SYNOPSIS: Last issue, Chuck, aided only by his incredibly preciss mind, got himself into a royal jam. Accepting a mission to find a missing scientist and scholar lost on a remote planet, Chuck found his life in constant danger. For it seemed an ex-criminal, also a master of de mented science would go all lengths to prevent his old enemy from being found. The attempts on his life already having been made, Chuck refused to say "Uncle" and even now sits in waiting to jet to the remote world, Sfomaly.

So enter we now the whacked out future that our friend the Adventurer, Chuck Clarkson, knows as his present:

CHUCK checked his expansive memory for the climate and living conditions on Sfomaly. The atmosphere: an adequate mixture of oxygen and nitrogen. It was a jungle world with a tropical climate; the only city, ultramodern Sfomalyopolis, engaged in the manufacture of mostly contraband articles. Also, the only spot in the known cosmos where Tellurian, the renowned wondermetal that baffled synthesis was to be found.

Reed, Chuck's supposed to be curing Sfomaly natives in the jungle region known as the Mangolian Marsh. Reed was a modern Albert Schweitzer, risking life and limb on Sfomaly; he calmly there carry out an official Federated Planets mercy mission: his orders: cure the natives of the dreaded disease, limb-semb, Chuck knew of the malignant blight known as limb-semb, and he felt a hot sweat break out on his croch as his thoughts dwelled on it. (His croch?)

The bite of a carrier snicker-wasp deposited small wormlike flukes, which migrated to the glands in the mouths of Sfomaly natives. The infected glands rotted within a week, and no longer manufactured a substance called urmicine. This was vital to turn a Sfomaly's food, bringing into vitamin K-2, necessary for the preservation of their arms, legs, and mental infancy.

Chuck swung his bag from the spacious relaxo bed after he had slung his croch onto itself. Tomorrow he would go to that notorious mongrel-pit of the universe, Sfomalyopolis.

There he would map his strategy taking all present factors into proper account. After all, he was picked for this mission because he had the hardest head to beat! The universe just naturally needed him as its ace detective, and only this realization kept him from quitting the PEP and mining soap on Barzax-5, as his father had done before him.

Chuck shuddered at the thought of what the universe would do without men like him. Maybe some telescreen entertainment would come in nicely before turning in. Staring directly at the tuning dial of the screen, it came to life at his gaze. The first thing to come into focus was a live recital of the Martian ballet, di-rect from Mars. Chuck didn't mind ballet, God knew he had taste-culture, but it was the sight of the Martians which sickened him. They were unattractively individ ual with a red, bumpy epidermis, even inside their mouths. Whenever a Martian opened his mouth, the long slimy bumps which littered the red-faced alien's palate could be seen playing football with his pink tongue. This tongue, by the way, was another remarkable part of the Martian anatomy. It would change hue with changes in the Martian's disposition; a pleased Martian had a pink tongue, but if he suddenly became angry, it would turn green with yellow blotches. Since the Martians always had their mouths open for some reason or another, their tongues and slimy bumps were always visible, making them extremely sickening, yet highly noticeable individuals. And now the sight of them leaping across the bald floor with the aid of their leathery wings, blinding each other on their nose-horns with elegant grace, was much for Chuck.

He quickly switched to another channel with a glance at the tuning dial. A quick circuit of the screen's channels revealed such mind-teasers as the Flattusian Little League Baseball Tournament, a space being tossed by the President, broadcast for the first time in the past three days, an ancient rerun of an outdated Tina Toulene Flick, and the middle of the two-hour daily News program covering all points in the universe. With a wink at the tuning dial that almost spun it off the set, Chuck angrily turned off the telescreen. When were they going to do something about the abysmal programming?

One last thing to do before catching some winks, final check that night. As Chuck gazed over to the communications screen, a direct line with Commander Whitfield, he blew some snow that had fallen on his nose. Snow! In the middle of summertime, his computer mind knew something was amiss. It couldn't be July! Totally shook by the implications of this discovery, Chuck failed to notice the cord for the communications screen had been placed in his path and was now becoming entangled with his feet. (No doubt Coenar had something to do with this.)

Chuck tripped with the grace of a Martian ballerina, over the lowly cord which hadn't sense enough to get out of his way; he fell onto a boxy-side chair, knocking it against the telescreen. (Thus he accidentally turned it on, unknown to a senseless, or rather unenlightened Space Ace.)

If Chuck could have looked up, he would have seen a super-silent vibro saw cutting a swatch through the duro-plastic ceiling plates. Completing a full circle, the piece of ceiling was noiselessly sucked free, and a hand produced itself from the hole. In the hand, an ultra-beamer!

The intruding weapon was swung mercilessly in all directions, emitting a white-hot laser ray that made short work of all it touched. Chuck was saved only by the boxy-side chair, it having fallen atop him after bouncing off the telescreen. Only thus did Chuck avoid a mailing not fit for a mindless man on Mars.

Silence prevailed, and to all purposes the invader assumed death had been dealt deathly from his hand. The smell of the burnt quantum carb pet was enough to make a normal man retch. But was Chuck a normal man? No... it brought him to.

Throwing aside the saving chair, Chuck assumed all that had passed. Reeling footsteps sounded above, and our hero was not to be denied a risk or two. Quickly he mounted a scored table beneath the aperture. A leap carried Chuck's arms to the edge, and a hearty hoist brought his head into the upper suite. A stoppered thud was leaving by the door he had entered! This was Chuck's man.

"Hi there," said Chuck, disarmingly. He was intent upon hoisting his body up for
followers, but his hands, sweaty with exertion, were slippery. His left hand slipped, something that Chuck Clark was once detective, had not anticipated.

He hung precariously by his right hand, kicking his take-off take from below. Then, regaining his left grip he continued his move up to get at the interloper. Chuck noted the man’s face for its split second -- an ugly, sallow face -- then he scrambled to get up for the encounter.

But not swiftly as he could hope. Coming on with a brutish waddle-body type gait, the assaultor threw his face straight into Chuck’s line of fire.

There was a terrific thud, because the man had a wooden leg and when wood meets wood, thuds resound. Chuck buckled and twisted, going down upside-down. His cat-like senses, functioning though his head pounded like a gong, pressed his body to twist gracefully so as to drop him on his feet, ready for anything to follow.

Instead, with a series of thuds, he hit the table headfirst. Only the hardwood skull of some depleted saved him from certain death.

A second time the arm of death was above; this time deadly was the pain. Chuck was propping around in a state of semi-conscious stupor, a condition familiar to the experienced space veteran. With the instinct of a blind homing pigeon, Chuck crawled directly toward the exit.

The only possible salvation was... Commander Whitfield, who was watching the scene with a new-activated com-screen. Only Commander Whitfield’s faceless shot of “Hand up!” caused a new balance, as the conditioned reflexes of a habitual criminal fired, and the ultra-beamer dropped directly onto Chuck’s knee to stop the space sleuth’s fleeting consciousness, and he said “Thug!”

As fate would have it, the Security Corp was bustling in on the scene at that very moment, and there ensued a quick apprehension of the would-be killer above, twin tackles plunging his shoulders to the ground. He was through with his devilish attempts on a decent man’s life.

Whitefield, detecting the meaning of the scuffle and running from the room above, sat back in his seat, uttering a prolonged sigh of relief. “Ahhhhhh...”

PART II

For Chuck Clark, returning to consciousness was a cavalcade of blurred images and halfremembered nightmares. When he finally did emerge from the enveloping bandage of black-out he was aware of a number of hands pressing him in a sitting position. Two more hands pursed his face with rapid, glancing slaps.

The dull monotone voice of Commander Whitfield thrummed through the veils of stupor.

“Clarkson, Clarkson, are you all right? Clarkson?”

“Yes, chief,” was Clark’s automatic reply. “I feel fine.” But his head still throbbed, and his vision was blurred. He blinked and shook his face, drops of saliva getting into Whitfield’s eyes. He slapped Chuck a little harder.

“Wake up, man.” Whitfield prompted. Another round of resonant slaps encircled his face.

“Allright, I’m with you,” blurted Chuck. “And quit slapping me,” he added, now fully recouping his normal state of mind. He tapped his finger over the dried gash in his scalp as Whitfield spoke.

