers, if there is something out there, and if it looks malevolent in any way, we abort immediately. Do you understand? *Immediately*. I'm not risking our lives for the sake of some juvenile exploration. Our work duties are paramount. Is that clear?"

Jagers nodded, but Hollis suspected the young pilot would have agreed to anything at that point in order to get them out of the ship.

With a hiss, the airlock door spiralled open, and the two men stepped out onto the moon's surface. The ambient light from Vega III cast the rocky landscape in a

blue wash, creating sharp shadows that stretched across the terrain. As they took their first few steps, they found the gravity here was marginally more substantial than that of Earth's own moon. They proceeded towards the origin of the trace readings, Jagers taking up the lead, holding his radar handset out ahead of him.

As they began to climb a steep gradient, Hollis noticed his partner was moving away from him.

"Jagers!" Hollis called.

Jagers didn't respond. Up ahead, the young pilot staggered suddenly, and his hands went to both sides of his helmet, as if he'd been struck with a great pain. Then he straightened up, and continued on up the rise at an even faster pace.

"Jagers, slow down!"

Jagers was striding now, like a man possessed. Hollis was about to call out a third time, when Jagers' voice sounded in his earpiece.

"Skipper, I've got it pinpointed! It's just over this rise-"

Jagers stopped dead in his tracks, on the lip of the rocky ridge. Cursing him, Hollis hurried up the slope. As he neared the top, he felt a knife of sharp pain slice into his brain. Instinctively, his gloved hand went to his temples, only to rebound uselessly off the glass visor. The pain was only momentary, and he found he was soon able to continue his ascent. Jagers was standing with his shoulders slumped, arms hanging loose at his side, staring down into the canyon.

"What is it, Jagers?" he asked. "What-"

The two men stood in silence, their eyes studying every inch of the vision below.

"Dear God," Hollis heard himself say. "Is that . . . what I think it is?"

Jagers nodded.

In the middle of the lunar plain, two small wooden houses stood out from the surrounding terrain. Both houses were the same size, and had a porch with an identical square of garden out front, surrounded by a white picket fence.

The windows of both houses were alive with a warm yellow light.

"This can't be real," Hollis said, as they moved towards the two houses.

Jaggers stopped a foot or so from the first picket fence and looked down at the freshly-painted wood. "Easy way to test if it is real, sir."

He reached out and grabbed a section of wood, giving it an experimental shake. The entire fence rattled all the way to the front gate.

"Solid, sir," Jaggers reported, but Hollis was already aware of that.

"But this is wrong," Hollis said.

"You're right, sir. Nobody could live in such conditions. Not on a moon. There's no oxygen, and the gravitational field-"

"Forget that, Jaggers! You only have to look at it. It's insane!"

They stood in silence for a moment.

"What should we do, Skipper? Go back?"

Hollis was contemplating this, when his young pilot suddenly gasped at something he'd seen on the far side of the picket fence. It was a tall steel mailbox. Written on it in red paint was the surname: JAGGERS.

"Oh my God," Hollis said. "*Jaggers?*"

Jaggers didn't respond. He seemed to have fallen into a trance. In slow deliberate movements, Jaggers opened the gate and began to walk up the path.

"Jaggers! Wait! Don't go in there!"

But the young man either couldn't hear him, or chose not to. He ascended the steps and pushed open the screen door.

Hollis was about to go after him, when something caught his eye in the garden of the adjacent house. It was another steel mailbox, identical to the first. On the side of this one was the name he had been expecting. And dreading.

HOLLIS.

He, like Jaggers, forgot his rational mind in an instant, and began to drift towards the house like a ghost. He opened the gate and started up the short path.

When he reached the screen door and peered inside, he found everything he treasured on the world he'd left behind.

* * *

The first thing Captain Hollis noticed as he stepped through the front door was the sensation of warm, fragrant air which greeted him, the scent of everything that was once familiar and comforting to him: the smell of home. He stopped in the hallway, his attention drawn to the creaking of his heavy grav-boots on the pine boards beneath him. He was aware that he was wearing a thirty-pound space suit, and that he couldn't possibly smell anything outside of it; but at the same time, some overriding voice was assuring him that these sights and smells of his life on Earth were absolutely genuine.

Just as he was about to head for the kitchen he heard something upstairs. The low murmur of a female voice. He went to the bottom step and looked up. Light from one of the upstairs bedrooms flickered on the landing wall as a figure moved in front of its source. Then he heard a child's deep, harsh cough.

"Jake," he said to himself, ignoring the note of insanity in his voice.

