

ALTERNATIVE MYSTERIES

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Edited by Philip K. Cartledge

WHY NOT BE A WRITER?

Your mother told you you could never be one, but what was the last time you listened to her, especially about using 'you' twice consecutively in the same sentence.

Alternative Mysteries actively solicits contributions from young and upcoming previously unpublished writers, especially if they include a nude shot with their submission. No PDFs or text files will be accepted, even if you have been clever enough to find out our email address. We prefer hand-written manuscripts, scrawled on either papyrus or toilet paper, but at a pinch that swanky Basildon Bond letter paper you can buy at W.H. Smiths will do. If you can incorporate some bloodstains, possibly from picking scabs, or from a recent piercing which has yet to heal, this will enable us to genetically identify you as who you say you are, and satisfy our lawyers. It will also of course help to convict you if you stalk us and murder us in our beds, which is, frankly something of a real worry.

Under the terms of a grant from the Dave Garnett Foundation, We are able to offer to pay upwards of 1 Euro and downwards of 10 Euros for accepted stories. Well, we offer that, but frankly it's not likely to happen. Contributors of unaccepted manuscripts will be sent a free copy of 'Current Archaeology' providing they include an International Reply Coupon. This isn't an entirely altruistic offer, it's part of a deal I have with the publishers of that magazine to try and boost their sales. They honestly aren't shifting a lot of copies these days apart from people who are actually interested in current archaeology.

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EDITORIAL

by Philip K. Cartledge

Whilst the world of the future beckons us, the world of the past cocks a snoot at us, whatever that means. I assume it is some reference to an arcane English Hunting ritual. Perhaps we are pursued by the past, whilst the future leads us a merry dance. Oh, no, I'm getting carried away now. They'll take away my editor's license soon.

Welcome to the first issue of a brand new spanking magazine* (*You know what I mean, but I was too late to change this anachronism because the issue had already gone to the printers).

Basically we all as writers and editors and indeed readers work at the cutting edge of something or other in literature. The difference is that when it's all printed and stapled together

some of it sells for one buck and some of it sells for ten bucks. Sometimes this may make us famous, but it is more likely to see us just paying one buck for something we will throw away, without even recycling it. Imagine how many of the world's trees would have been saved if they hadn't been used to publish crap science fiction magazines in the fifties. No, stop imagining that now because the people trading futures in recycling pulp are already knocking on my door.

So here is the magazine all of those people may have been waiting for, although I wouldn't bet money on it unless it was someone else's money. Every quarter, perhaps five months, we will offer you a veritable smorgasbord of literary delights, although thankfully none of them will actually be Swedish.

Science fiction is well known for its communities, both the

large national ones such as that magazine called New Somethingorother that operated from Notting Hill and also the parochial or fan-based ones such as that which operated from Ella Parker's Penitentiary in the 1960s, and were largely masterminded by the evil genius of one Langdon Jones, whoever he is.

Today we have a new community, which I like to think is embodied in this new magazine, and I would like to introduce you some of its leading luminaries (although I fear that may be putting it rather whatever the antithesis of mildly is.)

Abigail Swinge, writing under the nom de plume de ma tante, of Frank Looney, has published widely in the field of actuarial analysis. And I think this is evident in her story 'American Sarco', but who am I to discourage a woman who sent me a picture of her naked as a stimulus to publishing her work? Putative future contributors please take note.

When 'Randle & Spliff: A Tale of Mars' by Mary K. Reid, landed on my desk, or at least

on the stairs leading up to the landing of my bed-sit, I immediately puked, but that was because I had eaten and drunk unwisely during the previous six hours. Nevertheless I recognized a work of genius, although not of much. This is a woman writer to watch, I thought to myself, especially because she is a woman given, by her own admission, to wearing scanties, whatever they are.

What can I say about James K. Linwood's thoroughly researched essay on the life of Fred Batt, except that Jimmy Linwood, as we know him, must be very old to have remembered all this? Nevertheless I predict a bright future in sci-fi for him, if he can conquer his arthritis, and also crawl out from the shadow of James Ballard or even James Blish, or anyone else called James.

The story 'Manny Klein: First Man on the Moon' was frankly rescued from the slush pile of our editorial office, at 271 Portobello Road, thanks to the efforts of our daily cleaner who had inadvertently knocked over the waste-paper bin and sucked up the contents through her

Dyson and thus felt guilty about it. After rooting through the dustbin where she had dumped the waste, I managed to reconstitute the original text. It wasn't really worth it, but since I had spent so much time on it, I felt I really had to publish it. I'm ashamed to say I can't remember anything about the author Jacques Platt except that he took a lot of valium, ostensibly to calm a stomach condition, drove to Scotland, and in a bizarre incident which can be testified to by someone who has signed an affidavit, pushed his car over a cliff.

'Abney Sloth' is Joan Silas-Hall's first ever-published story although she assures me photographs of her unclad body have appeared in many mainstream magazines such as *Hustler*, and *Australian Poon-Tang in Bikinis*. I can't vouch for that personally, since the pages of all my magazines of that kind appear to have become stuck together.

So, there you have it. We would like feedback, but not that much of it. Not enough, for instance, for us to believe we could ever enter into a dialogue

with you, let alone share a pizza. Perhaps just enough to convince us not to knife you if we meet you down a dark alleyway.

Perhaps you can tell us what your favourite story in this issue was. We will collate the results of this readers Poll and then take the winning author out for a drink on our behalf.

AMERICAN SARCO

By Frank Looney



In the morning I like to wake up. And usually I do.

Three years ago, one day, I didn't wake up until the afternoon, but that was because I'd taken several Tuinol, some Seroxat, and Lomotil for my IBS. I was eventually woken by a phone call from my mother.

'Are you okay?' she asked.

