

ESC!

The Literary Magazine For Aspiring Writers and Artists



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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Vex: Treachery's Foil Paul Tucker
9/11/2001 Guy R. Qualls
Melvin Cartagena's ESC! debut
Joyce Bradshaw's TrilogY Continues
Dennis Golden's *Coffee, Tea, Curare?*



Vol.5 No.2

Publisher

Michael R. Potter

Submissions To ESC! Magazine:

Writers: We are looking for all genres including: science fiction, mystery, suspense, horror, or general fiction. Stories should be limited to no more than 2500-3000 words. Longer work may be considered. Poetry also is accepted. Submissions should be typewritten and double spaced.

Artists: Black and white line-art and illustrations are preferred. Please DO NOT send the originals! A high quality photocopy will suffice. Artwork should be limited to no more than 8½" X 11" in size. Cover illustrations can be 11" X 17" or 8½" X 11". If you need to draw it larger, please reduce it with a copier to the proper size. Comic strips and comical illustrations are also welcome!

For a complete list of guidelines, please visit <http://www.escmagazine.com/>

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CONTENTS

FICTION

- 6 **Coffee, Tea, Curare?** Dennis E. Golden
- 11 **Time And Again** Joyce G. Bradshaw
- 18 **Down The Way of Silent Heroes** Melvin Cartagena

& — The POETRY of ESC! Magazine

- 5 **9/11/2001** Guy R. Qualls
- 9 **Looks Like Rain** Guy R. Qualls
- 10 **You Decide** Guy R. Qualls

ARTWORK

- 14 **Werewolf** Tosh Bibb
- 15 **Vex: Treachery's Foil** Paul B. Tucker

ESSAY & NON-FICTION

- 3 **Editorial**

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **This Issue's Contributors**
- 21 **Advertising In ESC!**
- 22 **Subscriptions and Back Issues**

On the Cover:

Lady Liberty

Red White and Blue ribbon illustration by Paul B. Tucker.

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EDITORIAL

I learned something the hard way four days ago. Don't – and I can't emphasize this enough – mess around with device drivers on your computer mere days before the deadline for your magazine. It's not a pretty sight when the only this you can get your computer to tell you is INACCESSIBLE_BOOT_DEVICE. Cold. Unfeeling. Uncaring. Hrmm.

I guess what really grinds my shorts is that I have been working with computers for over twenty years now – ten of them professionally as a person whose job it is to fix problems just like mine – and I have yet to resolve the issue. I may be losing my touch. I'm pretty sure I'm going to beat this one though, it's just a matter of how long it will take. Each time I think I've thrown in the towel I go back again and re-examine the situation. I've spent over 20 hours on it so far. It's frustrating. I'm angry at the computer and at myself for dinking around with it in the first place. I'm tired, but determined. I bring my laptop online to research the issue. None – NONE! – of the solutions I find work. Aaaargh! So I make one last ditch effort – you know, before I head up to bed – and there it is again: INACCESSIBLE_BOOT_DEVICE ... I'm tired. My mind works on the problem ... eyes glaze over ... thoughts are wandering ... images dancing ...

... A father, a daughter, a mother. Traveling out West to enjoy the sun. Terror strikes – the young family huddles as one. The plane descends ... their life ... is ... done ...

... Brave men and women rush to the scene. Their heads reel at the sight ... Where could sanity have been? One deep breath and they rush in, preparing to fight ...

... The unthinkable happens. The towers collapse ... hundreds, no THOUSANDS of lives lost. Thoughts turn to their families – the emotional cost ...

... It's nearly two months later. Flags are flying – the nation is healing. Folks un-afraid to tell loved ones how they're feeling. The war rages on at home and away. New families are affected – they stay home and pray ...

... I snap back awake to a still and quiet room. A cat sleeps, purring on my lap. The images are still swirling. It's 4 o'clock ... AM. Catharsis. Do I feel better? No, not really. I still have the message INACCESSIBLE_BOOT_DEVICE defiantly staring back at me from the screen – but, somehow, it doesn't seem quite as bad as it did earlier. Disturbing the cat's sleep, I rush upstairs to kiss my wife and daughter. They're not awake. It doesn't matter though ... just knowing they're dreaming is enough for me. I crawl into bed, pull up the covers and fall asleep ... images now dance of a happier, more familiar place.

ESC! Magazine returns to a different world. A world in which we are told that we mustn't take nail clippers on a plane – or knitting needles. Box cutters have become lethal weapons. The "Happiest Place on Earth" now shakes down the few families who went on with their vacation plans and venture through the gates each day. ESC! has returned to a world in which we are told to be wary of our mail – Our mail!! – We're told to give everything the 'skunk eye' before opening it. A newspaper in Arizona has informed its readership that they will no longer accept 'snail mail' only e-mail. With roughly only 60% of the population enjoying access to a computer, what does that tell their readership? "We only want to hear from you if you can afford a computer?" This is not a message you'll hear from ESC! Magazine.

It's crazy. It's necessary. No ... it's definitely crazy. We're learning to adapt to a new way of living and I fear it's not going to get much better for a long time.

Continues On Page 21

This Issue's Contributors:

Joyce G. Bradshaw: Joyce was raised in Westfield, New Jersey. After attending Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia, for two years, she became the wife of a Presbyterian minister and had the opportunity to spend five years as a missionary to the Mayan community in the State of Campeche, Mexico.

Joyce presently resides in the Texas hill country and is a full-time freelance writer and author of three books: one is a volume of poetry, the second is a study of the modern process of globalization, and the third is the story of the way that her own writing and that of her mother shaped both their lives. She has three daughters and seven grandchildren, of whom she is exceedingly proud.

Tosh Bibb: "I first published my cartoons in my college student newspaper where I won several awards for my illustrations and comics. The newspaper is still published at the school and still has an excellent staff of writers and illustrators. I am proud to have been part of Tallahassee Community College's student newspaper 'The Talon'."

Tosh can be reached at: kohomat@earthlink.net

Melvin Cartagena: "Formerly an east coaster, now a resident of the a San Francisco bay area, I write whatever catches my fancy at the moment. My influences range from literature classics to some contemporary authors, and from sources as diversified as comics, movies and books. The most influential writers I consider to be Harlan Ellison and Ray Bradbury in the world of printed media, Frank Miller and Alan Moore and Will Eisner in the field of comics and Christopher McQuarrie and Andrew Kevin Walker in motion pictures. I currently work in a marine construction/dredging company, and my goals are to become a writer in comics and motion pictures. Books are also an interest of mine. For fun and relaxation, I like to run, kick and punch my training bag, attend concerts, watch movies, discover new restaurants, explore this wonderful place that is California, and whatever catches my interest at the moment."