He began to climb the stairs.

"It's all right, Jake," he heard the woman saying. "Momma's here."

At the top of the stairs, he found himself looking through the open door of his son's bedroom. Anna, his wife of six years, sat beside the bed, pressing a cool flannel against Jake's forehead. His boy looked deathly pale. There were dark brown rings beneath his sky-blue eyes and his lips were a light shade of purple.

As Hollis watched from the doorway, a fierce cough erupted from Jake's chest, doubling the boy up in a cramp of agony. Anna moved against him with a comforting arm, pressing a cloth to his mouth. When the coughing fit subsided, Anna removed the cloth, and Hollis saw the patch of red upon it. Jake collapsed and seemed to fall back into a light sleep. The sleep of sick-exhaustion.

"My boy," Hollis said, his voice trembling with emotion.

Just then, Anna turned to the doorway and her eyes fixed on him, growing wide with recognition and unbound relief.

"Ryan!"

She jumped up and ran towards him, arms outstretched. Afraid of what contact with her might mean, terrified that his mind was breaking, Hollis took a step backwards. She saw the fear in his eyes and stopped short. She regarded him for a moment, tears standing in her sapphire eyes. The eyes she had given their boy.

"Anna," he said. "I don't understand what's happening here. Is this . . . a dream?"

"No," she said. "Not a dream."

"Am I going insane? Is that it? Have I finally succumbed to space mania?"

A thin smile touched her lips and she shook her head.

"But if this was real," he told her, "you'd be dead. You couldn't survive the lack of oxygen for a start." A sudden biting pain appeared in the centre of his head as he spoke. "And the gravity, you couldn't-" The pain reached a crescendo, but when he stopped that line of thought, the bitter sting faded.

He reached up and touched her face tenderly, just as a single tear spilled down her cheek and onto the fingers of his glove. He saw the tear soak into the outer fabric. "And yet, this looks real, feels real. Everything in my heart tells me I'm really here with you, but logic . . ."

That pain again.

Anna let out a long sigh then, and touched the glass of his helmet. "Oh, Ryan. You are so smart. Nothing can fool you. You're right. This isn't real. Our meeting is not real, but-" She turned and looked back at the pale sleeping form in the bed behind her. "But what's happening back here on Earth is happening." She looked back at her husband, her frown creased by worry lines she'd not had when he last saw her. "Jake has the Bronchial Sickness. Many children have it here on Earth. The epidemic began about six months after you left."

Hollis felt a weakening at the knees. The suit suddenly seemed too heavy for him. "Bronchial Sickness?" he said.

Anna's head drooped and she nodded.

"When did Jake contract it?"

"About three weeks ago."

"Three weeks?" said Hollis. He knew how ravenous such a disease could be, knew from bitter experience that children rarely survived longer than a few months. His twin brother had died of it when they were both five years old. He hammered his fist into the wall. "Dear God, Anna. My boy's going to die and there's nothing I can do!"

She grabbed his forearms suddenly and fixed her eyes on his. "No, Ryan. There is something you can do. The cargo you are carrying on your ship--the *maelmite*--can save our son. It can save all the children!"

Hollis stared at her. "What? But how do you know this?"

"The scientists have researched it. Don't ask me the details because I don't know, Ryan. All I know is that what you are bringing home to Earth can save Jake. You must come home as soon as possible!" Her voice was rising in pitch as her anxiety grew. "Do you hear me, Ryan? Get home as soon as you can! Jake's life depends on it!"

* * *

When Hollis stumbled out onto the porch and down the warped wooden steps, he felt the disorienting effects dull slightly. He looked up and saw Jagers staggering out through the garden gate of the 'Jagers' house. He looked like he was heading for the ship, without even a glance to see if his captain was with him.

"Jagers! Wait for me!"

Hollis trotted over to him, the strain of forcing his muscles to work extra in this high gravity uppermost in his mind. When they came face to face, Hollis saw the deep lines of anxiety on his pilot's face.

"What happened in there, Jagers?"

Jagers spoke in a stilted monotone. "I saw my father. He's sick, Skipper. Real sick. Lung cancer."

"Sick?" Hollis said. "My boy's sick, too." Hollis looked along the moon's lifeless horizon and then back at the row of houses. "This is crazy . . ." The pain sliced through his head once more, but something made him hold onto that pain for a moment, a sudden wild thought flashing into his mind--*is the pain real?*--and strangely, this made the pain become smaller somehow.

"We better get back to the ship fast," Jagers said. "Back to earth. The *maelmite* is the only thing that can save my father's life." Jagers turned and began to walk in the direction of the drop-ship.