“When I saw you hit that table, I thought you had broken your skull.”

“I thought I broke the table,” moaned Chuck helplessly. “What about that galactic dog? Did you catch him?”

Whitefield assured, pointing to two agents Chuck recognized on sight. “But...”

“Energy pad?” guessed Chuck.

“Energy pad,” echoed Commander Whitfield. “I thought you might have continued to use it... Another one of Chemor’s henchmen. He makes sure we don’t get anything out of them.”

Looking around the room, Chuck noticed more familiar faces. The chief physician at PFP, putting away the small panel of instruments he had used on the shamus. There was a small, endofinesse brand on the salts. “Spatul,” said Paul, “Failed again.” He slid them into his black MD’s case along with the medicine box containing all the instruments of modern medicine a doctor equipped himself with in the field. He slipped the case into his shirt pocket.

Purrell was a curious sort, being a doctor and at the same time, Ferris’s foremost VD carrier.

Standing next to Commander Whitfield was Inspector Fletcher. And next to him was Space Ace Burren Check. The two lieutenants were both on the doorways, where another punchy man was now entering. Sunlight pured thru the translucent window-wall to the East. Chuck had been unconscious long enough to be suspected. (About 29 years, at last tally.)

The man entering the room took advantage of the momentary lull to go urinate in the bathroom. This set the stage for him as he returned to the gathering of top officials from the office. “Who’s going to pay for all the wreckage?” he piped. The voice was that of Chuck’s landlord.

“I’ve told you, man,” started Whitefield. “The government will fully recompense you for the damage.

“I don’t know,” resumed the man. “The government can be slow when it comes to paying out, they take with the lotto soup.

“Everything will be taken care of, man,” gloved Whitfield, waxing impatient with the intruding landlord. He probably just wanted to set up the FPP for a kicked-up repair voucher that would net him a few handy credits. Why couldn’t the mind machines make any progress against the imperfections called greed and cheating. They must be very deep instincts, indeed.

“I know I should never have rented to a space ass!” wailed the man.

“That’s Space Ace, sir!” ejaculated Chuck. “I’ve never met a bigger one,” the man countered.

With that, the chubby housing overseer turned and plodded out of the living cell. “It should be padded in here,” was his final line. But it wasn’t his final action, since he dropped a wireless microphone to the floor by the threshold, taking a shave.

He was going to have credits from both sides before he was thru. Chemor already, and the FPP to follow. He chuckled in delight down the hallway.

“The case is just getting engaging now.”

Chuck offered. “Two attempts on my life in one day; or is it three?”

“Hasn’t happened since I broke up that pluton-smuggling operation. They’re tough cookies! Yes, I’m going crack this case or have it crack me. That’s what a space ace is made of.”

“Put man,” Whitfield objected. “We know now that this maniac Chemor will stop at nothing. He’s a rascal! He’s trying to stop you from finding Dr. Reed. Even his getting to Sfonyx is the game now. Perhaps a new agent would escape his immediate attention. Perhaps we should undercover it from here on out.”

“Nix, Chief.” Chemor would be onto any man you send out to Sfonyx. And I want to be where the action is when it breaks loose. By the way, how long is that all-day space discothque open?”

“Duh, well said, Clarkson!” replied Whitefield. “We haven’t many an agent with the raw nerve you show. It seems the smarter they
are, the more they avoid danger. But not you. My man—stay on this and lick it!"

"What, yes," asserted Chirk, as Susy scuttled in. Susy was an animal-inspired girl. Beneath that suave appearance beat the heart of a savage, in that fierce left chest. Everyone present felt the heat of her body as she sauntered towards them. Chirk felt a chill ripple his spine.

"Chuck swallowed and said, 'Yes, Susy? What can I do for you?'"

"I don't know what you could do for me, Chuck, it's what I could do for you... How about coffee and some sweet rolls?" she purred.

"Sweet rolls, coffee, anything from you, Susy?" said Chuck.

"Alright then, I'll go get something real sweet for you, Chuckie," she offered.

She turned then, and if there was one weakness a Space Acé was subject to, Chuck could tell it well within him as his eyes fastened on her sculpted hips.

"Now get on your way," said Space Acé Barney Check, "there's man talk in here," he added dramatically.

Everyone but Check followed her and undressed her with their eyes as she sauntered out of the room.

"Spaceport at 1:30 this afternoon" requested Whitfield, sharply bringing the group back to the present.

"Yes, Sir. I'll go get what I've got while I've got it," added Chuck, obviously pleased with his quick turn of a phrase.

"Chuck?" Chuck snapped to bolster things a bit.

"Chuck," said Check, "you'd better check your chronoidal now and make sure you check in on time."

"Check," snapped Chuck.

"Chuck returned Chirk's "good luck!" Chuck, beginning to feel daunted again, uttered a thanks, hoping Chuck would not say Check again.

Chuck was leaving the room, Check called out, "Chuck!"

Chuck wheeled with his blaster drawn.

There was something about this Check that made him edgy.

"Blaster that, Clarkson. I just wanted to say: You're welcome."

PART III

At 1:30 that afternoon, Check was deposited at the main Space Port with last minute advice and encouragement from his superiors. A partner in the venture to find Dr. Reed had been assigned, Space Acé Rod Fren, a highly trained navigator with the group. He was to work in complete co-ordination with Check on Sponyx. (Heaven knows Chuck could use a little help when it comes to co-ordination.)

The two were to blend into Sponyxian life as well as possible, and steal into the jungles to find Dr. Reed. But before Chuck would accept this man he had never before met as a partner in peril, he had one test to perform. On the way out to the Astro-Drive Tiera and Quirtier, Chuck showed his arm around Fren's, in a seeming gesture of camaraderie. Chuck usually wasn't soft on the other men, and the move was a strange one. But not without purpose. As they neared the boarding ramp, Chuck tightened his grip and brought his free hand palm against the man's forehead. He reared with firm pressure, causing Fren to become a little perplexed.

"Chuck, what's happening?" Fren uttered with great patience.

"Well, since you pa: I the test, I don't mind explaining. I just wanted to see if your mind was thick enough for you to be a successful Space Acé." Chuck said, laying in a little humor.

Fren didn't laugh, so Chuck continued

"Undaunted. "No, in all seriousness, I was checking for an energy pad on you, the sign of Chirk's men."

"Dreadful a little cool there, Chuck. Whitfield and Frenster assigned me; do you hold them suspect, too?"

"Of course not, but an impostor could have replaced you."

"Come now, Chuck, take a look at me. Could some one duplicate this body?" Fren asked.

"Well, just wanted to see how Frenzy! you really were," Chuck chuckled. Fren didn't, so Chuck added "It's great to be able to laugh a bit even under tension."

Fren, an old-looking man with a bushy back and a white nose fairly resembling a lep- tean pickle, took it all in stride. But he didn't give a quizzical stare towards Chuck as the latter preceded him into the seating aisle of the Tiera cruiser.

As he sat down next to Chuck, Clarkson patted him on the hum. "For good luck," remarked Chuck.

"I understand," replied Fren. "You know, this is just a disguise that the space techs put on me for my mission on Chanzey-6. They couldn't get it off afterwards without removing my nose and back. Don't let them get their hands on you if you can help it."

"Check," said Chuck, biting his lip.

Take-off came quickly after seating, and soon they were traveling instead several thousand times the speed of light, weaving through and beyond the commonly traveled routes.

Fren dropped off into a nap, and Chuck went through his pocket, finally securing that Fren was A.O.K. After all, that’s just what could have been an explosive charge wired to a detonator in Fren's pocket somewhere.

For the rest of the while Chuck read some material he had brought with him. Only once did he notice Fren, to go to the front guidance chamber and visit with the crew for a bit. He assayed the crew as straight and loyal men, having no ill for him or Fren. No enemy pacts, and they submitted willingly to his foreword rubbers. They almost seemed to like it, and Chuck could tell they were a close-knit crew.

The stars were a hallowed sight, whirling past the front visors at a furious pace. Pure white streaks were there, and the speed was a gift of someone to be admired, even tho' it made Chuck dizzy to watch.

Fren came awake just as the Tiera cruiser was approaching a landing in Sponyxian. Coming into the anti-gravity chamber, their speed was slowed and the crew accompanied with nary a jolt of the occupants.