'Oh, sure, yeah,' I answered, 'It's three o'clock in the afternoon and I've just been woken up by mother calling collect. Why wouldn't I be okay?'

After I've woken up I like to shower. Well, no, first I like to piss, and then shower, although sometimes I simply piss in the shower to save time.

Then I shave; even though my beard growth is so slow I would normally only develop a trace of beard after several months of non-shaving.

I once asked a medical specialist about this, and he said it was probably due to a lack of testosterone. He said he could test me for that, but it would cost me 500 bucks.

Yeah, sure, I said, that sounds like a really good way to spend 500 bucks, so I can get to shave more often.

After I've showered and done twenty bench-presses, I spend twenty minutes on Aikido, strictly timed on my kitchen timer.

Sometimes about this time, my art broker rings and ask me if I've like to invest in a new work by Damien Hirst.

Yeah, sure, I say, because we all know he is one of the great artists of the twentieth century, second only to Tracy Emin.

Then I put on my Calvin Klein boxers, my Conrad Knight socks (enhanced with llama wool), my Pink shirt, which strangely is white not pink, my Gucci silk tie, and my Armani suit.

Then I go down to the lobby, where Pete the doorman reminds me I've forgotten to put on my shoes.

I go back to my apartment to select a suitable pair of bespoke Saville Row brogues. As I'm putting them on my bookie rings me with a tip for the four o' clock at Anaheim.

Oh yeah, sure, I say, then why don't you put five million bucks on it for me, because none of your tips have ever been known to lose?

Back downstairs, Pete opens the door for me and says, 'Have a good day, sir.'

Yeah, sure, I say. Today I have to meet with two Jewish lawyers, an oversexed female real-estate consultant, and also possibly hack the head off one of my business associates. I'm sure today is really going to be one I can look back on with pleasure.

I usually get a taxi to my office uptown. The driver is a Russian who tells me he is saving to open a pizzeria in Harlem. He has five children and hopes to make enough money from his venture eventually to put them all through medical school, as well as pay for his wife's breast cancer treatment.

Yeah, sure, I say, that's bound to happen. You'll obviously live a long happy life without being poisoned by pesticides, or have your old business associates from the former Eastern Bloc catch up with you and blow your head off, on the basis that you sold them out to a Mormon Hit Squad, dedicated to cleaning the streets, or at least those around Utah.

Should I turn right, here? The taxi driver asked, on the corner of 43rd and 10th.

Yeah, sure, I say. Funny, like I thought a Russian taxi-driver who'd

been in the country two weeks would already know how to get from place to place.

I walked from where the taxi driver dropped me the few blocks to my office. On the way a bum asked me for a cigarette.

Like, yeah, sure, I said. Here have the whole packet, after all there's absolutely no chance of you dying of lung cancer from smoking them.

It's a bad day in the office. Ruth, my secretary has got pregnant and wants to keep it.

Yeah, sure, I tell her, as a single mother with high-powered job you'll be able to dedicate all the time that's necessary to ensure its safe upbringing. There's absolutely no way it will end up a junkie, as I am absolutely sure you've never dropped acid or done heroin.

Ben and Phil and some other guys I work with barge into my office while I'm masturbating over a picture of Britney Spears.

You like that bitch, Ben asks?

Yeah, sure, I say, I think she's one of the most beautiful and desirable women in the world and doesn't at all appeal only to sad old men, like judges, who like to see her dressed up as a school girl.

The guys suggest we go to an Irish theme pub for lunch.

Yeah, sure, I say, that sounds like a really cool idea. How else could I possibly wish to spend my time?

At the pub we show each other business cards we have had made up for ourselves.

Yeah, sure, yours is really good, I tell Phil. I especially like the typeface. I mean, Times Roman, I

can't think of anyone else who's ever used that typeface.

Ben asks me if I saw the Rolling Stones perform at the Super bowl

I say, yeah, sure, it was one of the most awesome moments of my life.

In the pub a woman dressed as a leprechaun is pole-dancing. Ben says he'd like to bone her.

Yeah, sure I say, I'm sure that wouldn't result in you contracting any sexual transmitted diseases, and you would probably go on to marry her and live together happy and fulfilled for the rest of your life, possibly in a trailer park in Lubbock, because that would be all you'd be able to afford when your career goes down the drain as soon as your bosses found you'd laid it out for a stripper.

I slip Rohypnol into Phil's drink and suggest he comes back to my place because I want to show off my new home-cinema system with giant flat-screen LCD tv.

That must have cost you a pretty penny, he says.

No, I say, I picked it up for twenty dollars on one of those 'price-drop' TV auction shows.

No kidding, he says.

Yeah, sure, I say. Like everybody knows those are the best places to pick up state of the art technological equipment at knock-down prices.

Back at my apartment he is puzzled by the absence of my home cinema system.

Someone must have stolen it, I say.

You'd better call the police, he says.

Yeah, sure, I say, they will obviously make it their priority to try and find it. After all they probably don't have anything better to do. Like busting international cartels of drug dealers or stopping Islamic nut-cases diving planes into skyscrapers.

I put on a cd by Huey Lewis and The News.

This one of my favourite ever albums, says Phil.

Yeah sure, I say, I saw them live once, well at least on Saturday Night Live. They really rock. And it's also interesting how they connect with the underlying substructure of American folk music. And their lyrics are really meaningful. I understand you can take a university course in them these days.

I show Phil my ceremonial Samurai sword.

That's a great sword, he says.

Yeah, sure, I say, of course I only bought it to dice courgettes for my homemade minestrone soup. My recipe won second prize at the Bakersfield Annual Homemade Minestrone Soup Exposition. I obviously have absolutely no obsession with Mishima or any other Japanese regime-loving homosexual who may have used it to disembowel himself, because he essentially suffered alienation caused by his nationalist feelings, and also a general sense that whatever his self-esteem was worth it, it wasn't worth being humiliated, either by history, or some shy Japanese gay guy he might have met in the toilet.