Hollis stayed where he was.

"Jagers," he said. "That's exactly what my wife told me."

Jagers stopped and looked back. "What?"

"She said the *maelmite* we're carrying is the only thing that can cure my son's sickness. Don't you think it's a little odd that we're carrying the cure for *two different* diseases on our ship?" As he spoke, the pain was steadily building up again, but Hollis was prepared to fight it.

"It's fortuitous, Skipper, that's what it is. And for that very reason, I think we should get back with all due speed."

"I don't buy it, Jagers." The expected wave of pain inside his skull failed to materialise. There was a niggling twinge somewhere deep down. Nothing more. Jagers' face, on the other hand, was knotted in agony.

"Skipper!" he bellowed. "We have to go!"

Hollis shook his head. "Jagers, something doesn't want us to be here. Don't you realise that? Don't you recognise those bolts of pain in your head for what they are?"

Jagers reached up and grabbed both sides of his helmet.

"Something is sending us a clear message to get the hell away from this place. Don't you want to know who or what is doing it? And why? I thought you were the explorer, Jagers?"

They both became aware of a figure standing on the porch of the Jagers residence. Hollis recognised Jagers' father instantly, despite his decrepit appearance. His silver hair was long and oily, his eyes and cheeks sunken. The vest he wore exposed his emaciated torso, and Hollis could count each individual rib. Despite their having known each other for many years, the old man did not acknowledge Hollis.

He called out to his son: "Dean! You must hurry! My time is short . . ."

Jaggers looked at his father with great remorse and then glared at Hollis. "You heard him, Skipper. Let's go!"

Hollis pulled the pulse-pistol from his utility belt and aimed it very deliberately at Jaggers' father.

"Skipper! What're you doing?" Jaggers screamed. Instantly, his own pistol was in his hand and pointed at Hollis.

"Listen to me, Jaggers. He's not real. None of this is real!"

"My father's in danger! *That* is real! And now, if you don't lower that pistol, I will shoot you, sir!"

Hollis kept his weapon trained on the old man, but turned to look Jaggers in the eye. "Jaggers, do you trust me?"

"What?"

"Jaggers, if you trust me, don't shoot! Whatever I do next, hold your fire until I've done it."

"Skipper, I won't let you-"

"Trust me, Jaggers," he said, and with that, he fired.

The pulse thumped into the old man's chest, sending his frail form crashing into the screen door. Jaggers screamed in fury and returned fire. Hollis dropped to the ground, the shot missing him by inches. He expected Jaggers to fire a second sure shot, and clamped his arms over his helmet, waiting for the end.

But it never came.

Slowly, Hollis unfolded his arms and looked up. Jaggers was standing with his arms dangling at his sides, the pistol held limply in his right hand, looking straight past Hollis at the view ahead. Hollis followed his gaze and found that the houses, the gardens, even the body of Jaggers' father had vanished. Directly in front of them was the bleak landscape of the moon.

And something else, something just beyond where the imaginary town had been.

Jaggers stumbled over to his captain and helped him to his feet. Hollis was glad to see that sanity had returned to Jaggers' eyes. They exchanged a long look, a mixture of mutual relief and disbelief. Then they both looked into the middle-distance, their eyes fixed on the dark shape which lay there.

Hollis had seen old pictures of beached whales, and he was reminded of them now as he approached the behemoth. He remembered that blue whales, once the largest of all Earth's sea creatures, had grown to lengths of around thirty feet, and a quick mental calculation told him that this beast was somewhere in excess of that. Its hide was molasses-black, and the starlight created a thin line of light along its upper body. The two men walked along its length, studying the vast bulk in numb silence. In its mid section, two large flat wings protruded from its body, lying limply in the dust. Hollis was the first to reach the head end where he found himself staring into a pair of large ovoid eyes, rheumy with fluid. As he took another step closer, the eyes blinked.

"Well, whatever it is," he said, "it's not dead."

At that the giant beast opened its maw and released a cry that echoed around the rocky landscape. It sounded like the distressed lowing of a very large cow. Its body began convulsing, its large wings flapping uselessly at its sides. Hollis thought the creature seemed to be trying to shift its vast bulk away from them. Then he realised he was still holding the pulse pistol in his hand.

"Jaggers," he said. "I think it's afraid of us."

Hollis clipped the gun on the back of his belt, and, after a moments hesitation, Jaggers did the same. The creature stopped squirming, and once again regarded them with its big wet eyes.