Chuck and Fren stepped onto the brilliant pink surface of the landing pad and viewed the city thrust up about them. Then quickly they made their way into the dekabur building for check out. Soon they were having coffee and cream cheese pie, Chuck's favorite sweet, in the air-dome room, high above the ground.

Fren had some revelations to make. You know, Chuck, there's a General Head- quarters of the FPR on Sponyx. It's called a city with few ties to the outside or laws of the rest of the cosmos. I've a hunch our stay here will turn out to be a lot about dealing with surprise."

"That's just what you have here," Chuck reacted. "Let's see..."

"You call this slop coffee?" yelled Fren suddenly.

"Yuck, what of it?" snarled the walter. a man built like aene Heanderth.

"Good coffee," remarked Fren, winking, blink- ing and nodding. Mostly nodding.

"You see, Chuck," he went on in a hushed tone. "You really are for us here. Any other recognized planet and we'd have people looking all over us if we complained. Looks like we're up against more than the problem of finding Reed here; we're up against an unseen public as well."

"Yes, sheer ignorance," lamented Chuck, draw
ing attention to himself. He said it loudly.

"And don't forget that varmint Che
er! He might yet add his interference to the brow."

"Christian? What strange jargon is
that?" quizzed Fred.

"Oh, no, just something I picked up
on the space liner out here. Read a few cowboy
novels to soothe my temperament. High interest-
ing stuff, about the history of early Amer-
ica. Then ponder, and the law took second
place.

You know, speaking of Che
er; I think I
might've smelled a faint aroma of dirty socks
on the space liner. Che
er's trademark if
he used a man-transporter to steal onto the
cruiser with us, then using invisibility as a
shield.

I was just at the point where Jesse
James, an infamous cowboy villain had been shot in the
back while reaching for an Indian squaw at once.
I remember it well. Very faint, but definitely
dirty socks.

Fred made a gesture of innocence; if he
wasn't to blame it could very well have been
Che
er.

"If Che
er's here now, I have an idea that
might root him out within the hour. I can
almost feel the way that polecat thinks, and I'm
ready to surprise him out of hiding right now.
I'm onto him, Fred."

"I'm beginning to think you ARE on some-
thing, Chuck," Fred put in.

"Caramon can ruin the best piece of cheese
pie," replied Chuck.

"Well, I'll put up with it. I'm in it with you what-
ever the outcome.

With that, the two gulped the last of their
cheese pie, swilled some last swallows of coffee,
and departed. As second runway level they
heard a private jet and jetted to where Chuck's
truck lay. Needless to say, Fred's lay on his
back.

On the way, the two invertebrate crime-spoil-
ers checked out all possible sniper points,
surveying the needle-towered SFonyxian buildings
with more than a tourist interest. Soon they
were safely at SFonyx's greatest hotel.

Chuck tried to gain access to the build-
ing's underground storage vaults with some com-
manding talk and flashing his SFonyxian creden-
tials. He was here to look at the building's
garbage, he asserted.

He ended up bribing his way in, when due
process didn't impress the SFonyxian hotel
people. Before long, Chuck lay in deep
the debris deposited in the garbage bin. Jet
chutes from each apartment dumped their contents here
into individual crucibles. An ill-timed deluge
caught Chuck right in the face more than once,
but with herculean resolve he dove again and
again into the trash.

Soon Chuck smiled big and held up some e-
tectrical components fished from a reeking pile
of food scraps. His eager fingers recovered
more from the same refuse. An odd
piece of fish skin, glass-encased crystal, leads of wire, a shoe-cleaning
device, a map of SFonyxopolis with all the public parks
outlined, and a picture of Frank Frazetta
with Malmut and Bob Harret. The master of fantasy
illustration of 20th century Earth and his two
biggest fans of the day.

The signs of Che
er reflected in his gar-
bag.

With a jubilant look on his face, Chuck
pulled Fred along towards the elevation tubes,
where they boarded and shot up to the 27th
floor. From there the suspect garbage tube
had originated. Foregoing formality, Chuck
placed his full weight against the door of
Suite B, his objective. The doors unlocked.

In Chuck's stead, bluster drawn. He
always liked shooting from the prone position,
anyways--so it was so familiar to him. But
naught could Chuck shoot except billowing
clouds that filled the room. Poisonous vapors,
in all probability. The place had been
booby-trapped, and Chuck was the booby.

"Down, Fred---- back to the garbage and
get out. If I don't make it, find Reed and
dedicate the case to me!" yelled Chuck horri-
cificly, thinking of Fred's safety before his own.
Fred had already left, however.

He had to stop yelling then, his throat
was assailed by the gas, a putrid smelling
stuff it was. But not at all deadly, because
Chuck refused to die. Just as well he did, the
booby trap now he couldn't see. And Che
er would undoubtedly have a mask on, with a beamer set
to end Chuck's brilliant career.

A small squeaky voice penetrated Chuck's
ears, desperately trying to regain his vision. For a few moments Chuck started
giggling uncontrolled.

"Hey! What are you doing in here, you big
spooner," came the cry.

"What manner of beast are you, Che
er? You taunt me with nonsense talk before doing me
in," Chuck retorted, now laughing most out-
of-place with the situation.

"Are you some refugee from the whakoo clin-
icas?" came the reply. Now the gasses diffused,
Chuck could see dimly again; the voice was that
of a small boy, standing in the room with a gas-
mask on.

"You ruined my experiment, bastard!"
Experiment? Bastard? uttered Chuck, now
acquainting his feet and checking out all avenues
of sight through his blurry gas mask. "Are you
dead, small boy? Get out of here before our
mother takes you too; a criminal has no sympathy for
children!" guffawed Chuck.

"Criminal? Che
er?" countered the tyke.

"You bustled into house wrong just when I was
giving my pet lizards laughing gas. Did you ever
hear a lizard laugh, master?"

"Well, here I got a nut laughing instead.
My mother will take care of you... Marsa! Marsa!"

"Yes, Egor," came a muscular feminine voice
from a few rooms away. "What is it?"

"Patrol must be reeling, his vision still
not 100%, and he was chuckling all the while.
"But what about your garbage; you should
be Che
er! And chemistry experiments by children,
even the keeping of reptiles as pets is out-
lawed. You must be Che
er cleverly disguised
as a little boy!"

"Oooh! am I gonna to jail, I done
nothing illegal in SFonyxopolis... Marsa, Marsa!"

Chuck now heard the other person approaching
down the hall, certainly she would not be imagina-
tory, and how could he fight a woman, especially
a muscular woman. He was laughing so hard he
had dropped his gun, anyway. Clearly Chuck had
made a slight mistake, the theory had been
brilliant. Chuck decided retreat was in order
--he had to admit this was probably wrong.

And the little boy had stopped mean
looking deatfs from a pile of toys, intent on plaque-
ishing his guest. He really was a little boy!

In a wink, Chuck followed Fred down the
tubes, not staying to make the acquaintance of
Marsa. He was drying his cheeks out on his long
double sleeve tunic, still bubbling with gizzles as he
approached Fred on the street.

"What do you make of it? That apparently
wasn't Che
er up there, nor was it poisonous gas.
Some rascal kid playing with laughing gas, or all
thing? What kind of planet is this?"

Chuck's last remark brought a new person
into the conversation.

"Tourists? Do you understand that you
are new to SFonyxopolis, boys?"

Chuck eyed the man with understandable sus-
ception, a squat smiling little fellow in an un-
kept tunic. Only the printer's assistants on
Terra looked that dirty and got away with it.

"Yes, he had all the appearance of a rogue.

"Well, I'm apperin' myself your personal
guide around Sfoncepolis. I've got the day off anyhow for the ceremony later, yeah, and I'll even escort you to see the Omnipotent One do his stuff a little later. No show like it in the Universe, I say.

**Standish is the name, boys.**

With that Chuck found himself grasped by the arm and led down the busy street. He gave a searching look at Fren, who smiled and shrugged his stooped shoulders. Fren yelled to Chuck, "Go ahead and size up the city a bit. I'll see you later and I'll register right in that hotel here." Just ask for Ty Bennet's room to find me.

"I'm afraid your buddy is not interested in the sights," quipped Standish as they came to an intersection. "Maybe tired from the trip out here, huh?"