You must be very proud of that sword, says Phil.

Yeah, sure, of course I am. It's small seemingly insignificant things like that which really give me a buzz and make life worth living. I even put it on my CV. I think it was really helpful in getting my current job as a corporate insurance advisor.

Two weeks later a detective investigating Phil's strange disappearance visits me.

I wish I could help you, I say. Phil and I were really close and I really miss his sparkling conversation. He was a vegetarian, you know, and could talk about the perfect tofu sandwich for hours on end in a way that kept you really enthralled

You're taking the piss, aren't you? Says the detective.

Like, sure, I say, obviously I really like stringing the police along when I know they have nothing on me. Like, it's not as if they will take me down a dark alley and beat seven kinds of shit out of me, and then, say something like, don't forget we'll be watching you 24/24 just waiting for you to make one mistake.

The cop leaves. At the door, he turns and says, don't forget we'll be watching you 24/24 just waiting for you to make one mistake.

Now you're taking the piss, I say. And, yeah, sure, like I'm really scared.

Later that night my mother rings me again. She is sobbing.

You don't really love me, she says.

Why do you say that?

Because you usually pass when I call collect.

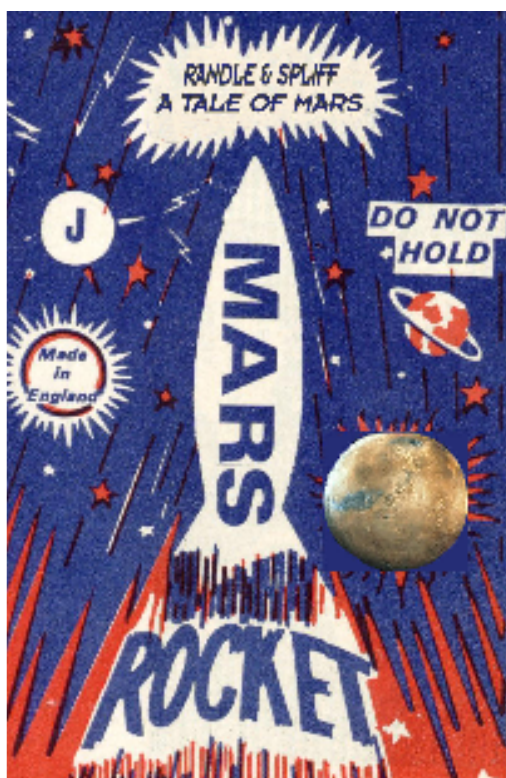
That's because I know you are in a bar and have run out of dimes. Look, mom, I really love you. Yeah, sure I do, I say. Why wouldn't I love a clinging, alcoholic mother who starved me of affection and is thus responsible for me ending up as a vacuous, self-obsessed soulless psychopathic sarcastic bastard?

Yeah, sure, like, of course why wouldn't you, my mother says.

RANDLE AND SPLIFF

A Tale of Mars

By Mary K. Reid



“What ails thee”, old friend, I asked.

Cartledge was reclining on his divan in a state of dishabille, and with a slight sweat upon his brow, a flush upon his loins, and dew pond in his belly-button.

“I fear it may be the tiger prawns I had for lunch,” he said. “Perhaps I should have cooked them first. Please read to me and excuse me if I occasionally interrupt you to puke into this handy galvanised bucket.”

I browsed through his bookshelves, passing over ‘Landladies in Lycra’ and ‘Snot Twirling For Fun’ before settling on

his well-thumbed three-quarter bound edition of **SPLIFF WITHINGHAM AND JEFF RANDLE, SPACE DETECTIVES, GO TO MARS**

I opened it at random and started to read:

It was a curly summers’ day down a country lane in old rural England, possibly in Rutland, circa 1935. One of the great big wars that everybody thought would be the last ever great big war, but which wouldn’t, was over and the next one, which everybody assumed would never happen, but which would, had yet to begin. Moths buzzed away amongst the hibiscus. Do moths buzz? Probably not, ornithology was never my strong suit. It was one of those warm summers nobody thought they had ever experienced before, but had, most recently in 1934, and all was suffused with the warm balmy glow of innocence, including the inner thighs of our favourite Nurse, Miss Flavia Elsingham. Later there would be buttered scones for tea.

I was out looking for badgers I could tame or at least slightly bend to my will, when suddenly, as if from out of nowhere, but actually from out of an over-revved V-8 engine, the throaty roar of an over-revved V-8 engine rent the quiet composed harmony of the countryside. Even lizards twitched under their rocks, but that was mostly because they were having wet-dreams about lizards of the opposite sex. A Triumph Spitfire (with overhead camshafts) steamed round a narrow bend shrouded with high hedges and screeched to a halt in the dusty lane. The driver, a ginger-haired lad, vaulted out.

“Jeff Randle,” he said, thrusting forward both his hand and his pugnacious jaw in greeting.

“No, that’s me,” I said. “You must be young Spliff Withingham?”

“Gosh,” Captain Randle, he said, without actually confirming his identity, or his youthfulness, “I’m really looking forward to working with you. The chaps at the MOD didn’t say exactly what the

project what but I've always admired your work, especially on genetic selectivity in the Mottled Skipper."

I addressed the bulletin on my clipboard. "You come with some pretty impressive credentials yourself, young Withingham. Your work on Topsy Turvy Particles is second to none."

"Shucks," he said, "I was just lucky to get a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation. Call me Spliff."

"Perhaps later when we know the cut of each other's jib a little better," I said. "I see you studied under Trubbshaw at the East Kilbride Agricultural College. A good man and a better woman."