"How do you think it ended up here?" Jaggers asked.

"Well, it can't be a natural inhabitant of this moon. It's physiology is not conducive to living in this environment."

Jaggers nodded, absorbing his captain's hypothesis. He stepped up to the creature. It flinched, but he proceeded to reach out to its hide. When he touched it, he could feel a great deal, even through his gloves. "It's hide is covered in hundreds of scales. They're tough. Like metal. Flexible metal."

"What are you thinking, Jaggers?"

"I'm thinking, Skipper, that this beast came from-" He jabbed a finger skyward. "Up there. Look at the impact marks on its flanks, like its been hit by thousands of tiny meteorites. I'd say this creature has been in space for a very long time." Jagers continued to run his hands over the scaly body. "Do you think it's intelligent, sir?"

"It must be, Jagers. This creature created the hallucinations we just had. If it has the mental power to create illusions that powerful, to uncover our most personal fears, it must be intelligent."

"Why do you think it did that to us?" Jagers asked.

"Like I said, I think it's afraid of us. Those hallucinations were designed to make us leave, go back the way we'd come. I think it was a sort of defence mechanism."

Just then, Jagers ran his hand over a portion of the beast's lower flank, and when he brought up his glove, he gasped at the sight of blood.

"Look, Skipper. The creature's wounded."

Hollis stepped up and examined the four foot gash in the creature's underbelly. They could see white, bloody flesh beneath.

"It must've been hit by a big rock to sustain that kind of damage."

Hollis nodded. "Can we patch it up?"

Jagers nodded and reached into his utility pouch. "The cell regenerator should heal most of that soft tissue damage. I'm not so sure about the outer scales." He knelt down by the creature's side, and began to work on the gaping wound.

When he'd finished, both men stood back to admire how the cell regenerator had knitted the white flesh back together. Then, as they were studying it, the black scales began moving together over the gash until there was nothing of the soft tissue visible. The creature's outer skin was whole again.

"Amazing," said Hollis. "I guess it's ready for travel again."

"Travel? Skipper, the only place this baby's going is Earth."

Hollis felt a sudden surge of irritation at his pilot's greed; then he reminded himself why they were here. What that reward could do for both of them.

"D'you think it'll fly away before we can get it into the hold of the *Arrow*?" Jagers asked.

"No," said Hollis. "I don't think it has the strength to escape the gravitational pull of this moon. Especially not in its weakened state."

"Good." Jagers' eyes roamed over the creature's immense bulk. "The EEL are gonna pay big money for this."

* * *

Clouds of moon dust filled the air as Jagers manoeuvred the *Broken Arrow* above the creature. Hollis was on the ground, trying to guide him so that the ship's gaping cargo area was directly over the creature's form. But each time they had it in place, the beast bellowed and lurched sideways, desperately trying to avoid the descending craft.

After several attempts, Jagers landed the craft a few meters away and his voice sounded in Hollis's ear.

"Skipper, you need to reassure it," he said.

"Reassure it?" said Hollis. "How?"

"Try communicating with it."

Hollis shot his pilot a cool glare, then approached the creature. Gingerly, he reached out and placed both hands against the near side of the beast's tapered head. He felt its body heat through his suit. The beast bucked at his initial touch, but as he forced himself to relax, he found the beast relaxed, too.

"It's all right," he said, over and over. "We won't hurt you."

Suddenly, that familiar pain flared in his head, but only for a moment. The beast began to speak through him, and Hollis heard two very different voices coming from his own mouth.

"Pain in heart. Sadness. Swimming in the black sea. Space. Time and time and time. For so long. Finding no warmth. Looking for home. Hurting. Meteorites impacting on skin. Cannot leave this place. Too heavy, too hurt. Looking for home. Home . . ."

Hollis released his grip and stepped away from the creature, gasping for breath.

Jaggers had climbed from the cockpit and joined him. Both men watched in awe as the creature proceeded to wriggle forward, using its long, thin wings to crawl forward into the back of the *Broken Arrow*. When they had sealed the doors behind it, Jaggers looked at his captain with wonder.

"That was incredible. What did you say to it, Skipper?"

Hollis smiled faintly, but didn't answer.

They climbed into the cockpit and were soon gliding over the lunar landscape. After breaking free of the moon's gravitational pull, Hollis opened a channel on the sub-space communicator. After a minute or so, he received a welcome page from Earth. In seconds he had dialled his home. The screen filled with his wife's face. She was yawning and trying to fix her wild hair.

"Ryan?"

"Anna!" he said.