"Yes, that must be the reason," said Chuck, still uncertain about whether he wanted the hospitality that had been extended. Chuck had always felt safe in broad daylight and passed any concern for his own safety out of his head. He did want to see about a trustworthy Sfoncepolis guide into the jungle regions, and perhaps this citizen could be of good help in that regard.

"Over there's the largest Brewpoint in Sfoncepolis," started Standish as they waited for the change of the lights.

"Brewpoint? You mean that intoxicating beverages are allowed in your city?" Chuck returned.

"Sure, they push out 20,000 gallons of Bubbleburb and Cosmic Crutch a day, y'know. And that just barely fills the demand. I drink my share of the 20,000, by the way. Could be the best available; nice and light and giddy, not like the rotgut brands, Devil Juice and Happy Hours. Don't touch 'em, if you're smart. Especially since you're not used to the stuff, being from the outside in all.

You come and get in the fun, didn't you? Thas why most everyone ports in from the outside -- to enjoy themselves like nowhere else in the cosmophasiens."

"Why, yes. I'm here for the pleasure of it. Can't you tell by my FPP uniform," Chuck snapped, trying to set the man in his rightful place.

"Yeesh, I suppose you straight types need release more than an average person at that. Din' even notice your funny suit till now," was the manner of reply Chuck drew from the Sfoncepoli. Not proper at all.

"Well, let it be a lesson, but step lively there's what's your name..."

"Chuck, Chuck Clarkson," was all our adventures could blurt, as Standish was hot legging it across the large intersection in a broken car stop. Cars sped up as if trying to hit Standish, the pudgy man doing all the dodging to avoid collision. Chuck started across and had to maneuver with all speed and skill to avoid two or three land-cruisers himself. Almost across the road, he got clipped and jolted from behind, stunning him into the pod walk head first.

Instantly Chuck reacted to the motorized assault, as he wheeled in a sitting position and ripped out his head blaster. He started a bead on the reeding motor cruiser as Standish dashed up, knocking his arm down most unceremoniously.

"Chuck, hold up. You can't take the law into your own hands. Man, that driver was in the right!"

"In the right!"

"Yes, that's how you keep down the seigniory in Sfoncepolis. It's a countryland for young functioning people and anyone playing the game. Drivers are in the right if they cut down anyone who can't make it across the street with their own faculties.

Eh, we have old people's homes and hospitals for the disabled, but if you're on the street, you take your chances along with the crowds. Surprising to you?" Standish asked as he helped up the space ace and brushed his pant's seat off.

"Chuck was only manage one word as an answer, "Incredible."

For the next few hours he was whisked around the bustling city by Standish, who had more energy than a bionic bison. In crossing the streets and openly confessed that he himself might be cashed in any time now, but while he still could, he'd enjoy the open exciting Sfoncepolis street life with his brother Sfoncepolians.

During these Chuck gated in on all the sprawling drinking joints, not found in any other city to his knowledge, where the Sfoncepolians made open sport of losing their mental equilibriums both physically and mentally. Chuck had one big question to ask Standish.

"How do you manage to break Galactic rules of conduct like this? This city is like a mental asylum."

"Oh, simple, Chuck. You see, we are not subject to Federated Planets meddling here. Hope, we're immune due to our wonder metal, Tellurium. We're the only planet exporting it. This the Tellurium ship on."

And the first colonists, who found the ore deep in the bowels of a water shaft that was sunk, numbered scientists amongst their lot. And the scientists, to ensure the built sabotage mechanisms into the only mine, to assure their complete control over the discovery. They wanted and got wealth from the Tellurium, and freedom to do as they pleased because of it.

GREAT ACCLAIM!

"Incredible," muttered Chuck again. Now, each time they came to a street crossing, Chuck got more uneasy. He was not used to the dodge-ems antechamber, admiring to remember.

And he was about to take leave of Standish to jet back to Fren with his observations of the wild open city life they were surrounded by. But Standish begged him off. "Man, stay with me at least till you see the Omnipotent One do his act. I like you Chuck; you're different. And I want you to see this last eight before turning in tonight."

So, he set it to himself that all the posters and placards he'd seen about this public hero interested him. Yes, Chuck decided upon one last go to the big religious convenience, then down to the business at hand, come next morning. He naturally could not be jolted any more by those goings on than he already was by the gambling spas, the drinking joints, the pedestrian pickle, or the last bit of status recognition that existed on everyone's hand in Sfoncepolis. Standish gingerly led him to a large open area in the center of the city. It was beautifully laid out with growing trees of all kinds, lush vegetation and flowering plants, and in the middle of the great park was a cluster of very ornate buildings, with a gigantic open covering made of strong leather covered with Sfoncepolians, more arriving in droves all the while.

Amplified words drifted over the crowd, pearing their enthusiastic attention:

"Huzzah, huzzah, colsehah, ting-ting, wallah, wallah, bing bang!"

"Boy, he's really hot today, friend Chuck. We're in for a good commotion, stand on.

"Commotion? This guy talking through the speakers sounds like a Neptunian nut-bird, citizen Standish. What's he want to accomplish with all that talk you know?"

"Please, friend Chuck... I do not mock your customs. Do not mock ours; do not mock our most beloved Wizard. He always thrills us with his astounding feats of skill. And in usual being meaning to our lives. You know what I mean, buddy boy?"

"Well, granted, Chuck was curious about the behavior of Sfoncepolians, and this seemed to be a focal point of their lives, so he watched on despite a growing aggravation with the un-
civilized behavior of the people.

Now the crowds waxed larger. Every nook and cranny of the outdoor arena was filled with eager faces. The air was thick with their shouts, for their human God to come forth. In the background fast and fantastic music could be heard, coming from large loudspeakers positioned in the center of the arena's ground. And among them....

wildness, the great Divan seats, a great colorful clothed divan stood. It boasted a huge multi-colored divan, fixed with many swan-necked microphones. That might be where the orator sat. To make his appearance before the rubble, Chuck thought.

"Friend Chuck, how bout a swig?" asked the fuzzy fellow, Stanshil. He had pulled a can of some noxious beverage, "Cosmic Crutch," by name, from his tunic and was splashing it down his throat in big gulping drawers. "It always like to see the Most Potent One when I'm high. Adds to the enjoyment, y'know."

"Thank you, but I do not partake of such wishmes," said Chuck, in his own language. "I prefer drinking water."

"What a great shame," replied the fellow, "someone who fell to his knees under the impact of the blow, now, and Chuck had to help him up. As he did, he noticed that throughout the crowds people were gazing from similar flashes, leading Chuck to believe that this was a true potential chance to skill the trial of a public defender such as Chuck. After all, it always boiled down to defending the public from itself, if you know what I mean.

Stanshil continued to swizzle his brew, finding it harder and harder to stand. So Chuck found himself propping the rubber-legged fellow by the elbow before long. Many of the crowd were similarly affected, which might have also contributed to their public behavior.

The music was getting more pitched, and the gay festival sort had changed to a furious and acrobatic dance. Colored plumes of smoke rose from the speakers and engulfed the plaza, obscuring its view from the throngs. The throngs reacted to this as a signal, and chanted, "Wacar Wacar Fablo Fakir, now appear!" over and over till Chuck's head throbbed with the din.

There was a very raucous cascade of noise from the speakers, and the shimmery colored smoke stereoelectrically di-withalized and dematerialized now on the divan. As the last of the smokes was carried away by sudden gusts of wind, clearly a figure stood out, mounted above the masses. Dressed in a flowing robe, pointed star-spangled cap on his head, he stood up to bow all around the masses.

Unmistakable, it was Chemor!

The people pressed forward, cheering, leaping, releaping, reliving every gesture. They locked forward to greet their beloved figure.... Chemor!

Chuck, honestly speaking, was flabbergasted. Here was the man whom he had sworn to stop Chuck's merry mission on Chemor, and he was adored and defiled by the masses here. A God amongst men. Yes, Chuck was set aback, but more than this, his analytical mind knew instinctively that Chuck's death would be the death of this shining alloy bench which, with a mechanical whim, would come right next to the ceremonial couch. A blanket of blossoms was laid atop it, followed by Chuck.

"Death by fire," Chemor had decreed. A typically vouchsafed, almost inevitable, legacy of instability, and Chuck was the prize nut now, a pecan ready for the roasting.