Dennis Golden: Dennis's story "Coffee, Tea, Curare?" was originally slated to appear in ESC! Magazine Volume 4, Number 1 and is presented here for your reading pleasure. Dennis describes the work as "an entertaining little puzzle" and more as a "how-dunit" than a "who-dunit". To the true mystery aficionado, "it may be considered as an affectionate salute to two stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 'His Last Bow' and 'A Scandal in Bohemia.'"

Guy R. Qualls: Guy was previously published on the ESC! Magazine website in the fall of 1998 and in Volume 5, Number 1. Guy was born and raised in West Texas. A former "Gulf War Volley Ball Veteran", Guy enjoys spending his time both indoors and out pursuing his hobbies of wildlife photography and computers. Guy feels his greatest asset is his family who he "takes too much for granted and appreciates far too little." In his own words: "Everything is dedicated to Mom -- she was the greatest fan a person could have ever had!"

Paul B. Tucker: Paul's work has graced many covers of ESC! Magazine including the Premier issue back in 1992. In addition, Paul has contributed his beautifully written and illustrated continuing story "Vex". Most recently, Paul designed the new logos for both ESC! Magazine and ESC! Publications. Paul lives in Chicago, IL and works as a professional illustrator for an advertising agency.

NEXT ISSUE, (V6,N1 - April 2002):

- Time Will Tell (part 3 in the trilogy)
- More familiar faces return to ESC!
- All New Poetry

9/11/2001

Forgive me mother for what I am going to say
Forgive me father - I seem to have lost my way
Forgive me family - I have forgotten the past
Forgive me Jesus - of the stones I might cast

I HATE THEM

I DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE

You see - I just watched 5000 people die
I lost my breath and began to cry
and I forgot about everything good
that ever happened to me

I know I could have never changed their fate
Someday, I will salute them all - at the pearly gates
Until then - I'll just try to remember all the good
that ever happened to me

For a moment there - I got lost in time
Reality blurred - I couldn't see the line
I could actually smell evil's foul breath
As our lives all stopped - appalled by the death

Slowly, I think
We'll all be back on our way
Sadly, I think
We are far from better days

Guy R. Qualls
Outta the Void

Coffee, Tea, Curare?

Dennis E. Golden

Captain Christine Adler of the police homicide division of a large eastern city chewed her eighth Maalox tablet of the morning. She was the first female officer to command one of that department's detective squads, but now it seemed that, even before she could prove herself, she was doomed to public defeat and embarrassment. On her desk the morning paper's headline read: "THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING PYGMY". The subhead was even worse: "Police Baffled".

"The question was not so much who wanted to kill Hugo Stevenson; but, rather, who got there first."

It was clearly Hugo Stevenson's fault, the Captain reflected. It was also just as well the unspeakable Mr. Stevenson was deceased at the hands of the person or persons unknown, or surely she would kill the S.O.B. herself. Certainly Stevenson had been begging homicide, according to investigation, and for that matter, Adler's own sense of justice. An accountant by trade, he had been simultaneously married to three wives! Worse, to support all of them he had embezzled from his employers, who were Mafia connected. The question was not so much who wanted to kill Hugo Stevenson; but, rather, who got there first.

This had all been duly reported in the papers, along with the even more sensational details that the murderer had killed with curare, and vanished without a trace from an airplane at thirty thousand feet! But to be fair, if one read all the accounts, a essentially complete set of facts would emerge.

Upon boarding Trans Oceanic Airlines flight 934 from London, Stevenson had taken a window seat just ahead of the flight attendant's station. In the aisle seat was Mr. Robert Johnson, described by witnesses as bearded and somewhat under average height. The middle seat was unoccupied. Attendants Beth Wittfield, Laura Klinger, Mary Lawrence, and Ron Stanton were assigned to the cabin. On the flight deck were Captain Edward Freeman, First Officer Irene Wright, and Flight Engineer Steve Bothwick.

Both Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Johnson spent the flight quietly. Stevenson napped or read. Johnson worked with his briefcase open on the unoccupied seat. One or more of the cabin staff could see both men at all times during the flight, and no other passengers had approached either man. Attendant Lawrence had found it odd that Mr. Johnson never removed his hat.

Approximately ten minutes before the scheduled descent into the local airport, Johnson abruptly rose and walked to the rear lavatory, carrying his briefcase. Immediately thereafter Mr. Stevenson made a choking sound, and was obviously in extreme distress. Attendants Wittfield and Klinger attempted first aid, but Stevenson expired within minutes.

Immediately thereafter came a muffled explosion, and the airplane suffered sudden decompression. Captain Freeman dove to five thousand feet to restore cabin pressure. Then First Officer Wright and Flight Engineer Bothwick conducted an inspection for damage. This investigation revealed that the decompression was caused by a small bomb blowing open the lavatory discharge. At no time was any outside hatch or doorway opened. A single additional, but most strange, fact was uncovered. Robert Johnson was nowhere to be found.

The crew brought the plane to an emergency landing with Police and medical personnel alerted and waiting. Six injured people were taken to local hospitals. The police made identifications of all six; and took statements from the remaining passengers and crew. All persons were accounted for with the exception of Mr. Johnson. That gentleman's notebook still lay open but unmarked on the seat. His empty briefcase was found in the sabotaged lavatory. Traces of a man's suit jacket and a torn ace bandage were found clinging to the broken pieces of the hopper mechanism. Also First Officer Wright reported that upon her inspection of the area she had smelled cordite and nail polish remover.

The autopsy on Stevenson's body found that he had died of curare poison injected in the thigh. Predictably, Robert Johnson could not be traced. His unclaimed suitcase was confiscated from the baggage hold and found to be empty.

This was the extent of the coverage; excepting a quote of one detective allegedly referring to First Officer Wright as a "hot dish". When called on the carpet, the man in question, Sergeant Ben Walters, swore innocence. He did admit that he had remarked on Ms. Wright's appearance, but in no such crude terms.

The captain had to concede that she was mildly envious of Wright, who was indeed attractive with auburn hair, blue eyes, and an excellent figure. Still, Adler insisted that Walters call and apologize at once. Ms. Wright was gracious enough to accept his apology. However, 103 other people, who had called the commissioner's office, were not.