"It's lovely to hear from you, hon, but do you know what time it is on Earth?"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, darlin'. I just had to call, to find out if you were okay."

"I'm fine," she told him.

"And Jake?"

As he said his son's name, the boy appeared behind his mother, rubbing his eyes with a balled fist and dragging a cloth dog along beside him. Anna put her arm round his narrow shoulders and drew him to her chest. "Of course, hon. Jake's fine. Say hello to your daddy, sweetheart."

Jake offered an affectionate wave and said, "Hi, Dad."

Tears welled up in Hollis's eyes and he found himself touching the viewing screen. "I just had to know that you were both all right."

Anna sensed the vibration in his voice, even across the sea of stars. "Ryan, is anything wrong?"

"No," he said. "Everything's fine. We've set course for home."

"Can't wait to see you," Anna told him. "Get home soon."

Hollis saw the counter click towards zero. "There's our minute. Love you both."

The screen went dark and Hollis settled back into his chair with a heavy sigh. Sometimes, the pain of missing them was too much. But what they were carrying in the *Broken Arrow* hold could end all that. And yet, something brushed against the corners of his conscience.

Silence reigned in the cockpit. Hollis flicked on the hold monitor and found himself staring into the huge dark eyes of the beast.

Before he could stop himself, Hollis stabbed the hold release button and, via the monitor, saw the doors open behind the creature. The beast let out a cry which shook the hull of the *Broken Arrow*. They watched as it slipped out into the gulf of stars.

"Skipper!" Jagers shrieked. "What are you *doing*?"

Hollis said nothing, his attention fixed on the monitor. There was a brief period of anxiety, before the beast convulsed, and its large wings snapped into life. It arced around in a graceful manoeuvre and then accelerated into the distance at an incredible speed. The two men stared at the viewing monitors until the creature was beyond their range.

"It just wanted to get home, Jagers," Hollis said, filling the silence. "Can't you understand that?"

After a while, the anger in the pilot's face melted away, and the tension in the cockpit eased. "Aye, Sir. I suppose you're right." He sighed. "What do you think made such a creature leave its home planet in the first place, Skipper?"

Hollis shrugged. "War. Famine." A smile spread across his face. "Who knows, Jagers, maybe he was an explorer at heart. Just like you."

* * *

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Lee Moan lives on the south coast of England with his wife and three children. His stories have appeared in *Dark Recesses Press, Revelation, Scifantastic, AlienSkin, Nocturnal Ooze, Whispers of Wickedness* and *From the Asylum*.

Beyond The Canvas

The Art Of Barclay Shaw

Words alone are not enough to describe the amazing work of Barclay Shaw. You need to experience the visual wonders with your own eyes! His images are among the most intense and vibrant you will ever see, jumping right off the page at you. From traditional painting to digital illustration, animation to sculpture, Barclay is a master of all media and it is with great pleasure I present a showcase of his work in this issue of the eZine ...

* * *



'Remaking Of Sigmund Freud' : Copyright © Barclay Shaw 2007

Since turning to the arts as a full-time freelance artist, Barclay Shaw has painted well over 500 book and magazine cover illustrations, working for virtually every major U.S. publishing house. His paintings have received Chesley Awards and several Hugo Award nominations, and his original artwork is displayed in museums and galleries, as well as Science Fiction & Fantasy Convention art shows. He now provides high-end computer graphics and 3D animation support primarily for government and private sector scientific research and development programs.

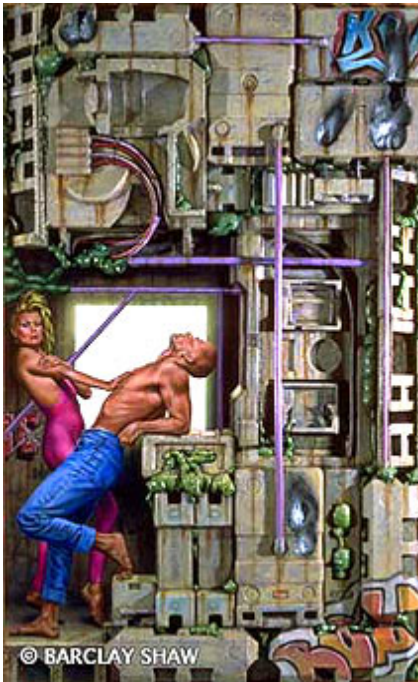


'Organic Perch' & 'Paingod' : Copyright © Barclay Shaw 2007

The art of Barclay Shaw stands apart in its eclectic originality. His strikingly surreal imagery and crystalline rendering style create a unique space within the arena of illustrative art, computer generated graphics and 3D animation.