Chemor made mystical gestures over Chuck's prone form. The space ace lay very still, perhaps removed to his fates perhaps now forever frozen in the realization there was no escape.
The coolness of the metal was an ironic sensation to Chuck as the torch rays were wheeled close in, ready to ignite with a blast of white heat. Chuck, who was close to Chuck, was almost driven off by the intense heat. His hat was low. Only one word, heard through the blare of the cone, which could be, heard as: "I warned you Clarksoon! Remember it!"

One of Chuck's eyes opened. The twinkle of beads of sweat shone from his sinewy cheeks. "I still feel just as hungry for you, Chuck. I'm going to let you know about me."

"But, no, Clarksoon. For the universe needs a new hero, and that hero needs something more than a friend."

"You must have known I was here."

"Chuck...

The mongrel god strode ceremoniously to his podium. Both his arms extended and roused to above his head. Now the masses were still, two hundred thousand eyes upon his Wizard's arms.

Down past the arms, master control board in the front, the assassin-priest, and the linking flames spit forth, played over the full length of Chuck's body. The flames grew quickly fiercer, and Chuck glowed like some incandescent effigy, moving, swaying, enveloped by flame.

Chuck's eyes closed slowly, relaxed. His one finger never left the press-ped on his high. From the system of his head, his nostril, fitted to need, Sforny's resistance. A second later his eyes opened, and he spoke. "Chuck's..."

"...he knew me."

The crowd grew more silent by degrees. For this outlandish Chuck Clarksoon apparently would not burn! This chaste, tender priest we pointed out to you before did something very peculiar. He threw out his hand and something went through the air and fell across Chuck just before the voltage got to him. Those closest to the podium, namely the ring of sub-priests on top of the podium, could see that it was a strand of Tellurium, that near-inviolable super-conducting wonder metal found only on Sforny. And they couldn't buy the time to pass this observation on.

"Chuck was the electrical current flowed deadly, Chuck slumped and his body went lax. Even more, half dozen of Chuck's sub-priests fell dead all around the altar.

Tumult captured the crowd now as they stormed the podium like children! Such a gorgeous panorama of sacrifice had never been seen here before. Now Chuck quickly vanished through the floor to the obscurity of the underground temple from whence he had come.

And the mysterious priest who had thrown the Tellurium wire at the height of the pagant (unbeknownst to the crowd) turned off the flames and hastened Chuck's body to his shoulders. The crowd parted miraculously to pass Chuck's body in death, not in half-thoughts. Kind of like being conscious, if you're Chuck. But anyhow, Chuck was noticed stirring and opened with, 'You didn't know I had minister's blood in me, did you, Chuck?'

Chuck sat up in his bed with a Western novel Chuck had read on the flight, titled, Some Dice Twice.

"Hey, y'know, these wild West novels are good, Chuck went on."

"Wild West, minister blood? Who's happenin' come Chuck's baby-blue reply.

"Why you side kick only rescued you from the mouth of an eagle, impersonating as a man of the Earth, Chuck showed a Tellurium wire over you that drained all Chuck's energy into a bunch of his sub-priests. Were they surprised! Knockout 'em dead, so to speak.

"Then I jostled away with you courtesy of a rocket belt under my robes. Left the crowd in an uproar, no less."

So you were that obnoxious priest who went all over me last night, God, and I wanted to blast you -- had a strong impulse to do to the way I felt over the whole situation. But it would have been a senseless thing, as I held back, thank you, Chuck. You're learning fast, and I must confess, I never had a bath at the time. My electro-insulation couldn't have held back the bolt, I fear, I was knocked out even though you drained away the power of the machines.

"You know, Chuck, I was an FFP super-agent and they didn't care a bit. They wanted my smoke for their history books.

"Yeah, Chuck. What say we head for the uncharted bush right away.

"I think you're in the right, Chuck. I'd rather trust the primitive savages out in the jungles than put one of the civilized gong squad as a guide.

"Uh, yeah, Chuck," said Fren, putting down the wild West novel.

Next stop, the wild West jungles of Sforny!

PART IV

A few hours later found the two investigators driving through the alien world of Sforny. Here they were, the Fren had been no easy feat to get there. Upon leaving the hotel, there had been an ugly crowd of informants that dashed through the building, waiting for the man who had robbed their making history. They had deluged Chuck and Fren with garbage and foul oaths, and the drivers on the streets were particularly eager to nail Chuck at every corner, one charging onto the ped walk and putting his vehicle into a babywear store trying to smash our here. Only a shout and shove from Fren had saved him.

Quickly they had left Sforny by rocket belt, armed only with their carried weapons and gadgets, and a manual of edibles in the Sfornyian back country thoughtfully provided them by the FPF Central Planning Facility. It seemed that this was the only item that the FPF had given them fit for dealing with life on Sforny, vegetable life. But their adventures were not to be
less hazardous or unexpected, it turned out. For, before two hours were up, Pren was taken by a Prioxynian lizard-mole and carried off to its nearby burrow in the ground.

Pren had been behind Chuck, and by the time the area Space ace had mapped it had been overpowered and whisked away, it was too late. All Chuck could do was risk one shot at the beast, as it turned to gloat defiantly at him, and it still missed him. Then, and the creature was gone, disappeared into the labyrinth of subterranean tunnels the beast knew as home.

Following the beast down into the earth could be futile was too dangerous to the outcome of the mission, so Chuck was left to face the losses of the good old Pren. Space Ace's Fundamental rule, "Mission first, sidekicks second," had to take precedence.

Chuck had to remind himself solely. The jungles were choked with gigantic plants and vines of all descriptions, and gay blossoms were an ironical feature to Chuck in his gloom and loneliness against the Unknown. Since he had chased the changeling, he had felt with a familiar adversary, however, a human foe.

For as he rounded a bend of the winding jungle trail he was following, a party of natives came into view. And they were speaking to each other in a language that he couldn't understand, but it was a start at communications.

Curiously enough, one of them approached him at his call. Chuck stood fast, giving the universal hand signal of peacefull intentions, the left middle finger extended, the others closed into a fist.

And the native said, "What do you want?" in guttural English.

"Ah, you speak my tongue!" Chuck said, enthused. "You know Dr. Reed?"

Dr. Reed, Dr. Reed," the bold native shouted. And Chuck began to dance about most gayly at this change, hoping for a sign of his good friends. His sound arms, shaking their sound legs in testimony to the man. The seemed they had been recipient of his carious skills waging the finest against the evilly thought, they could not know that Chuck, Reed's warm hearth, ruled the civilized portion of the planet, and who knows what had become of Reed after the killing of these children of the bush!

Chuck went to his thoughts. When a white-headed old man came into the clearing, walked through the dancing natives, and towards our hero. Clearly, he was an Earthman, and as he walked, the natives prostrated themselves, still chanting, "Dr. Reed, Dr. Reed!"

Could this be...

"I'm Dr. Reed," the man said without formality.

"This is too good to be true," exclaimed Chuck. "I'm Chuck Clarkson of the Federated Planetary Patrol, sir." Chuck extended his hand to shake with the advancing old gentleman.

"Yes, I know you're here, you are, replied Reed as he shook the hand of a well-built man at his first meeting. It caught Chuck Tell on the forehead and sent him crashing into a lumpy tree, fully out of commission. Once against limb-twisting, thought Chuck, he was sure to come and bear away the silent form of Chuck.

PART V

"Drink some of this, my dear sir," Reed offered a golden brown, vinous fluid to Chuck's lips and poured a swelling stream down the Space Ace's gullet.

"Say, that's real good," remarked Chuck, feeling the fuzz dissolve in his brain for the first time in years.

"But, why did you atom me out there?"

He snapped, realizing in a flash what had occurred.

"I know, and I'm sorry. But I couldn't deal with you in any other way, I'm afraid. Now I'll have a heart to heart talk with you and see if you see my reasons for acting as I did. First, just tell me, Chuck?

"My head feels light, very light. That was a mean stunt you gave me out there. Lucky I can absorb most any blow to my head, no, don't feel at all. Now, go on..."

"Tell, you see over there, a hole in a pointed hat. Does that call anything to your mind, Chuck?"