"Indeed, a leader in the field of womb transplant surgery," acknowledged Withingham, colouring slightly, which was not easy for a man of his complexion. "But that was merely a diversion and should not detract from his work on Elasticity Theory, Push-Pull Hydrodynamics and Thrust-Quenching."

"Well," Withingham, I said. "I want you now to walk with me down this narrow country lane to the romantic cottage I share with my attractive wife, Gisella, otherwise known as Mrs Randle, where you will live with us as our lodger whilst we pursue our researches in my subterranean workshop. And please, whilst we saunter, keep a look out for any badgers."

"Lead on," said Withingham. "I presume you will send a donkey to tow my roadster to the local garage."

"Better than that, I said, "I'll send my manservant, Estovan, as soon as he's finished arranging his gladioli."

"Splendid," said Withingham. "Perhaps you could tell me more details of our work as we walk?"

"I'll fill you in," I said.

By the time we arrived at the cottage, I had filled in Spliff several times. He disguised his limp well, but was obviously shaken. He struck a match from the newel post on the kissing gate and lit up a small cheroot, which he immediately stubbed out upon seeing our No Smoking sign. "It's a wonder," he said, pocketing

his pocket hummidor "how, especially in the world of pulp fiction, you can't find a decent big cheroot these days." I passed on that one with a discreet cough.

My comely wife Gisella greeted us at the rose-entwined doorway. She was snipping the heads off the dog roses with her secateurs, to prepare a pot-pourri, whatever that is.

She took us through to the kitchen and poured our visitor an enema.

"Lordy," she said, in her Savannah Creole Pidgin. "I bin lastick bostick, and am creamed enough to grindle three shanks."

She poured glasses of Chantilly Cobbler and Rory Gallagher and we sat and chatted idly while I attempted to explain my wife's mixed ancestry to an increasingly incredulous Withingham.

Then I invited her to show young Spliff to his room in the guest annexe.

"Go lick me," she said, but I hoped this was a figurative or colloquial injunction and not a literal one.

Spliff wobbled off on shaky legs leaving me to peruse the classified pages of the Devizes Free Advertiser.

Five only slightly shop-soiled Translational Interlocutors were offered for sale, but not the Intermolecular Grovelator I had hoped to find. I made a note of the number of a certain Madame Zizi who offered for sale ex-war department solenoids.

After Spliff had dried his underwear, pomaded his chest-wig and read a short inspirational lesson from the works of St Ignatius Loyola, he rejoined us for our evening meal. I sat him down at our vast oak refectory table and rang for the servants, before remembering we didn't have any, only Estovan who didn't work nights, unless Giselle had booked him to trim her topiary.

Giselle appeared in a Voertrekker style Dutch cloth cap, suspenders and tights. She called me a wastrel and began to taunt me with ostrich feathers, whilst doing a vaguely erotic wiggly dance, but I told her not to bother and to bring some kind of exotic bread, perhaps ciabatta or

even focietta. I inferred that in the last resort I would settle for a Sainsbury's Potato and Onion Batch Loaf, organic, mind you. But that would just be between the two of us.

"When have I got time to go down Sainsbury's," she said, temporarily forgetting her Pidgin dialect. She turned on her stiletto heels and stumped out, which incidentally left a number of holes in the expensive designer rubber flooring. I watched her go. Well, I think we both did.

"Now, young Spliff," I said. "Later a maid or henchman, I don't know which, I use a temp agency, will mop the spilt diesel oil from your tunic and clean your goggles. Meanwhile tell me what you think about this?"

"About your shirttails?"

"No, they just flopped out by mistake. I didn't have time to dress properly this morning. Rather distracted by badgers, you know how it is, well, probably not. This is what I meant," I said.

I unrolled some engineering drawings on the refectory table. They were on the peculiar starchy paper that Greek chefs use to wrap king prawns before frying them in a light tempura batter. What's it called? Never mind.

I continued. There was no stopping me, unless you applied a ligature to my neck and exerted a strong rotational pressure until there was first a faint creaking and then a final crack.

"These are the preliminary designs for the new rocket motor, which will power our ship on its voyage to Mars," I said.

Spliff pondered over the designs, but I wiped it up later. I couldn't help but notice his epaulets were wilting and made a mental note to get a quote from We Are Leather Refurbishments Limited.

"They're impressive," said Spliff.

"You mean the twin carburettors," I said. "And each has its own turbo injectors."

"No, I was referring to your wife's thighs."

We spent the rest of the evening exchanging quadratic equations and generally Malmorrokoring. A jolly time was had by all until Spliff excused himself claiming the need for an early night to rest his groin. I bid him goodnight. Sooner or later I would have to face him with the problem of rotational negativity and the corresponding effect of Coriolis in a tangential universe. Without the answers to these problems Mars would forever remain beyond our grip.

Filo pastry, that's what the stuff is called. Sorry, it just came to me

Before I myself, and indeed my wife, settled down that night, in our separate bedrooms, I hasten to add, I went to the window of the west turret of my cottage and looked through my brass-ensconced telescope towards the hills in the West. Or it could have been the East; I was slightly disoriented because I had just snacked on a slightly off sausage-roll and was experiencing some gastric discomfort, and besides since I could not yet afford even the most affordable Global Positional Satellite Tracking Device, I could not only not verify my position but could not count how many times I had used the word not, in the last sentence, because I was very tired.

However, a glint of reflected light did manage to raise my level of awareness from a sub sentient level, and, in doing so, attracted my attention. I tightened the focus on the telescope (it can be done believe me). The image of an old enemy hiding being an outcrop of stone or rock or something and watching us through high-power binoculars swam into view. It was Otto Schenk, the world famous evil German genius, created by Angus McVicar, and now obviously re-incarnated through the auspices of Zen and Doctor Frugal's Mescaline-flavoured herbals teas.