Although the majority of Shaw's early artwork has centered on Science Fiction and Fantasy themes, his work covers an extremely broad range of subject matter and use of materials: from painting and sculpture to digital imagery, 3D

animation and multimedia presentation. His background in painting, sculpture and design along with his active interest in animation and music production, make him uniquely qualified for the current environment of computer generated graphics and multimedia production.

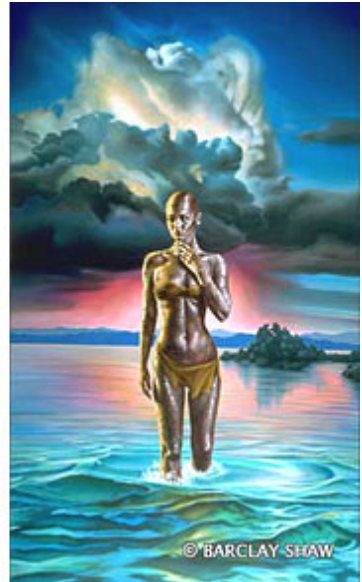


'Subway Love' & 'Work In Progress' : Copyright © Barclay Shaw 2007

In addition to traditional art tools, his studio includes both Macintosh and Windows platforms and has full digital audio and video production capabilities.

Clients include : Bantam Doubleday Dell, Baen Books, Ballantine Books, Berkley Publishing Group, Boeing, CACI, CIA, DARPA, DC Comics, DAW Books, Del Ray Books, DynCorp, Fawcett Books, Field Publishing, Friedlander Publishing Group, Galoob Toys, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Hasbro, Heavy Metal, Home Squared, US Army INSCOM, Macmillan Publishing, Mayfair Games, Maui High Performance Computing Center, Micro Analysis & Design, Myers Rum, National Audubon Society, NRO, Object Sciences Corp., OMNI International, Parker Bros.,

Penguin USA, G. P. Putnam's Sons, PBS, Random House, SAIC, Shafer Corp., Simon & Schuster, TOR Books, Toys R Us, TSR, Time/Warner, USC ISI, Waite Group Press, Whittle Communications, Ziff-Davis



'Shadow Singer' & 'Eurydice' : Copyright © Barclay Shaw 2007

* * *

Q : Since making the switch to digital tools, do you miss the "feel" of real paint?

A : The quick answer is no. I have always enjoyed using a variety of media, where a fair portion of that enjoyment is derived directly from those differences in "feel" between media. I spent 20 years primarily painting in oil and acrylic, occasionally sculpting and always dabbling in music along the way (guitar & synth). I have also had ongoing interests in film making, animation and computing. In the digital realm I can now combine all these areas of interest as part of my profession and could not be more thrilled.

I have always found satisfaction in the actual creation process, not in the end product itself. The same artistic principles apply across all media. Digital image

generation bears very little resemblance to painting as such, but I find the creative process equally rewarding, if not more so. Working in 3D programs is like sculpting a 3D painting for me. I can then expand on it by creating an animation of the scene, composing a sound track, then compositing and editing the components into a final piece. Real paint will be there anytime I feel like using it, but I am very happy with digital tools for the time being.

Q : Do you think there will come a time when computer-generated images will start to go out of fashion, and if so what medium do you think will replace it?

A : The digital medium is just one of many available to the artist and various media go in and out of fashion, so I see no reason why computer generated art should be exempt from this. There is, however, a powerful economic reason why it will stay in the forefront in the near term: it's cheap. One individual on the publishing staff with a computer can produce artwork for multiple titles at less cost than one commissioned cover painting.

As a medium comes into vogue, it has always coexisted with other media, never replacing them. In the 1950s it was feared by traditional illustrators that photography would take over the illustration market, but in the '70s and '80s we had a golden age in illustration. The current dismal financial straits of the publishing industry has forced them to cut costs where they can : cutting back the number of titles published along with the associated budgets for cover art. As their production methods moved to the digital realm, they naturally turned to this as a cost saving method of cover art production. Couple this trend with the continuing flow of young artists into the illustration market and you have a fairly dismal situation for the freelance artist.

Although I don't see a reversal in this trend coming up anytime soon, a healthy publishing industry can support any medium for cover art including a return to traditional media, and I think the consumer would welcome that right now. But the digital medium is here to stay, whether in vogue or not. One thing that sets it apart from other media is the fact that it is an evolving medium, one that will continually be replacing itself with newer versions itself.