"Chemos's clothes! Has he been out here trying to get at your?

"Not exactly, Chuck; for you see, I am Chemos!"

He paused here, letting the last statement work a full effect on Chuck. The Space Ace was obviously dumbstruck, and now was somewhat speechless, too.

"Dr. Reed continued, "Yes, I must say, I am Chemos, and I'm also Dr. Reed. You are the only person in the universe who doesn't know, and the implications. My jungle children don't realize anything of the sort. They are rather simple, you see. In my identity of Chemos, I'm an ordinary human on this planet. As Dr. Reed I lived a few days out here with the jungle folk, my children..."

"But I must explain further. I must justify my actions in each identity to you. As Dr. Reed, I was a famous and brilliant scientist. And in dealing with a complicated system, I was no longer to marry, to squander my valuable time in personal ways. And I had access to much scientific knowledge of the highest order, but I could only use this knowledge and ability to work on government sanctioned projects."

"So assignment here to slowly to use my medical skills on these suffering people, and there started a new life for me. For on this planet I saw potential, potential for a whole new identity to assume as a beloved figure to the people of Sforyxopolis. There rose Chemos, my alter-ego to the city dwellers."

"For Freedom. And the possibilities of it were intoxicating. I say to you Chuck, a man needs freedom to do as he sees fit in order to be at his best. So in Sforyx, this renegade planet where people desire to leave the corrupt and repressive rules of the universe, full of foolsh rules..."

"Chemos was a natural outgrowth of my confined creativity, and my lack of personal freedom. It was a simple thing for a man of my nature to devise delightful tricks to amuse the Sforyxopiates. And at the same time I found a simple, satisfying life amongst the fronyxian natives."

"So, you see, I didn't want to be found by the established, ignominiously designed formal universe; I want to live out my ways right here, in my freely chosen dual way..."

"I'm no longer a mallace for anybody, I do for the life I left, and that extends to a feeling of malice against the agents of that former life, namely FFP agents trying to return me to the drudgery of a life without choice. So I was willing to go any lengths, including your death, Chuck, to prevent my discovery. But now I may have reasoned upon another way, a more pleasant way."

"Here, please have a little more Godpurple nectar for your head. You'll feel better quickly."

"But what was this? Had Chuck's equilibrium been sufficiently upset by Chemos's stun blow, coupled with his amazing revelations, to commit an obvious violation of Space Ace Regulations?"
strange liquid on an alien sword being definitely forbidden!"

"Ah, yes. (giggle, giggle) Hmm, it makes a right queer sound going down," Chuck said, upon gulping some more fluid offered by Dr. Reed.

"I find it very amusing myself, Chuck. It's a perfect drink, you know. Contains all vitamins, proteins, and minerals man needs for perfect nutrition. Quite a complete food, and delicious to the palate and mind. There are some hitherto undescribed narcotic molaritys in it, too, you see." 

"Narcotics? Then my purest of pure bodies has been corrupted!" Chuck realized, aloud. He tried to sit bolt upright in order to pene- trate the veiled khasia with his searching stare; but instead he just found his elbow go out and he rolled leisurely around in the moist forms for a bit. Chuck could feel the heaving nectar swirling delightfully in his stomach. He knew, of course, it might be poisoned. But somehow, he didn't care.

And a wonderful warbling feeling was in his head, replacing the usual blurry feeling of clear thinking he had trained into him for years. He could hear and see perfectly, but the colors and sounds were more intense and beautifully harmonized than he'd ever noticed before.

"They ought to legalize this stuff," he heard himself saying in spite of himself.

This kind of statement went against all the principles he had been imbedded with. But perhaps it was only the canyness of a master slauthh speaking out. "Go jolte the enemy, then bring him to justice"... the seventh rule of interplanetary crime-fighting.

Now a snowy, buzzy, pair-chested Bruktok Native she brought a sort of pillow and sat down next to him, massaging his neck. The sounds she made as she hunched into him, the whispering of little kittens and the cooing of little love birds. Not uncomely at all was she.

Chuck suddenly flashed, and in that mental scene he dreamed he saw a painting, one he'd seen in an old book he'd confiscated in a thought raid against a Pornography outlet on Conqueror VIII. The painting was by Maxfield Parrish, a master of realistic fantasy in the vulg 1900's, and it had made an impression on his mind that was indelible.

There was a marble veranda, with Roman pillars going up all around. And the background was an idyllic scene of trees, balsams and ferns full grown. The sunlight beamed off huge-hued mountains on the horizon. Skies swelled a majestic sky, warming the entire scene with reflected sun.

On the veranda there was a reclining girl, fair and blushing, and she was dressed in a pure white toga, a smile bloomed on her face. And standing beside her was a golden-haired boy, hands on knees, bending over -- a completely satisfied eunuch was he, naked and encrusted by her surroundings.

Chuck imagined himself as the eunuch, since he certainly wasn't effeminate.

The things flashed before his mind's eye as he breathed deeply of the sweet vegetation all around and felt his innermost warm as the Skynyx sun high above.

The aroma of the Bruktok girls sun-baked body made his eyelids flutter nice, and she touched them to quiet him.

The feeling of her fingers upon his eyes warmed his mind throughout, and a slow sensation of carefree ease filled him, a sensation he had not felt before. Her long silken hair tumbled over his face, sending itchy prickles dancing around his body. And her lips, the succulent pale lips that held everything over an earth girl's, her lips were strong and warm against his neck, over his face, around his mouth.

Suddenly Chuck didn't feel like a eunuch anymore..."

"This is living, alright," sighed Chuck abruptly, not hearing himself say it. "Ah, I prayed that you would see things as I, Chuck."

But the tone of Reed's voice just then tugged at Chuck's trained reflexes. He knew deep within what he had to do, and by degrees he let the embrace of the Bruktok beauty, his hand stole into his pocket. It came out with a Universal Repurifier Pill, his last desperate defense against chemical influences on his body and mind. He had to fly back the desire to cling it to the gentle winds, a lapse of responsibility he'd never felt before.

Then he popped it into his mouth before Dr. Reed could realize what he was doing behind the girls back.

Instantly the pill should work to negate the effects of any foreign drug upon his system. Now he'd be the keenly analytical marvel of old, ready to bring Reed in no matter what the barriers immediately. But perhaps the all-important pill had come flaw engineered into it by the master chemist who didn't really agree with what he was doing, the likes of Dr. Reed.

Swiftly now his hand stole into a secret sleeve in his right boot, and he withdrew a small hand blaster capable of delivering a sizable stun.

"Wow, wow! Would you talk about leaving?" Reed stammered. But then, he had a limp, which always makes it hard to walk when emotional.

Camo Chuck's quick reply: "Leaving... why, I just got here, didn't I?"

He tossed the hand-charger skidding across the luxuriant grass.

Then the Bruktok she really got friendly.

**THE START**
THE GALLERY

CHILDHOOD'S EVE

Nudes by
steve hickman kenneth smith berni wrightson mike kaluta
BILL: Gee, I haven't seen Reed for.... oh, it must be ten years now. He was older than us, and he must be well into his fifties by now.

RICH: He's a rather unique EC veteran because he had a long apprenticeship in comics before he came to EC. He did some beautiful work for the Quality Comics group back in the early '40s. A lot of the other artist only just burst upon the scene when they were working for EC.

BILL: Yes, Crandell was a big man in his field long before he came to work for us. Most of the other artists blossomed after coming to work for EC.

RICH: Ingle had been around for a while before. He did a lot of things: westerns, love, and a whole lot that even I never knew about. I'm just starting to see some of his old work now, the point being that he was a pro and Crandell was a pro before they came here. But most of the other artists were relatively young and relatively untied before they hit us.

RICH: Do you feel a sense of personal pride when you look at the careers of some of the artists you had, and see how far they've gone?

BILL: Oh, yeah, like: "We knew them when...." Wally Wood and Jack Davis. Bill Elder with his "Little Annie Fanny."

RICH: (Inevitable) And Fratzetta?

BILL: Well, Fratzetta never did that much for us. Not nearly as much as now I wish he had. He was always tied up with other stuff, and we just didn't see that much of him. You know, we never really brought artists out. They sought us out--like Crandell. He came walking in here one day; we'd never seen him before. He was a few years after the rest, and think he just came in to join the fun. Frank he just happened to walk in. I saw your checklist just the other day, and I was surprised he'd done as much for us as you said. I suppose you know what you're talking about; I haven't checked it out.