What did the evil Otto Schenk have in store for us? I wondered. And would it involve young juvenile characters who would stowaway upon our spaceship? Very likely, I thought. My mind hummed

with possibilities (it was to the tune of 'Mull of Kintyre) before I eventually fell into a dreamless sleep, except for a few dreams where badgers were attempting to bite my fingers off, and a left-handed swinger from the Miami Dolphins failed to score a single home run in any season, thus rendering my claim in the National Lottery as invalid.

The next morning dawned, as it had a habit of doing in this part of the world. I finished herding my ferrets and sent Estovan down to the chemist for some Alka Seltzer. My stomach was still giving me gyp.

Spliff had risen early to muck out the stables. Suddenly he came up with the answer. It was a staggering feat of lateral thinking. "Horses are for riding!" he said, smiting his forehead, and falling backwards into a pile of steaming ordure.

After he had regained consciousness, I congratulated him on his insight, albeit in slightly disparaging terms, which may or may not have included terms like 'tit' and 'wanker'.

"No, no," he said, strapping on his Lederhosen (it was the weekend of the Bavarian Beer Festival, and he wanted to get into the spirit of the affair, without actually going there). "What I mean is, horses are for riding and so are rockets. Horses have saddles, but rockets do not. Why don't we put saddles on our rockets. What I'm suggesting is that instead of thinking of our ship as a rocket with engines attached, why don't be think of it as engines attached to a rocket."

"Where do the saddles come in?" I asked.

"We sit on them. Imagine the weight saved when you don't actually have to build living quarters."

"How do we breathe," I said. I can't help it. Small practicalities always bothered me.

"We consume these oxygen globules, which I've patented, which go directly to our lungs."

"How do we withstand the vacuum of space?"

"We tie ourselves up very tightly with bandages, not ordinary bandages, mind you, but those formed from recycled tyres."

"Brilliant, I said, "I'll go away and finish the designs for the whole concept immediately."

"By the way," he said, "it would be better if it were all built out of balsa wood."

Three months later, thanks to a government grant, we strapped ourselves onto our saddles, astride our balsa wood rocket, and held our breath whilst Gisella lit the blue touch paper.

Within three weeks we were on Mars.

WHAT WE FOUND ON MARS

Thanks to our foresight in bringing along with us several do-it-yourself greenhouse kits, (in flat-packs of course) we were able to establish a base at our landing site on Mars fairly quickly. So we settled down to growing tomatoes and forcing our rhubarb. We discovered that aphids were practically non-existent on mars, which was a big plus, enabling us to cut back on both organic and non-organic pest control agents.

We also found a large tumulus which we suspected contained the graves of dead Martians, but both of us were too squeamish to attempt any excavation. Unfortunately their racial memories lingered in the soil and continued to pervade our dreams, instilling in both of us a lust for Macdonald's Double Cheeseburgers, with medium fries.

Ten weeks into the mission, Spliff became very homesick and I had to smack him several times. Then I became homesick and he smacked me. We both took down the nude pictures of Gisella from our lockers and ritualistically burnt them, but it didn't help.

After sixteen weeks the water-pills were had brought with us ran out and we were both suffering from dehydration and

reduced to eating kelp. Unfortunately there was no kelp on Mars, because there were no oceans. Okay if you want to be niggly there was dried kelp from the dried oceans, but these were in fact vast fields of volcanic lava flows and not seas as such, so that knocked that on the head. No kelp nowhere, boss.

In a last ditch last resort last everything endeavour, we set out together pulling sledges tied together with clothes pegs to try and find the transponder on a rescue rocket that had been sent out from our Mission Control Centre in Maudley Street in Clitheroe. We found it buried in the sand ten miles from our base. It was attached to the burnt out cardboard casing of a 'Brocks' Mars Rocket Special firework (Take special care when lighting within the vicinity of small children')

This wasn't the end, although it might have been if I hadn't managed to stop Spiff gibbering by slapping him vigorously around the cheeks with a wet haddock, which I'd found in the emergency rations, along with two Twix bars, six packs of chewing gum, a can of Stella Artois, and four hundred condoms (Durex Especially Knobbly Variety), and a spade.

Using the spade we (well mostly me actually) dug down into the sand of Mars and eventually found the spores of a mushroom like algae, which could sustain us for hundred of years, provided we entered entirely voluntarily into a parasitic union where we lay in a state of suspended hibernation and allowed their tendrils to enter our hearts, lungs and other vital organs, through an intermediary medium of glycolic acid with ceramide. And why wouldn't we?

Several hundred years later, Mars was conquered and settled as part of an Islamic Diaspora. A gang of sappers from the Finsbury Park mosque dug us up and sent us home to be re-united with Giselle and Estovan who had spent the intervening period in hibernation (at least that's what they called it). We were given a ticker-tape welcome on the streets of Lubbock, Texas. It wasn't the best deal, but it was the best deal we could get.

The End.

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF
ALTERNATIVE MYSTERIES – JUNE 2006

A Busy Day: a new tale of space by Mary K. Reid, set on an isolated Space Research station in Australia and not at all a rip off of a Charles Eric Maine novel.

How We Enjoyed Ourselves in the Twentieth Century by new contributor Morgan P. Hall. Some suggestions as to how we enjoyed ourselves in the twentieth century. That just about sums it up really.

Film Club - new author Evelyn K. Possum relates his/her experiences at a film discussion group in North London. Sounds boring? It is. We only bought it and promised to publish it because the author threatened to commit ritual suicide on our doorstep.

Chuck Eager – Jacques Platt, author of 'Manny Klein, First Man On the moon' returns with this footnote on one of aviation's modern heroes.