Q : How has the job changed over the years, with regards to how you work and the kind of images you have been required to produce?

A : My case is not representative of most in the field. Because of the conditions in publishing mentioned above, I found myself transitioned out of editorial

illustration and into digital art creation, principally for defense-related concerns currently. This was not an intentional move on my part, but happened more or less while I wasn't looking. In the mid '90s (mostly through serendipity) I received freelance work from the Defense Advanced Projects Research Agency (DARPA).

I had been experimenting with digital art and animation on my own through the late '80s and early '90s. That (working digitally - the "*medium of the time*") along with my SF background happened to be just what DARPA was looking for to illustrate their more futuristic programs. Over the ensuing years I found myself receiving fewer and fewer book cover commissions while receiving more and more work from DARPA and related concerns, until one replaced the other. I started 2002 by working on the design of a virtual interactive command center for the US Army Intelligence and Security Command - as cool as it gets, in my opinion.

From my point of view, this change was transparent. My current work involves the same amount of creativity, skill and problem solving abilities as traditional illustration, only now I get to do animation and sound design as well. And the trend is toward more animation, which I encourage.

Q : Do you feel it is more competitive than ever in the illustration market?

A : If I were still in the editorial illustration market, my fingers would be bloody from clawing at the publishers' doors. Many of my once well-established illustrator friends are now in relatively dire straits, working from job to job when they were once booked months or years in advance. It's brutal out there and I am delighted to have found a new slot in the market. Of course, as a freelancer, this can change at any time and I could find myself back in the editorial ring, slugging it out with the rest.

Q : Can you see fantasy and SF art being as popular in the future as it is now?

A : The readership for Fantasy and Science Fiction literature is decreasing while interest in mass media "*sci-fi*" and fantasy is increasing. I do not see that trend reversing any time soon either, and Science Fiction art already seems to be reflecting this media "*commoditization*" too. I think the popularity will always be there, it's more a question of how the art itself will evolve.

A resurgence in literature would bring along with it a resurgence in art. Although obviously not eminent, this will happen at some point. The form this

takes may not be what we expect. From necessity, the publishing industry may evolve into something totally different than what we now know, with art and literature incorporating past, current and future media and technologies. The potential here is enormous and I am very excited and optimistic about its future.

* * *

Be sure to visit Barclay's website for more fantastic creations!

www.barclayshaw.com



'Ellison Chess Table' : Copyright © Barclay Shaw 2007

Revolution

by Krishan Coupland

I'm going to kill my best friend.

Well, he's not really my best friend anymore, but it's hard to stop myself thinking about how we used to take our bikes off dirt jumps in the woods behind the school. Or how he once got me out of being mugged by that druggie on the bus. There are a million little things that connect us, tangle us together. Me and Simon.

He's changed. God, how he's changed. When I look at his super-enlarged picture on the propaganda posters, on the side of derelict busses, on the blimp that forever circles over the city it's not him I see anymore. It's his body alright, his face, but everything that made him Simon is long gone. Burned away by something alien and angry.

That is why I have to kill him.

The world has become a strange place for me recently; me and about twenty thousand other people. Everywhere I look the familiar has become the disturbing. Uniformed men patrol deserted streets; everywhere are bright green banners and people will not talk anymore for fear of being overheard.

Back when we were at school together Simon would build bombs in his garage. Little, tiny ones, though he always said it was just a matter of scaling up to get something bigger. The last year of college he blew up the shed in his garden, and laughed and laughed and laughed. I should have realised something was wrong then, I guess, but I didn't. I just laughed along with him, because I didn't know what else to do.

I wonder if all this had already started back then. If the plans were already formed inside his head, because if they were then I saw no outward sign of them. The first I knew of his 'revolution' was when I was dragged in front of him by the uniformed men, when he offered me the ultimatum to join him or die. That was on a cold day in March three months ago. That was the day my whole world changed.

The internet's a powerful tool for people like Simon. It connects people, and if you get enough people of the same thinking together and you get someone clever,

someone charismatic and dangerous to lead them . . . well, you have an army. And this army – it's made up of ordinary people, the people all around you. They build homes, they sort mail, they take care of your money. They are the living, breathing gubbins of society. In short: they have all the power.

Simon needed trucks – his drones got him trucks. He needed guns – and from the dark crevices of the criminal underworld came guns. He needed soldiers – and every single frustrated, small-minded, stuck-in-a-rut, just-want-to-hurt-someone psycho came crawling out of the woodwork to wield those guns, drive those trucks, be his unthinking soldiers. The new order was born.