RICH: Well, we forget our way around the comic world trying to find out what all of these artists worked on. A lot of times, you may not have realized that you paid artists for certain bills that they contributed. A few of them were close personal friends, as I'm sure you know.

BILL: Of course, especially Williamson and Krenkel. Well now we never had Krenkel do a job for us, but we dealt with Williamson. I don't recall Krenkel ever getting a by-line.

RICH: Once, in Incredible Science Fiction 32, the story "Food for Thought."

BILL: Well, a lot of the boys did this. Wally Wood's early stuff felt the presence of Joe Orlando. A guy by the name of Sid Chenks was kicking around for quite a while, and God knows how much he put into Wally's stuff. And Wally had a wife who could draw. Of course, Wally has pride in his work nonetheless.

RICH: The thing I can't understand is that he has been credited as saying that he can barely stand to look at a lot of the work he did for the old EC's. And he feels his clean style today
is much more a true illustrative style. The work he did for EC was way too cluttered, according to him.

HILL: Well, it was cluttered, no question about it; and we recognized it. Wally didn't do a heckuva lotta covers for us for that reason, if you'll notice. A cluttered cover is not a good-selling cover. It should be as simple and punchy as possible. Once we sold the magazine, we didn't care how much clutter was on the inside.

Graham Ingles! Covers never sold as well as Craig's and Davis', as much as I love Graham's work. We just ran them because we loved them. His work, brilliant as it was, was not very saleable. The HAUNT of FEAR's with his cover work never sold well.

HUGH: But he seemed to be quite popular by the letters printed in the horror books.

HILL: Well, he got a lot of letters, but they don't reflect the sales. You know the story about science-fiction fandom and fanzines.... Probably the most vociferous group of fans in the world are the science-fiction fans, and many a publisher has gone to ruination because he believed his mail. I don't know how it is now; I've lost touch with the field. But in my day the leading science-fiction magazine, which was GALAXY, was selling under 100,000. At this level of sales I don't know how they made money; I don't know how they existed. And with all the fussing and fuming and shouting, there just weren't enough fans to support a magazine, which is why science-fiction rates were very low. The publishers probably couldn't afford to pay more. The market just wasn't there. I don't know how they're doing now, do you?

HUGH: Well, there seem to be more on the market now than a few years back. But then there was a paradoxical flood of horror comics on the market back in the EC days just before the code, when things were rough for the publishers.

HILL: Before the CODE there were 700 horror titles on the stands.

HUGH: Did your sales go down proportionally when the tremendous flood of titles came in?

HILL: Ours didn't, but remember that we only had ten well-known titles. The most we ever had was ten, which for a comic house is very small, and Kurtzman handled three of those. I didn't have anything to do with TWO-PISTED FRONTLINE or MAD. So, Al and I really only handled seven. And that was all we could handle. Martin Goodman (Marvel) put out 70 when he saw the success of our horror comics. So the quality couldn't have been there, simply because of the volume. That Stan Lee did as well as he did with 70 horror titles was a miracle.

HUGH: It's very apparent that the EC imitators just didn't have the luster of EC, lacking editing, artwork, and story quality. Marvel is trying horror titles right now, by the way. They're putting out TOWER OF SHADY and CHAMBER of DARKNESS. And of course, DC has constant horror titles, which are doing quite well in sales right now. There seems to be a whole new boom in horror at the present.

HILL: Well, of course, Joe Orlando is over there at National, and I can see his fine Italian hand in their success.

HUGH: We were touching on Graham Ingles a moment ago, and that's a point of interest. He seems to be one of the most confused personal topics concerning the old EC group. It so happens that he's one of the favor-

ites of today's EC fans, the interest in EC being at a near-fever pitch throughout fandom. Ingles is one of the most sought after of the EC bunch; referring to his life -- it seems to be a tragic mess, though admittedly I don't have many facts to be sure of. Is he around now? I understand he's gone from the scene?

HILL: Well, he is a favorite.

Here in a nutshell is what I know about Ingles the person. He is or was an extremely nice man, but he was an alcoholic. Consequently, he'd go along fine and then he'd fall over the edge and disappear from sight -- he couldn't be found. So we'd just wait it out and hope he'd show up in time for the deadline with the job. He generally did show up in time.

We quickly stand-up the situation and gave Ingles jobs with long, long deadlines. We'd give him a job due on a certain Tuesday, and it might really be needed two weeks from that Tuesday. One thing I'll say about him is that no matter what dreadful business he was involved in, and most of the time we didn't know, he never lost a job, and he never got a job dirty. His home was out in Long Island, and he'd be on his way in here but stop off somewhere for a quick one. And that was his downfall, as the quick one would turn into a very long one. He'd come in here four days later with his mind a complete blank. But, as I say, he never lost a job and he never got one dirty.

HUGH: He seemed to make just about every horror issue, though. I know in HAUNT of FEAR he had a string of stories and covers that lasted for I don't know how long.

HILL: Ingles was in every horror book, and there were three horror books every two months. So there's six weeks that he appeared in horror.
Now, if he was on the ball, with the other two weeks he'd do a story for SHOCK. And if he wasn't on the ball, that means he messed up for two weeks. We'd try very hard to get him in all the horror books.

RICH: And now, nobody knows where he is?

BILL: As far as I know, he's missing. Everybody's dying to find him; it's like he's become a sudden hero. I do think there'd be a lot of work for him now if he'd pop up somewhere. There are a lot of good years left in him if he's still alive.

RICH: Would you reflect a bit on your favorites?

BILL: Oh, they were all my favorites, every one. I loved them all, even Kamen, who is everyone's unfavorite. (Chuckles as he sees my face wrinkle.)

RICH: He's not well received by devotees because he didn't have much range or flash......

BILL: Well, Jack was hired originally for love comics which we never put out. We had put some out, but by the time we hired him the love comics had died. By the way, the death of some of our earlier titles created some funny title changes and numbering systems. The reason is that when you publish a magazine, you want second class postal entry, because you send out your subscription copies at a lower postal rate. It must be applied for, and once it's granted, it's a valuable thing. A deposit has to be provided, and when a title was dropped and a new title started, it took the post office a while to return the first deposit. Meanwhile, a new sum had to be deposited for the second title. So, rather than put up a new deposit, we tried to change the title so the post office would allow us to go on. That's why SUNFLOWER, I think, turned into HAUNT of FEAR '15. Occasionally we'd get away with it, and sometimes not. Then, the post office would make us go back and start renumbering. That's how HAUNT '15, 16, and 17 were followed by HAUNT '15. There were two 15's, two 16's, two 17's, and so on. I can generally place it together, though it takes me a while to figure it out.

Anyway, (boy can I get to rambling) Jack came here for romance, but we kept him. And he seemed to do very well with a kind of story that we used primarily in CRIME, SHOCK, and the science-fiction titles.

RICH: He seemed to be real big on this love triangle thing, really science-fiction love stories. So you used him on love in spite of the science-fiction format, huh!

BILL: Well, yes, we gave him a lot of those. We wrote the stories, and when we sat down to do a story for Jack, we planned it for him. Every story was written with the artist in mind. When we wrote a story for Graham Ingles, we knew it was a story for Graham Ingles, so naturally we put in all the oaky monsters and slobbering blobs of protoplasm and mussed-up old people we could come up with. And we gave Jack the love triangles and pretty young girls. Somewhere in the almost every Kamen story some girl says, "Look, Buster!" like "Spa Fon" and "Squaw Trot," which the aliens invariably said.

RICH: You enjoyed wording those little trademarks into the stories, didn't you?

BILL: Yeah, we enjoyed it. Al put most of those in, because Al was the actual writer. We'd plot together, generally. I would come up with the 'springboards', and then we'd sit down (the two of us) and we'd plot out the idea. Then Al would go off and write the story from about one o'clock to four o'clock. Al would actually write the story in pencil on the drawing board, breaking everything into panels as he went. Then, the story would be sent out for lettering. (As you know, we used 'Jerry' machine-lettering.) When the thing was lettered it was given to the artist, already broken down into panels, the balloons drawn in, and the lettering already in the balloons. And that's all the artist would get; he got no other script. Al would go over the story with him, and then the artist would take it from there, with no other directions.