So Adler's mood had reached blackest bottom, when a chastised Walters entered her office with a telegram. "All sorts of weirdos are homing in on this one," he said. "This is all the way from Sussex, England." The telegram read:

MY DEAR ADLER:

OLD HABITS DIE HARD / STILL ADDICTED TO
SENSATIONAL PRESS BETWEEN BEE SERUM EXPERIMENTS /
IF ACCOUNTS TRUE YOU SEEM AT LOSS / I WOULD CALL
YOUR ATTENTION TO SEVERAL CLUES / THE MAFIA MIND
BENT / THE SEAT LOCATION / CURARE / THE OPEN
BRIEFCASE / THE IMMOVABLE HAT / THE UNMARKED
NOTEBOOK / THE EMPTY SUITCASE / THE BANDAGE IN
THE BATHROOM / THE TIME OF THE CRIME / THE SIZE
OF THE SABOTAGE / APPEARANCE OF COPILOT WRIGHT /
HER JOB / HER NOSE / MEDICAL FRIEND INSISTS I
WARN YOU / BEWARE THE PEN / ANTICIPATE READING OF
YOUR SUCCESS /

S.H. ALTAMONT

"Altamont?" muttered Adler. Then something clicked. She called in Lieutenant Charley Gerardi and asked, "Do all three wives have good figures?"

"Stevenson's consistent."

"What are their occupations?"

"Alice is a bookkeeper in Seattle, Helen's a nurse in Baltimore, and Sibyl runs an air service in Maine."

"Any of them have blue eyes?"

"Sibyl and I think Helen. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, just that old S.H. isn't such a misogynist after all."

Gerardi and Walters looked at her with puzzled expressions.

"Never mind," she said, smiling. "I have jobs for you both."

Those tasks would result in an arrest less than twelve hours later — an arrest that would nearly cost Walters his life.

Late the next day both men were back in Adler's office, bearing a greatly expanded respect for their superior.

"How was your flight?" the captain asked.

"A lot easier than the arrest." said Walters.

"How did you know which wife it was?" asked Gerardi.

"Oh, I had a hint."

"You mean that Altamont guy isn't just a nut?"

"I'm not sure just what he is, but the most improbable explanation is also the most intriguing. As they say, 'once you've eliminated the impossible...'"

This was met with blank stares.

"Think about it," she said. "Only one wife combined red hair, blue eyes, and an enviable figure; as well as having the key occupation."

"I still don't understand," said Walters.

"Let's take it step by step. First, I eliminated the Mafia. The crime was just too fancy for them. That left us with the wives as suspects. One of them was disguised as Mr. Johnson. He, or I should say she, shielded her face behind the open briefcase to avoid recognition. The hat was never removed because it concealed a woman's hair. The smell that assaulted the copilot's nose in the sabotaged lavatory was acetone, used to remove false facial hair. Finally, a short man translates into an average height woman."

"I suspected Irene Wright, the copilot," said Gerardi.

"You forgot Wright's job, Charley. She was on the flight deck assisting in take off at the very time Johnson was in full view of the entire cabin crew. But you were only half wrong. The murderer had to look like Irene Wright."

"Why's that?"

"Consider the timing. The crime is committed, and immediately thereafter as (among other things) a diversion, a blast goes off; large enough to force an emergency dive, but not crash the airplane. Why? Because the murderer is still present. So she needed a new disguise resembling someone already on board, because a stranger in a sealed airplane would draw attention to say the least. Since there was a minimum of time, it had to be someone the murderer already resembled, but she couldn't take a chance on meeting herself. Therefore she had to impersonate a member of the flight crew, occupied with the emergency. There was only one woman on the pilot's deck. Therefore the murderer had to resemble that woman, Irene Wright. We also know that she shared Ms. Wright's figure because of the remains of the ace bandage used to hide her attributes. If you had ever read a lady's magazine, gentlemen, you'd

know that's a fashion model's trick. The necessary uniform jacket was in the briefcase.

"Then the murderer did Wright's job. She inspected the airplane for damage. Before being observed too closely, she lifted the rear access hatch, and descended into the baggage compartment. When the genuine copilot arrived, everyone assumed Wright had come up through the forward hatch."

"But how did you know her occupation, and how in hell did she get off that plane?"

"Ben, remember I said the sabotage served more than one purpose. It was also designed to cause passenger injuries so that ambulances would be waiting at the airport. In the baggage compartment the murderer removed a medical coverall from Johnson's suitcase, returned to the main cabin, and administered first aid to the injured passengers. Then she walked out as one of the ambulance attendants — the only people not checked.

"To carry out the role she would need to have medical training, and also access to curare, used in treating convulsions. Employment in a hospital would satisfy both conditions."

"So you had us arrest the nurse," said Gerardi.

That's what I detested, a nurse deliberately causing injuries. If someone did to me what Stevenson did to his wives, I might be tempted to murder as well. It was the passengers she put at risk that made me want to hunt Helen Stevenson down.

"How did you know about that poisoned tipped pen she almost nailed me with," asked Walters.

"The notebook was pristine even though Johnson was seen to be working in it. The pen didn't write because it was a disguised syringe."

"Well," said Gerardi, "all that's left is who's Altamont."

"Form your own conclusion," said Adler. "I know who I'd like him to be."

"You did a hell of a job doping this out, Captain," said the sergeant.

Adler couldn't resist. "Elementary, my dear Walters."

- END -

The clouds grow dark
As does my soul.
Life seems like a rock
But it does not roll

And it seems my mind
Has lost control
I thought I knew the cost
But it grew ten fold

I feel the drops of the rain to come
I feel urge of my legs to run
I know the sight — of a heart in pain
But I've smelt the air after a summer rain
Clouds are rolling in
Sky turning black

It looks like rain — on a sunny day.
I hear thunder - not far away.
Looks like the sky — has a debt to pay.
Don't need the water — but we need the rain.

All my tears
Had a place to go
Seems like the clouds
Will overflow

And all my pain
I worked though
I did it for me,
But here's to you

In the dry dry summer — the earth will crack.
With a fear of eternity — I can't turn back
With all I've lost — there's more to gain
When you count the cost — watch the weather vane
'cause it sure looks like rain

It looks like rain — at least it does to me
If that's not thunder — what could it be
In rolls the clouds — ready to burst
GIVE ME THE RAIN — GOD, GIVE ME YOUR WORST

It looks like rain — on a sunny day.
I hear thunder — not far away.
Looks like the sky — has a debt to pay.
Don't need the water — but we need the rain.