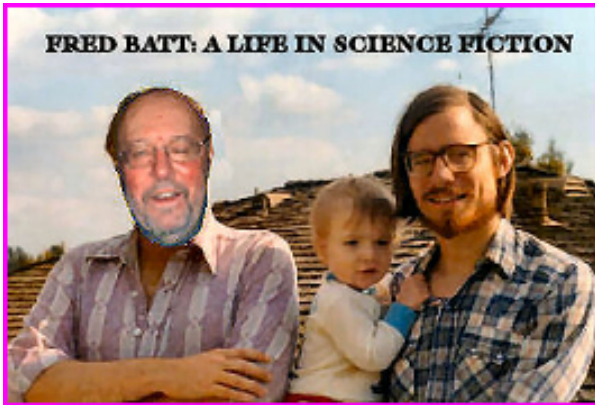
Death Runs Deep – a debut story from exciting new author Abgoth Schrapnel for whom we predict great things, although possibly not winning the silver medal in the luge in the Winter Olympics.

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FRED BATT: A LIFE IN SCIENCE FICTION

By James K. Linwood



Frederick William Batt was born in Derby, in Derbyshire, which at the time was known as being situated at the gateway to the North, but later as merely a place on the A46. He moved out to live in Lincoln, in Lincolnshire, which was on the A10, and not a gateway to anywhere, except perhaps the Fens, and why should they need a gateway, being a large tract of watery fenlands (ibid). beside it would only leak, unless constructed of finest quality steel and equipped with state-of-the-art rubber seals, possibly designed by NASA, but probably, in the interests of safety, not, and who was going to fund that? He spent two months there when he was twelve or possibly thirteen. Only he was counting. Either way he wouldn't have been allowed a liquor licence.

He had one or two eccentric habits.

He loved tapping barometers, for instance, without any real idea of why he was doing so, and always gave the one in his porch a quick tap every time he left to do whatever he had to do, which could include running numbers and picking up money for the mafia, and possibly slaughtering pigs. He never tickled

Aborigines. That was just a vile rumour spread by Peter Nicholls, no not the playwright.

Fred (as those who knew him intimately were wont to call him, including his bank manager, and manicurist) loved quince jelly, but since he didn't know how to make it and since no commercially available brands were on the market at the time, it only led to a deep frustration, reflected in later life by a tendency to encamp outside supermarkets with a placard reading: 'Where were you when I wanted Quince Jelly?'. This is British jelly of course, as apposed to American jelly, which is in fact jam.

In the immediate post-war years (though which war was never certain) Fred Batt also wrote several science fiction novels for the American pulp publisher Trollope & Schuster.

There was the controversial 'Jesus on Neptune', and the rite-of-passage trilogy 'Mars the Green. Red and Yellow Planets', in which sundry adolescents, later to be played in the movie version by Hollywood brats Kevin Bacon, Kiefer Sutherland, Keanu Something, Zack Braff, Keenan Wynne, Lollie Tollhurst, Someone Rider, Diastol Trophy and Edgar Woods, faced up to the demands of their developing sexuality in a small hermetic colony on the planet, where they couldn't even cop off in the back seat of a Cadillac.

In 1964 Fred Batt decamped to the U.S.A, arriving after a two-week cruise on the Queen Mary, and thankfully not the Lusitania, which had left at the same time not only in an alternate universe, but in a different time-stream (which is a good trick) only to be sunk by a German U-Boat. This annoyed Woodrow Wilson no end, who made a speech about babies disappearing open-mouthed beneath the waves (among other things) and was consequential in the U.S.A. joining the war (although which was uncertain). But since this was in an alternate universe, with an alternate time-line we can safely switch back to the main narrative thrust, which is:

His publisher was there to meet him on arrival but was so repulsed by his

physical appearance (even though Fred had pre-warned him about his facial disfigurement, sustained when he had fallen face-first into an acid bath whilst under the influence of Stella Artois, a renowned Belgian whore) he threw a bowl of chicken soup (with noodles) in Fred's face. Fred responded by firing several blinis and some matzo balls at his assailant with a sling-shot, or catapult as its known in English. A steward in Third Class who knew too well the animosity with which immigrants to the U.S.A were sometimes received had given this to him

In was an inauspicious start to his career as a freelance writer in the American market, but a good one as an unmercenary hit-man (believe it or not there are hit men who follow the profession not for the money, but for the job satisfaction and a sense they are contributing to the moral well-being of society).

Batt would later be reconciled with his publisher, although he had to wear a paper bag over his head, and bring a selection of roasted nuts, every time he visited him

He even managed by skilful bargaining involving venison sausages, to renegotiate his rate of pay up from 1 cent per word to 1.3 cents per word, which probably paid for the nuts. I remind you of the famous publishing adage: 'if you pay writers peanuts they write like monkeys'. Unfortunately in the case of many publishers, and even some readers, especially those of Fay Weldon, this is considered to be Not A Bad Thing

Batt contributed several novels to the famous T&S Doubles series, a marketing ploy in which two novels were bound back to back and upside down, which confused simple-minded readers enormously because they had to buy one novel they didn't want for every novel they did want, even if it was by the same author, using a pseudonym, which it frequently was, for contractual reasons. Batt later confessed that some of these novels took days to write.

In 1967 Batt entered into correspondence with Philip K. Dick,

whom he had long admired and had in fact once met at the office of Trollope & Schuster, but had failed to recognize, because Dick, suffering from a bout of paranoia, wore a goldfish bowl on his head, I mean over his head, not sitting on top of it, which would have required balancing skills Dick was frankly not up to (largely due to his ingestion of vast amounts of abusive substances, like chicory and oatmeal). Later they met frequently in Dick's hometown of Normal, Illinois, to arm-wrestle and exchange tales about conjunctivitis from which they both suffered. They even collaborated on a novel called 'Do Paranooids Dream of Layered Fudge Cake' in which the main protagonist was a secret agent in an alternate reality where androids disguised as celebrity chefs kept the population drugged with their confectional concoctions. This was published as a T&S Double back-to-back with 'Gobble Hounds of Ursa Major' by the up and coming young writer Thomas M. Schid, who would later go on to find fame as the inventor, but unfortunately not the patentee, of the combined Egg Two Sausage & Bacon cast iron frying skillet, a boon to short order cooks the world over.