I'm dressed as one of them, sworn in as one of them. I even have the three chevrons that indicate a Director's rank – instant promotion because of the connection I have with Simon – but I am not one of them. Not really, not inside, not where it counts. That's what I keep telling myself anyway.

As I pass through the lobby of what was once the central bank's office building the doorman bows to me, as does the receptionist and every other person I get within five feet of. I wonder what they think of me – do they hate me or do they worship me? Does it show in my face that I'm about to become a murderer?

No. Murder is for innocents. Megalomaniacs are assassinated.

I have the lift to myself and as the doors whir closed the camera in the corner rotates to stare fish-eyed at me. Upstairs Simon will be informed of my arrival. I fold my arms behind my back and feel the reassuring weight of the gun stuck in my belt.

I'm coming for you Simon.

I've just had the thought that Simon isn't really the kind of name that you'd give to a man bent on taking over the world. It hardly inspires terror in the hearts of innocents. I wonder what it means. Like in Greek or Latin or wherever it originates from, what does it mean?

Red numbers trace through the display. Floor one, two, three . . .

These past few weeks have been kind of surreal. Things in my life have suddenly become so much bigger. Like two or three months ago I was worrying about my latest deadline at work and now I'm worrying about assassinating a crazed dictator. The world's changing I guess. One day this will all be part of history; maybe my kids will learn about it in some far off, futuristic classroom.

There in black-and-white print will be my name. The one who ended it all.

Am I hero? Will I be? This certainly doesn't feel heroic. More than anything it feels like I'm betraying Simon, going back on all those times he helped me out during school. He was always the strong, confident one – the one who wouldn't back down from a fight. He cared. He looked after me. We spent so many hours together we might as well have been brothers.

I thought I knew him.

fourteen . . . fifteen . . . sixteen.

This lift is way too small. I want a million miles to myself. I want out of this city – Simon's city now. More than that I want Simon back, the real Simon, the one I could depend on, the one who was my friend. The one I caught the bus with every week for five years; the guy who got me my first ever beer; who carried me to hospital that time I fell off my bike and conked my head.

Back to reality.

He has said in infrequent speeches that we will build a utopia. A land of the free. I know the truth, though. I know that ordinary people are fighting and dying every other day to hold back the encroaching armies. I know that food and water aren't getting through, that we're losing the city, block by block. Simon though – he won't back down until the international agents come clambering over a pile of the dead to blast down the door to his penthouse and drag him away.

twenty-one . . . twenty-two . . . twenty-three.

I do what I sometimes do when I'm scared and try and imagine I'm looking back on the event from sometime in the far future. Only this time it doesn't work. Past killing Simon there is no future, no plan, no nothing. It seems as though that is the be-all and end-all of my existence; as though this one deed fills up my entire world, and that afterwards there won't be a need for anything else.

That time when I came off my bike; I was out of it for maybe two or three hours. First thing I saw when I came round was Simon smiling crookedly down at me.

That's what I'm thinking of now. That's what I can't get out of my head.

twenty-four . . . twenty-five . . . ding.

The doors scroll open.

My hand tightens on the gun behind my back, and I step into the penthouse.

* * *

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Krishan Coupland is a student living in Southampton. Currently he is studying for a career in medicine - or something else. He hasn't really decided yet.

His homepage can be found at : www.freewebs.com/krishanc

* * *

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from
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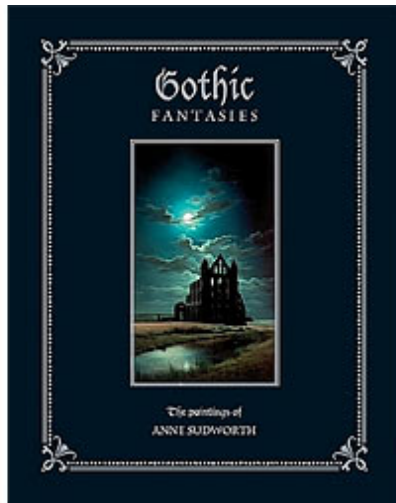
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* * *

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Check out Anne's website for more info and be sure to look on the 'News' page to find out when she's doing signings for this book : www.annesudworth.co.uk

* * *

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Discarded Science

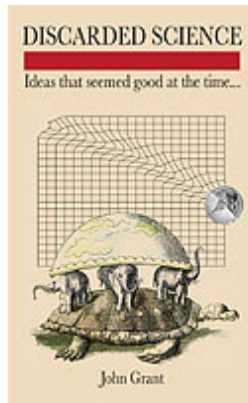
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