DisEnchanted '99
Dutta the Void

You Decide

Edge of the world - and here I pray
Give me the strength for tomorrow
That I didn't need today

Tomorrow may be - yet just a test
But it's a trial by fire
We should all do our best

I played with fire - I've even been burned
But if I never touched the flame
I would have never learned

Out of the flame - all is now new
Look up to the sky
You will know what to do

I reached for the sky - reached with all my might
Only to open my eyes and see
I'm staring into the night

Success we can see - and sometimes even touch
Some decide they can only fail
Or just don't need it as much

We are all going to fail - but we all have to try
Not everything is possible
Not everything is denied

Anything is possible - this is always true
You may have to step to the edge
And decide what is for you

Edge of the world - here I will not wait
For if I even plan for tomorrow
I have decided my fate

Guy R. Qualls
February 2, 2000
Outta the Void

Time And Again

Joyce G. Bradshaw

It was a perfect day for celebrating the sheer joy of being young. And Tucker did feel exceptionally youthful. Being twelve, going on thirteen, seemed like everything an individual could wish for: freedom from responsibility, boundless energy, unfettered exuberance, and (best of all) two sturdy legs that tingled with the need to run, jump, and climb. He could barely restrain himself from leaping over things just because they were there.

The soft, clear October breeze ruffled his hair, lifting the brown curls that framed his face. Hazy sunlight warmed his bare, muscular arms as he hopped across the cracks in the sidewalk, negotiated the two-foot-high wall in front of the library building, scaled a minor mountain (the wooden bench at the bus stop), climbed up one concrete ramp alongside the courthouse steps and slid down the opposite, and walked lopsided with one foot on the curb and one in the gutter.

When he unexpectedly stepped in a shallow puddle of leftover rainwater, he laughed so heartily that he tripped and tumbled forward into the grass. No one passing by appeared to notice him lying there, giggling as though he was cotton to a secret of great significance. After all, what twelve-year-old boy knows anything that anyone else — besides another twelve-year-old — wants to know?

Finally, recuperating sufficiently from the hilarity that had engulfed him, Tucker scrambled to his feet and took off on a dead run through the city park. He didn't even hesitate to consider where he might be going. He only thought about what an absolute thrill it was to chase the breeze and not grow tired.

A small, wiry terrier joined the romp across the grass and Tucker whistled to him, delighted to have the pup respond with an enthusiastic tail wag. The two of them joyously circled a couple of trees, crawled under an unoccupied picnic table, and scared away a covey of grackles that had been foraging for scraps around the trash cans. When the dog was compelled to answer his master's call from the far side of the park, Tucker waved good-bye and dashed on toward the baseball field.

As he approached the dusty diamond, Tucker realized that a bunch of guys about his own age were attempting to play ball. Tucker considered it an attempt and not an actuality. They weren't doing too well by his standards. He could definitely do better!

He stood for a few minutes with his nose pushed up against the chainlink fence at the end of the field. He was directly to the left of the rather chunky catcher, who fell backwards into the dirt every time a pitched ball hit his mitt. The more he watched, the more amused Tucker got. The kid, obviously one of the younger players, simply could not maintain his balance under the impact of the speeding projectile.

After a while, Tucker could no longer stifle his amusement and he began to laugh out loud. The young boy behind the catcher's mask turned and hollered at him, "Oh, you think it's funny, do you! Then you get out here and do it better!"

For a second or two, Tucker assumed that the kid was joking. But when he threw down the mitt, ripped off his chest pad and shin guards, and stalked off the field, his seriousness became apparent. The rest of the players began shouting at their retreating teammate to get back to his place. The boy just shook his fist defiantly and kept moving. "Okay," thought Tucker, "why not?" And he stepped behind home plate, donned the abandoned equipment, and took the appropriate stance. Seemingly without a second thought, the teams resumed the game.

Tucker managed to handle himself quite well. None of the players complained or harassed him. He figured that they

were just glad to have someone manning the position. And because he felt so young, so strong, so invincible, he put everything he had into it.

Indeed, he got so involved that he lost track of the hour. By the time the bunch of guys that made up the two rather sparse teams decided to disperse for the day, the autumn sun had sunk behind the crisp-leaved trees and the air had developed a noticeable chilliness. Tucker shivered slightly and wished he had brought a jacket or sweater along.

As the players gathered up the scattered array of equipment and outerwear from the benches and the ground, most of them ignored Tucker. They didn't even appear to be aware that he wasn't a regular participant. They quickly ran off in all directions with nary a word to the stranger in their midst. "Oh, well," Tucker said to himself, "I guess they want to get home for supper."

He handed the mitt and pads to one of the players who reached out as though to claim possession of them. Tucker looked up at the boy and then his expression brightened in recognition. "Alex," he said gleefully, "where ya goin'?"

The boy stopped short and turned back in Tucker's direction. "What do you want? I'm in a big hurry. Besides, I'm James. My grandfather's name was Alex, not mine."

"I didn't want anything in particular," Tucker stammered, sensing the blush of embarrassment that rose in his cheeks. "I only thought I recognized you from Amerson Junior High."

"Amerson?" The boy looked perplexed and more than a little incredulous. "What do you mean, Amerson?"

Swallowing hard, Tucker stood there in the settling dust trying to figure out exactly what to say next. He had spent a year and a half at Amerson and he couldn't comprehend the boy's reaction to his remark. The two of them had to be approximately the same age. They would have to have been schoolmates at the only junior high school in the township.

"Look, you, I don't know who you are or what you want with me. You must have come from Mars or something if you don't know that Amerson was torn down over two years ago. We all attend classes in the new building out at the edge of town." So saying, he took off running toward the exit gate.

Tucker's stomach felt as though it was double-knotted and his knees were weak and wobbly. He suddenly had the queer sensation that his body was closer to being seventy than thirteen. "I'm just hungry, that's all. I need to get home and eat something'."

As he approached the modest, shingle-sided house that stood in the shadow of the woods on the periphery of the residential section, Tucker found himself experiencing not

only physical hunger, but — more deeply and painfully — emotional hunger for the reassuring company of another human being. He climbed the porch stairs not with the vigor of youth but with the hesitancy of someone advanced in years. The door, never locked because it never needed to be, swung open at the pressure of his hand. He longed to call out, "I'm home!" He knew that nobody would be there to care.

It took Tucker a while to locate enough bits and pieces of food to constitute an adequate meal. The kitchen shelves were virtually empty and the refrigerator held only a few eggs, a container of milk that was on the brink of turning sour, and a none-too-fresh loaf of bread. With disheartenment he went about assembling what was on hand, slowly consumed the meager results, rinsed the dishes and stacked them in the rack, and went straight to bed. He retired at once primarily because he could not tolerate the intense loneliness that griped his mind and drained the strength from his body.

At first Tucker stretched out on his back, half-closed eyes staring blankly at the ceiling. He was too tired to think about the day's events. Growing sleepier, he rolled over on his side and as he did, he felt something hard and lumpy press into his hip. There was an object in his trouser pocket that he had completely forgotten.

Turning over onto his back again, he slid his hand into his pocket and withdrew the slippery-smooth article that had rested there since early that morning. It was the white marble doorknob that he had purchased from the owner of the antique shop. At the time it had seemed like the most important thing in the world: to buy that old knob from the Thurston mansion and make it his own. But what had he wanted it for? Why had it been worth ten bucks? And why did it feel like so much time had passed since then?