In 1984 Batt's novel 'Crabs' broke the all-time record for all book sales ever, although no one was really sure what it was about or what genre it belonged to.

Steven Spielberg bought the rights and attempted to film it but even he was baffled and could only produce 8 minutes of total footage, and those were mostly gratuitous scenes of Kate Winslett posing nude for the Impressionist painter Monet (which he would later use in his feature-length cartoon 'Monet') before having a nervous breakdown. Spielberg, that is, not Kate Winslett.

Later the artist Manet would sue all parties involved because he believed a vowel had been inadvertently transcribed from the original script treatment, thus denying him millions in royalties. (NB. Manet's pen-name was John Brosnan.)

The Japanese anime director Yukkio Kurasawa later managed to commission a

script (written by John Brosnan) and produce a full length feature, (featuring a sound-track by Curtis Stigers) but committed hari-kiri after first destroying the master reel as an abomination. I think we all probably owe him a debt of gratitude.

Batt's advances were sufficient for him to move to Malibu where he lived for several years in a beach-front villa next to that owned by Woody Allen, with whom he later became good friends, but not that good, I don't want any misunderstanding here, since Woody is notoriously litigious. Another near neighbour was Norman Teflon who had made his fortune by inventing a fabulous material which would prevent objects sticking to cooking surfaces, and which he called 'grease-proof paper'. He was second-only in the New York Times list of 100 Wealthiest Inventors and Weirdos and Social Misfits, to Job Quigly who had invented an inert chemical solution which could dissolve wheel-claps.

In later life he was often taken to Task, in Wyoming, by his grand-children, to see the Clint Eastwood Museum of Organ-Utans. There was no real reason for this, and his grand-children are the first to admit they didn't know why they did it. Possibly they'd smoked too much dope, possibly they'd saved up too many coupons from the Graham Crackers that had a special 'Visit Clint Eastwood's Museum of Orung-Utans' promotion, which ran from January 1994 to February 1994. Who knows?

Anyway he didn't much care for Wyoming ('too dry' he remarked in his diaries 'and 'smells of monkeys.'). He died in Penury, which I believe is somewhere in Iowa. Once a year upon the anniversary of his death someone comes to lay daffodils on his grave, but that person is a local madman called Maurice Coombs who does the same for every single inhabitant of that graveyard.

It keeps him occupied.

MANNY KLEIN: FIRSTMAN ON THE MOON

By Jacques Platt



Manny Klein was born in Scranton, but when his parent's trout farm failed due to an outbreak of *Piscirickettsiosis* they moved to live in a trailer park five miles from the Edwards Air Force base.

After five years they had made enough from itinerant begging and selling small plushy bears purporting to be Catholics, to actually afford to buy a trailer, albeit a small one which could only sleep one at a time, so they slept in shifts.

I suppose you could say that if Manny didn't have flying in his blood, he at least had it in his ears and was in fact a lifelong sufferer from tinnitus caused by this early exposure to jet aircraft flying recklessly ten feet over his head with their afterburners on.

After a less than distinguished education at the local high school where he was remembered only for a prank which involved pouring lighter fuel over the entire college basketball teams' collected jock-straps and setting them alight, he set up a roadside car valeting business, on a downtown parking bay owned in perpetuity by his Uncle Ishmael,

who had won the deeds in a 'pin the tail on the whale' stand at the local state fair.

One day one of the pilots involved in testing the X-15 rocket plane pulled up at Manny's concession and asked to have his wheel trims buffed. His name was Neil Armstrong and he flew seven missions with the X-15, before a heart murmur caused him to pull out of the project. Eventually Neil was to move to Florida and establish himself as a successful realtor and part-time porn star.

Neil remarked upon Manny's speed with his chamois leather and also the fact that Klein was only five feet six tall, and suggested he should apply for a place on the X-15 testing project, because they were sorely in need of very short pilots, having bought in a bulk stock of cheap under-sized pressurized flight-suits from Taiwan.

Manny applied and so impressed his induction committee, not only by his size, but by his ability to rotate one hand above his head in a clockwise direction which rotating the other across his chest in a counter-clockwise one, that they immediately hired him, although they cleverly only committed themselves to paying him after he had survived his first flight.

A word should be said about the X-15. This was a rocket-driven research aircraft designed to be driven to very high altitudes at very high speeds for very short duration flights. Because of the speeds at which it would be driven, and the resultant friction, even at high altitudes, where it's tail was actually known to melt. it was designed with minimal control surfaces and therefore minimal control, which made actually flying it a bit of a bummer, especially when you were pushed back into your seat by a number of acceleration g's which would normally cause any healthy man to black out, if not shit himself. The X-15 was equipped with one of the most sophisticated ejection seat systems ever designed, but when you are in a dive spin and pulling 15 vertical Gs, and 8 Horizontal Gs, you'd be unconscious and almost certainly clinically dead long before the plane actually tore

itself apart under exactly the same forces. This is memorably what killed Michael Adams, one of Manny's contemporaries.