Tucker's confusion and concern carried over into his sleep and his dreams that night all involved some cold, luminous treasure that continually eluded him.

The following morning, sunlight filtering through the broken lace of the window curtains roused Tucker from his fitful sleep. Initially he experienced the sort of joyful anxiety that ushers in a new day for the young. Exciting images of possible adventures stirred in his head as he extended his legs to their full length and pushed aside the blanket that partially covered him. More baseball perhaps? Fishing at Lake Singleton? Was this a holiday as he had been assuming or was he supposed to go to school?

But as his eyesight and mind began to clear, he recalled the strange occurrences of the previous day. Confusion resurfaced and he groaned at the idea of having to orient himself to reality — whatever it might be. At the moment,

food was his principal concern and he chose to concentrate on that for the time being. The rest could wait.

Tucker rolled out of bed, stretched his arms over his head, and yawned widely. “Well, at least I don’t have to get dressed,” he said, looking down at his slightly wrinkled shirt and trousers. “I wonder where my jeans are. I feel like an old man in this outfit!”

Slowly waking into full consciousness, he wandered into the kitchen. He remembered the general scarcity of food and that he had used up most of what was available the evening before. “What am I to eat now?” He slumped into a chair and propped his elbows on the table. “I could go over to the cafe,” he considered, “but what shall I do for money?” He sat there for a few moments, unsure of his next move. Suddenly it came to him. “The cigar box! There may be some change in it still.”

He was in luck. The secret “bank” held enough coins to buy a simple breakfast at the local restaurant — if you could call the Mainstreet Cafe that. Tucker washed his face and hands, endeavored to straighten his clothes a bit, and ran a comb through his hair. Studying his reflection in the mirror, he acknowledged that not only did he appear slightly disheveled, but also somewhat overly mature for his age. “Heavens, I’m growing old before my time!” On his way out, he picked up the polished doorknob and slipped it into his pocket.

At the cafe Tucker ordered pancakes and sausage (he had, after all, eaten eggs for dinner the day before) and a glass of milk. He really yearned for a cup of coffee but decided against requesting it. The waitress had looked at him rather closely when she brought him his meal and accepted his handful of coins — like she recalled his face but couldn’t recollect his name. Tucker didn’t wish to draw more attention to himself than necessary.

He had finished every morsel and had settled back to savor the last of the sweet, fresh milk when he spotted the attractive gray-haired lady at a table across the room. She was seated alone, sipping coffee and gazing out the window. There was something so familiar and compelling about her that it startled Tucker. Who was she, anyway? Where had he seen her before? Most important, why did she arouse in him that same agonizing sense of loneliness?

With intense interest, he sat and observed her. She moved so gracefully, so elegantly! Her obvious maturity added to her charm and when she smiled at the waitress who brought the check, Tucker could feel the warmth even from a distance. Realizing that the woman was preparing to leave, he slid out of the booth and rushed to the door just in time to open it for her. When she looked at him — and then looked again more intently — his knees almost buckled. “Thank you, young man,” she said, her voice low

and gentle and full of kindness. Tucker wanted desperately to speak. He could think of nothing sufficient to the occasion.

He followed the woman outside, watched as she crossed the street and disappeared into a store entrance, and then he turned toward the center to town. As he walked along he slipped his hand into his pocket and felt the slick surface of the marble knob. “I don’t understand any of this,” he muttered. He had to think things over and so he headed for the bus stop bench.

Fortunately the seat was not occupied. Tucker sat down and leaned back against the cool wooden slats. He stared up into the giant oak that shaded the waiting area. The mid-morning sun highlighted the burnished leaves and outlined the massive branches. The whole tree swayed hypnotically. Soon Tucker’s conscious mind began to relax and subconscious memories gradually rose to the surface, where they crystallized into mental images. The face of the woman in the restaurant alternated with that of the elderly antique dealer. “That’s not right,” Tucker mused. “The guy that sold me the doorknob was a younger man. Why can’t I keep that straight?”

“That’s what happens when you reach your seventies,” he heard himself say aloud. “Agnes would tell you that you simply have more essential things to think about.”

Tucker jumped to his feet. “Agnes!” he shouted. “Her name is Agnes! Of course! I remember now, I was deeply in love with her! But...I was her age then!” Overcome with a sudden surge of dizziness, he sat down on the bench again.

Tucker’s heart was pounding. His hands, cradling the marble door handle, were shaking violently. Snatches of recollection sped through his mind. He had purchased it — when exactly was that? — at the antique shop. Now he could picture it distinctly: full of junk and stale, musty air. He had gone there — he was older then, he was quite certain — seeking a special knob. He had remained there among the collectibles and the haunting aura of expectancy, waiting for it to...to become available to him. And time had actually changed — had altered its orientation like the different eras of the countless antiques that filled the dusty shelves — while he waited there.

“Oh, my God!” Tucker whispered. “I changed, too! When the clerk told me about the thread of time running through the shop and causing alterations, I didn’t realize that that would include myself as well.”

He couldn’t get to the place fast enough. He ran the whole mile or so. From halfway down the block he saw the carved wooden sign: “Antiques of Distinction.” He stopped dead still in the middle of the sidewalk, breathing heavily. “What proof do I have that all that really happened? I could walk in there and make a complete fool of myself!”

Another mental image flashed past. "If I'm right, then there is absolute evidence somewhere here in this empty lot." He started searching frantically through the tall grass, anticipating and fearing success simultaneously.

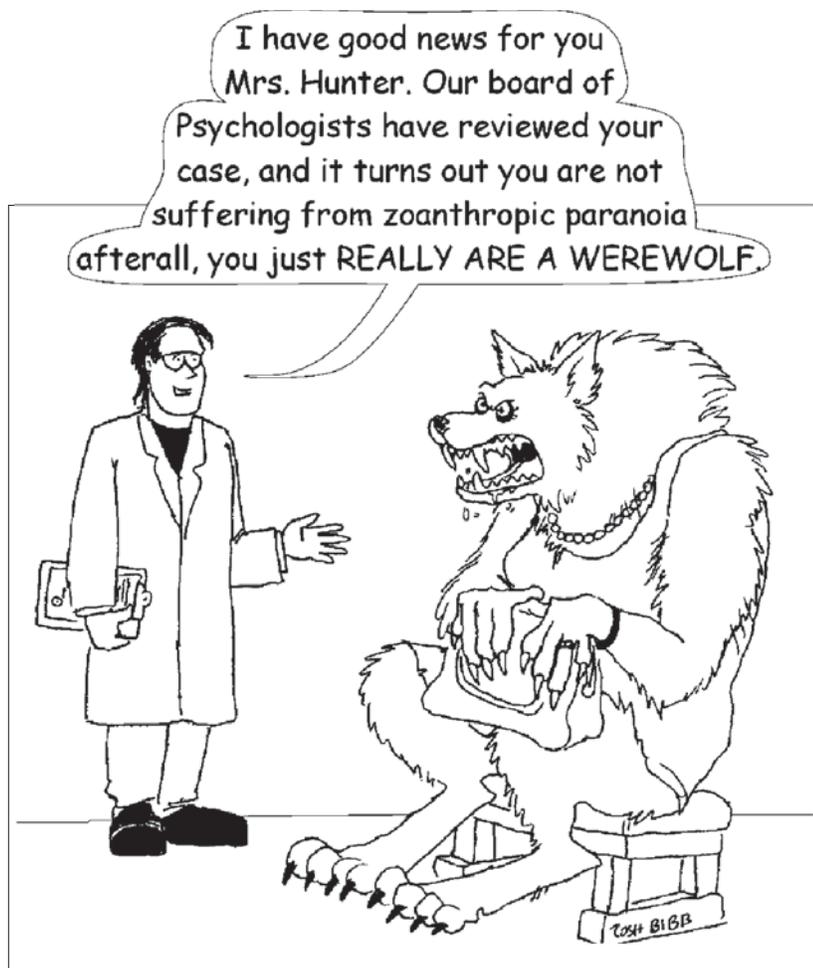
He was about to abandon the search when he tripped over an object almost hidden by weeds. Lifting the smoothly polished walking stick out of the tangled greenery, Tucker let out a yell. "It *is* here!" He brushed it off and ran his trembling fingers along its length and across the brass doorknob that topped it. The stick seemed familiar, like a former acquaintance.

Tucker strolled slowly toward the antique store and

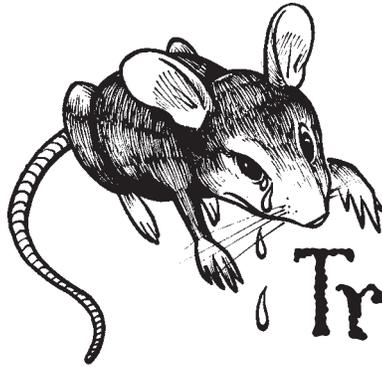
hesitated beneath the gently swinging sign. He was still unable to reconstruct all the details, but he was confident that this was no ordinary shop and that his life had been altered under its influence. His two identities were plain to him and although he was not certain of the potential consequences, he knew that a monumental choice had to be made: between the strength and stamina of adolescence and the security and assurance of age. Which did he treasure more: the freedom of youth or the companionship of maturity?

After a moment's pause, Tucker opened the door and stepped inside. The bell jangled behind him.

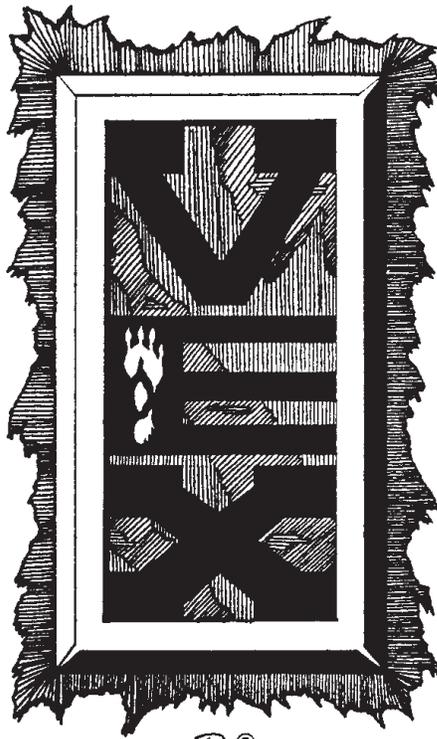
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Treachery's Foil



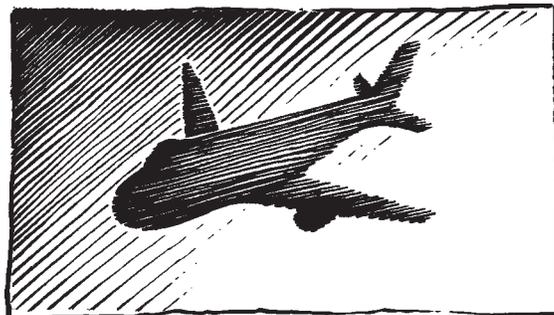
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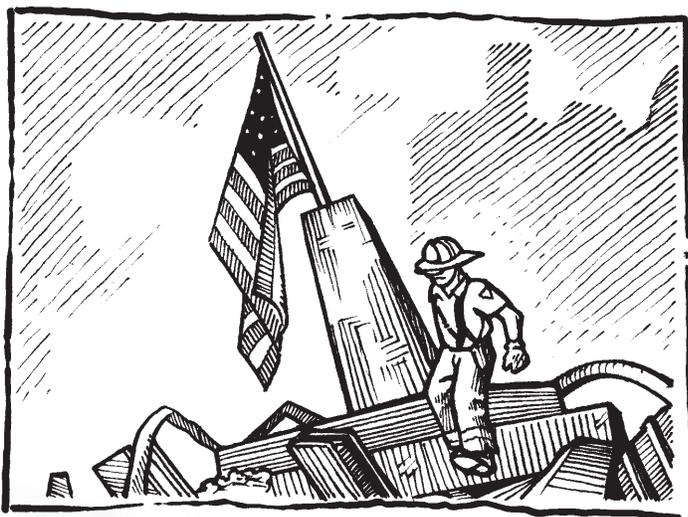
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aven called out to me that day.
Said a man named *Treachery*
was on his way.



He had his plot and played the role. To make
the unsuspecting and innocent his foil. He
did his deed. Great towers
and Man did fall. As did
brave souls who answered
the call.

The old standard rang
out the news. Treachery
had made his way. He
took the good and made
great bad. Only #93
would foil his play.