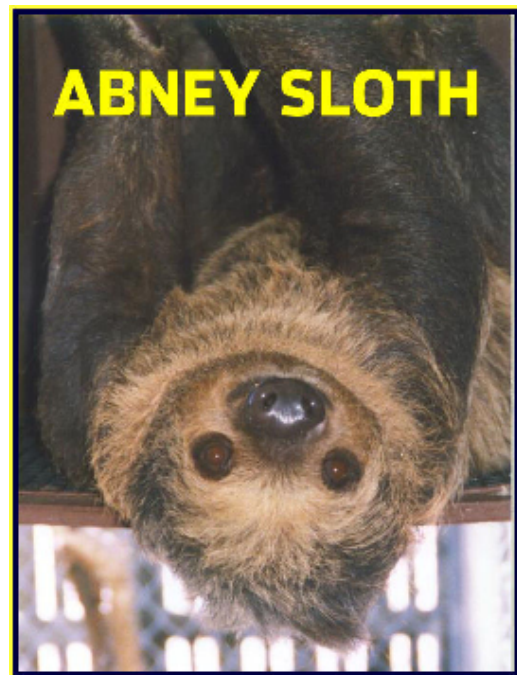
One should perhaps ask what caused men to fly under such conditions, and the answer is probably, as with us all, the need to pay off our debtors and to live in a style we have become accustomed to, with regular barbeques, even if it means ruining both our livers and our marriages.

Manny was scheduled for twelve more flights in the X-15 but all of them were pulled because of either weather or technical problems, but when the time came for the newly established NASA to consider him for a place on the astronaut team dedicated towards realizing Kennedy's promise to land a man on the moon, his record for surviving, if nothing else, proved impeccable, and he sailed through.

Of course we all now remember Apollo 11 and how Manny's habit of vocalising his tinnitus eventually caught up with him when he landed on the moon and could only say: 'This is (sssssssss) one small (sssssssssss) step (sssssssss) for a man, but a giant (sssss) leap for Manny (sss) Klein (ssssss).'

ABNEY SLOTH

By Joan Silas-Hall



Is he an artist, musician, writer or serial rapist? Abney Sloth claims he is all three. Born Elvis Twiddley in Harpenden in 1983, he was the son of very unkind parents, neither of whom were actually called Twiddley. What can that do to you?

He soon adopted the identity of an alter ego named after a cemetery in Stoke Newington in combination with his favorite physical state.

He produced his first full-scale canvas, when he was only eleven. It was made out of a pair of his mother's discarded dungarees, but he neglected to paint anything on it. Later he wittily titled it 'Full Scale Canvas No. 1' and it went on to sell in auction at £5.000.000.

He never quite repeated this success, possibly because his mother had stopped wearing dungarees and had adopted leotards and stretch leggings (well, she was taking an aerobics class).

He studied at the Slade (which is either a school of art or a prison, I'm not sure which) and at the Anna Schuul Stage School where he majored in 'Citizen Kane's Rosebud: Is it a sled or a flower arrangement?'. It was also here that he first gained his reputation for being a serial rapist, something he today vigorously denies, claiming it was acquired in some other establishment.

He was hounded by the press, and he was also subsequently actually hounded by a group of foxhounds, one of the infamous Berkshire Fives under the leadership of Sir Rolly Jolliet, which had mistaken him for the infamous Earl of Abney (a worthless socialite with whom we need not concern ourselves further, or in fact with any other conjugation of those words).

He spent the next five years drinking very slowly from a very large bottle of gin, in which someone had infused a large number of sloes, or possibly sloths.

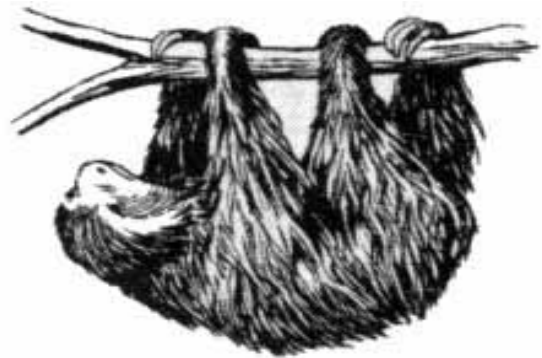
Then, Max Clifford took him under his wing, and subsequently under intense media pressure to disclose both the size of his socks and his personal relationships with small furry mammals, Abney moved to the U.S.A in 1942 and then again, after he had been born, in 1996.

He moved among various schools of folk artists located mostly in and around the Texas towns of Lubbock and Flatlands, and settled finally in a small town called Groff, which had one rolling irrigator and a small carbody workshop to its name (not to mention 3,000 grain silos, ten caravan parks, and a paddywack shack advertising Nude Dancing).

Here he set to work to produce the first major installation of his career, which would consist of 200,000 miniature clay models of the country singer, Joe Ely. He set up a factory of

500 itinerant Mexican labourers to produce these, but he was forced to lay most of them off when the Immigration Authorities caught up with him, and claimed he had been paying them far too much. He was committed to seeing the work finished, but had to produce the rest of the batch by hand, personally. It (and the large bottle of Gin to which he was now constantly attached by a drip) nearly killed him, and he was forced to retire to a nursing home in Pasadena, where he still lives today, emerging only to cash his occasional royalty cheque and to appear on the David Letterman Show.

Walt Whitman once said, 'Despite the moral decline of our nation, there will always be a few people usually called Vince, on whom we can rely to monitor the subversive activities of our neighbours, and their young male children. They may be no more effective or reliable in meeting this ongoing threat of ennui, than if I were to twiddle with the curled leaves on the bracken, or to smear the juice from the broken stem of a dock leaf or a nettle upon my lips and go gibbergibbergibber, but we have to give them a chance. They may soften the sting of the wasp. But remember no amount of balm can stop a rash appearing later. Meanwhile call toll-free 0451 4783 4563



SMALL ADS

The Ashford Science Fiction and Home Improvement Society meets every last Friday in a month that has an 'R' in it in The Frozen Duck, on Ashford Common. That's a pub, not an actual duck

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