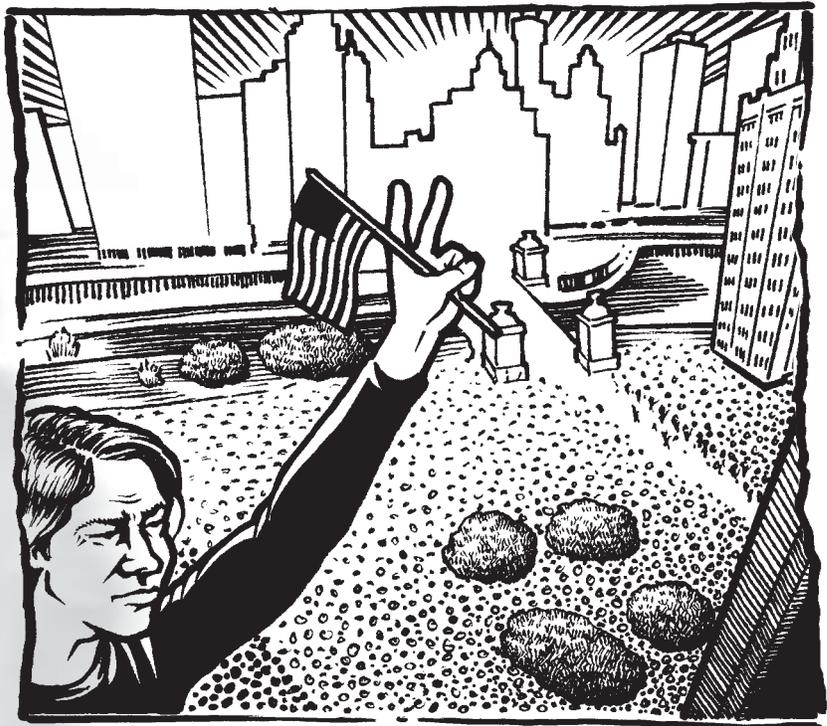
Treachery had struck his blow.
Hate was his friend. Using his
god as a reason to a murderous
end. But after his deeds he hoped
to find only the death and despair
he'd left behind.



Yet in the ashes,
many would find the
reason to be hopeful
with what they had
in-kind.

The banners were raised.
The trumpets rang out.
A million voices did sing
with a thunderous shout.

Treachery had made his play.
But had he really won? When
millions of difference came
together as one.



Is the battle yet over? I fear
it's just begun. But only
with justice and light will
we truly have won.



Down the Way of Silent Heroes

by Mel Cartagena

The great tribune convened solemnly, and decided on the fate of one. He waited with his face held high. His arms hung in front of him, held at the wrists by a band of energy. The collective will of the judges focused on his hands in a bind that held him fast but did not bruise his flesh. The judges did not believe in unnecessary cruelty.

The accused kept his eyes dead center as the judges entered the hall of discipline and took their positions on the high pulpit that surrounded him on three sides. Their faces were averted, studying the polished marble slabs they treaded, as if it hurt to acknowledge the man below, diminutive and forlorn from the intimidating height where they stood. Presiding judge Elios gave his six assistants minuscule nods in turn to indicate he would proceed. After each acknowledged in return he laid his large bony hands on the white slate and leaned forward, his face taut.

“Does the accused wish to remonstrate?” Elios asked the man below grimly. His voice thundered through the room from the high cushioned ceilings to the smooth mosaic floor.

The accused returned the judge’s cold stare and answered in a voice nowhere near as loud though no less strong, “My stance remains the same your highest.”

Elios looked down at the accused with practiced contempt, the left side of his mouth twitching infinitesimally. When it became obvious the accused would not break the eye contact, the judge lowered his eyes slowly. As his eyes settled on the surface of the slate, a gray square delineated itself in the middle. Similar viewing screens were appearing on the slates of the other judges.

“Ansel Jolen Hyden,” Elios recited with the ease of habit, “You stand before this, the highest of discipline orders, accused of heresy, disseminating doubt among men, and challenging the order of unity, among other less severe charges...” the judge said slowly. His stance suggested words recalled from memory, though after countless trials Elios had learned to place his eyes at such an angle that both the screen and subject below were both within eyesight.

To Ansel, in his narrow semicircular space below, the voice had no benevolence, no timbre of discipline that could reach his ears. The entire chamber seemed chilled to its foundations. Uncounted many like him had stood here, been accused, and shown the light. Ansel briefly wondered if their crushed souls lingered in here, if those were the tingling sensations in his spine.

“Do you have anything to declare, accused?” Elios asked him.

“No your highest; no declaration,” Ansel could not bring himself to speak what was on his mind. Not now that what he suspected would happen was real.

“Do you admit to the charges then, accused?” Elios leaned forward as he asked, his wrinkled lips pursing in an ugly pout.

“No,” Ansel answered simply, after a meditated pause. The last of his echo drifted and was followed by an ominous silence. Not one Judge displayed emotion in their weary, lined faces or stirred. The silence elongated and a miasma of tension settled over the entire chamber. It was as if the collective rage coursing through the withered bodies of the judges

could not be articulated and the chamber was absorbing it in some bizarre form of osmosis.

“You blaspheme!” Elios shouted. The suddenness of it made Ansel and the six judges jump in surprise. Elios looked down at Ansel with his eyebrows raised, the left one twitching. “Do you dare deny these charges? Do you dare stand in front of this assembly, in front of *me*, and deny your wickedness? Answer?” Elios shouted in exasperation when Ansel failed to respond. After the judge’s outburst he felt his wrists go loose. He looked down and saw the bands of light fading, becoming weaker. He pulled his wrists apart and felt the luminescence yield. And then Elios’ rant drew his attention away. In spite of his fear he felt the words escape his throat with a life of their own.

“I admit to wondering aloud why we are; I admit to asking of my fellow men if there is more to us than listening to the musical glass and erecting walls between the city and woodlands; I admit to wondering more than once what is our far past,” he paused to catch his breath at the effluence of words and to amaze at his own audacity, “I admit nothing else your highest, except wanting to know where it came from,” he attempted to gesture at the immaculate structure around him.

“Insolent!” was Elios’ response to the honest outburst. His hands clutched the edge of the slate with hysterical strength. “I can see you are all of the mentioned charges and more. My ire is roused that this court should even convene to allow you a fair trial. That you misuse the right given you by the system on which our very foundations rest sickens me,” he said to Ansel with righteous indignation. Ansel noticed a tiny drop of spittle on the right corner of his mouth; he could see the whitish pearl with eerie clarity, even from the depths of his position. He felt no amusement on witnessing it; if anything, it increased his latent animosity towards these men and their systems.

“Why is it wrong to examine the glass? To understand what makes it ring tones? Why am I being punished for simply wanting to understand?” Ansel pleaded, looking up the receding perspectives of the pulpits, “I cannot help wanting to know what is beyond the woodlands...” he let the sentiment trail, having found that the fire that ignited the words left just as suddenly as it came.

“Enough! You insult this convene,” Elios thundered down at Ansel almost before he could finish pleading his humanity. “I need see no further; I will *bear* no further! Ansel Jolen Hyden, I find you guilty of the charges aforementioned, in addition to endangering the life of your fellow men with your rampant venture beyond the walls of the city and demonstrating execrable conduct towards this highest of orders...”

The judge listed the charges loudly and with a certain relish. As he spoke the mosaic floor shifted; a small portion of the floor in front of Ansel spread outward in the shape of a star. The air immediately rushed through the hole, whipping at the sleeves of his coat and pant legs, and disappearing in swirls and eddies.

“Is this what I get for my questions? For my need to know?” Ansel asked the old judge. He had to shout over the dry roar of air escaping the chamber, whipping through his brown locks. Though Ansel could not see it, all seven members had risen to their feet; except for Elios, their eyes were on the floor.

“This highest of courts has convened and decided you are a hopeless case, Ansel Jolen Hyden. One who questions the norm; who undermines the importance of rules established from time unknown. This case has been decided,” the judge said with ceremony. Outside the sky drifted faster; the clouds ran past the dimensions of the elliptical window in a way they had not before the star-shaped aperture opened.

“The highest order behaves with the best wishes for mankind,” Elios began with the comfort of a familiar prayer.

“The highest court operates knowing that what it sees and feels is a gift,” the judge standing leftmost of Elios continued with equal solemnity. Each judge in turn took up the litany and recited his appointed passage.

“The highest court sees that mankind is content with the gift; that it never needs to go beyond the walls of the city where nothing is known,” the next Judge said as the wind tousled his thin graying hair and flowing robes.

“The highest court observes the inquisitive, the indiscreet, the seeker of unnecessary answers...”

“That endanger the well-being of mankind and attempt to codify the great mystery that is everything...”

“Because there is no reason to question the crystalline notes of the musical glass; no answer to what is mankind...”

“Because mankind is, mankind has always been, mankind will always be. As essential as the mechanism of life, a mystery in itself...”

“That needs no explanation because it simply is. And to ask anymore is to endanger the mind with egregious impulses,” the judges continued in turn as the wind’s strength increased. The height and receding angle allowed the Judges to remain upright while intoning their sentence while below, Ansel felt the gall forces suck him down.

“And whatever lies beyond the city is not important ...”

“And whatever activates the musical glass is not important ...”

“And whatever the city rests on is not important ...”

“Because it is, and is all that matters ...”

“And we are, and is all that matters ...”

“And the sky is, and is all that matters ...”

“And the mind that conceives beyond incites questions in others and disrupts harmony among men.”

As Elios shouted the last words the wind pressure increased in one hard burst and carried Ansel forward, pitching him head-first down the orifice in the floor. Ansel screamed and put his hands in front of him, realizing for the first time the restraining band was gone. He was falling fast but could make out details around him. Vague darkness beyond the shifting walls of the tunnel that carried him down. Down towards the harshest, brightest, most intense light he had ever seen. Gradually he had to cover his eyes as he descended. The light became more intense and heat pulsed forward in waves. Ansel felt sweat on his forehead. Moisture that was immediately absorbed. He tugged at his collar and felt a stinging sensation on his skin as he dropped. The rate of his fall seemingly slowed, it felt to Ansel. He

opened his eyes to a slit and saw he was near the end of the vertical tunnel.

He could see a more solid blackness just past the edge of the tunnel exit. A narrow ring of dark framed by the burning light. Then the tunnel was above him, its lowest portion retracting and disappearing. The black was everywhere and Ansel saw where he was.

Ansel gave one last scream that was lost in the immensity of space and was sharply cut when the last of his air was torn from his lungs. Even before his blood had an opportunity to boil, a long flame from the sun he was falling into lashed him and a second later there was nothing to Ansel. He might never have been there.

A long distance away, in the hall of discipline, the judges waited for the star to close before moving. They went to their chambers with their heads down and faces solemn. They knew that another insurgent had been shown the light and order had been restored.

THE END

Continued From Page 3

Many of you got an e-mail message from me letting you know that this issue was going to be delayed. Unlike in past years this delay is on purpose. Still waiting on a couple of release forms for the stories within, I wanted to accommodate those forms which were delayed by the week long shutdown of the airline industry. Since this issue was originally scheduled to come out a mere four weeks after it happened, I also felt it necessary to address the events of September 11th. With that in mind, two close friends of mine – people whose work regular readers of ESC! will recognize – offered to write and illustrate pieces for this issue. Guy Qualls wrote the poem *9/11/2001* found on page 5 of this issue and Paul Tucker set aside the Vex he was working on to create, from scratch, a new episode of his illustrated story labeled *VEX: Treachery's Foil*. Paul did this in two weeks no less. Personally, I think it's his best work yet.

Other faces familiar to ESC! readers have rejoined us: Both willing to give me another try, Tosh Bibb and Joyce Bradshaw are back this issue. Tosh with her comic panels and Joyce, with part two of her "Time Trilogy" – the first part having appeared in ESC! Magazine Volume 3 Number 2 back in November of 1994. Part three is coming next issue!

Lastly we are lucky to have two new writers to ESC! appear this issue:

Dennis Golden's story was originally slated to appear in Volume 4, Number 1. Those of you who rejoined us back in Spring know what happened to that installment of ESC! Magazine. Dennis was gracious enough to entrust me one more time to put his fictional "how-dunit" in this issue. I think you'll all enjoy his salute to the many stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Thank you Dennis!

This issue's closer is brought to us by Melvin Cartagena. Mel first heard of ESC! a little over five months ago and immediately submitted his story. He was referred to the magazine by Derek Muk, another one of ESC!'s regular contributors. From the moment of its inception ESC! has catered to aspiring authors young and old. Mel fits this bill and, judging by his work, I think we'll be hearing more from him in the future.

Well, that about wraps it up for this issue. I hope you'll join us again in April next year when we'll be bringing you more fresh fiction, poetry and illustration!



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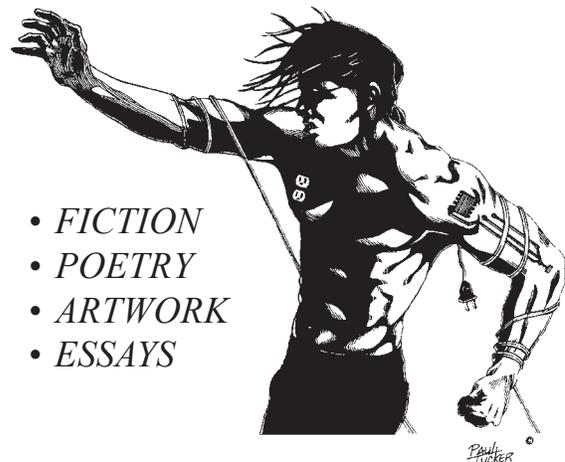
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