RICH: Today at Marvel Comics, they do it differently, almost reverse. They do all the art, with balloons and spaces for narration, then the writers take it from there. That's probably why there's seldom a comic plot involved.

BILL: Well, this was something new that Martin Goodman tried to make the comics more art-oriented. After all, when we gave a story out, the story was already there; there was nothing the artist could do to change the yarn. Joe Orlando was working for Marvel when the new idea was first started. He said, "They're doing something revolutionary over there. They're letting the artist do whatever he wants, and then they're putting the words in later." I don't see how they can do it, but apparently they're having a measure of success with the technique.

RICH: Well, on the new horror titles they're reverting to the traditional style of story first again.

BILL: Do you think EC could have gone in its original format all today if it wasn't for the friction you got from various groups and the comics code? To clarify, do you think the artists could have kept up the great quality art and could Al and you have kept up the stories?

RICH: Towards the end, Al and I had brought in some script-writers. Larry Stark, in his famous "Ellegy to EC" said something to the effect, "You could almost see that towards the end that everyone was expendable. I never felt quite that way. What we did was to bring in the writers, who I think actually strengthened the books. After all, after five years, Al and I were pretty exhausted and we started running nothing but horror comics. But we had just about everything new we could conceivably do. In desperation we brought in the outside writers, who were fresh, and by working with them (Al re-writing just about everything they came up with) I think the book's last few issues of the horror books were even stronger than the middle ones. I didn't keep those records, unfortunately, and I don't know who wrote the final stories. I know we had a Carl Wesler, and he was a damn good writer. We had a Richard Bernstein, a Jack O'lock, and an Irv Weinsteine. So, I don't see why we could not have continued.

BILL: But I gave those horror books up after the Senate hearings.

RICH: You actually had to go down to Washington to be part of them?

BILL: No, they were held right here in New York.

RICH: Jerry Weist is supposed to present the actual transcripts in the third issue of his fanzine, "Squaw Trot." Were you much harassed by the Senator's? They seem really to harry people when they get them up before those fact-finding panels.

BILL: Well, we were slightly harassed. They had me a little punchy there towards the end.
I have a recording, and I know there were differences in what was actually said and the printed version. Nothing severe—a few words, maybe. It was probably 99% accurate in the printed form.

RICH: Did they have you pretty depressed and disgusted after it was all over?

BILL: Oh, yeah. It was headline stuff around the country. Somehow, I managed to cop the headlines. They did ask me to go up to the courtroom to ask, "Do you think this is in good taste?" And they held up that Craig cover (CRIME SUSPENSE STORIES 22).

And I said, "I thought it was good taste for a horror comic." So they said, "Well, how would it not have been in good taste?"

(Mom, the truth of the matter is that when Craig first brought that cover in, it had blood dripping from the neck. You could see the bottom of the severed neck and blood was dripping out. To Craig I said, "Johnny, move the cover question mark, move the bottom of the page over, this whole thing off and there isn't any."

That's what I said, and of course, they thought it was hysterically funny. And it made the headlines. It was a difficult experience, because all of a sudden you find that everyone you know kind of regards you as a criminal. There had been the famous Kefauver Hearings before this, with criminals and the mafia, and they were very big. So all of a sudden, we comic publishers, and me in particular, found ourselves classed in with Frank Costello and all the other crooks dragged up before Kefauver. Kefauver technically was not the head of the comics committee, but Kefauver was pretty rough on us.

RICH: How many days did they grill you?

BILL: Oh, I think it was just one session, or at the most, two. If it started in the morning it finished up in the evening, or maybe it was just one morning.

RICH: What was the crucial point at which you decided to throw in the towel on horror comic publishing?

BILL: Well, after this hearing. You can't imagine the conditions in the industry at these days. First of all, it was the McCarthy Era, and the whole country was nuts anyway. There were all kinds of stupid things going on. To show you how really wild things were—do you remember the cover of one of the early MADs which was disguised as a comic book? You know, "designed to sneak into class..." Well, the HARTFORD COURANT in those days was regarded as one of the top six or seven papers in the country. It had a reputation for integrity matched only by the NEW YORK TIMES.

And the HARTFORD COURANT had a big campaign attacking me and MAD magazine. They took that cover seriously, and they actually had headlines such as: "CORRUPTING YOUTH BY SPEAKING COMICS INTO CLASS?" By God, MAD magazine, you know?

RICH: No sense of humor at all?

BILL: No sense of humor at all, taking all that stuff seriously. In an early issue of PANIC (our own imitation of MAD, which never went anywhere) we did a parody of "The Night Before Christmas" (Bill Elder) and on the back of Santa's sled he put a sign: "Just Divorced." It was typical of what Bill Elder used to do in all of his MAD work. He used to put signs all over. You know, cars have signs "Just Married" so the sled had one "Just Divorced." He gave it a thought until we found ourselves bashed in Boston and all over Massachusetts. They were on our back because Santa Claus was a saint and we suggested that Santa Claus was just divorced. Well, who gave this thing a forethought?

We were catching hell on everything.

RICH: You must catch it nowadays, too?

BILL: Now, nothing like the old days, nothing. It's a whole different world.

RICH: A whole different mood of the country?

BILL: Absolutely. Why, we go ten times as rough in MAD today as we used to dare, and we never catch anything; in the old days, my God, we never put out an issue when the roof didn't fall in completely.

RICH: What about Wertham? Did you ever have any personal relations with him? A lot of people associate him with the fall of EC, since he really got on the bandwagon and led a flock of folk into believing that comics were toxic to a young child's mind.

BILL: Aww, heh, no, nothing personal. He made a good living at it at the time. And he made a good living in recent years attacking television. You know what's nothing like comics to attack, and now he attacks television with the same old line. Oh, I read his book and I found it full of the worst kind of mistakes, blunders; he completely missed the point of a number of our stories. He found our book humorous. It was amazing how a man could be
so far off base on this sort of thing. The things he reads into our motives are completely fallacious because his understanding of the stories was screwed-up. I just can't off the top of my head remember an example. But he made stupid mistakes.

BILL: We considered them all cracks. We did just what we had to do to survive. The present Comics Code Association is not the first association. It is at least the second or the third. If you recall there was a little bar with a star under it on the old EC's. This was the seal of the first code authority. I involved it with all of them, and for many years, we had to take these things and put them thorough their censor. Of course, their censor was a lot more reasonable than Judge Murphy, who was our own.

BILL: Early EC was censored, then.

BILL: It was. And there were a lot of things we had to take out of the horror books. When Judge Murphy came along the horror books couldn't possibly survive.

BILL: But then actually the Senate was attacking the wrong people over what had gotten into print. After all, the stuff was censored, so it would seem to be the censor's responsibility regarding what had gone to press.

BILL: Well, let's face it - the censor was paid by the publishers. The first censor didn't represent most of the industry. And they were only represented a small segment. Outfits like National Comics and Dell, Classics Illustrated and so on felt that their comics were clean in the first place, and what they sell doesn't need a censor to censor their comics, so they didn't even join the first organization.

So most of the early censor's clients, you might say, were the smaller publishers. I suppose that he thought that if he got too tough, he'd lose a client and every time he lost a client his salary would go down. When Murphy's association was set up, it was set up more on the pattern of a movie studio-type of thing, everyone in the industry went through it; and if you didn't, you lost your drugstore at the wholesale level.

I tried not to join it, and my first New Direction magazines in each title were put out without the new seal; we sold like 10%, which is catastrophic. So I joined the association and the sales went up to like 20 or 25%. Too is still catastrophic.

So, you asked me about four hours ago (chuckle) what put me out of comics. And the answer is that I was losing money left and right. And I went out of comics because I couldn't push out a title that wasn't making money. Every single New Direction comic I put out, single one of them, lost money. You know, I had run out of money.

BILL: It was pretty incredible to me that when EC put out its beat stuff (the second half of the horror runs, and the second half of the science fiction) sales dipped lower then at the beginning of my articles on the WEIRD SCIENCES run is going to be called "The Power and the Glory" to indicate how they had blossomed into greatness. Was it the many covers and the covers that held the sales up by the squeeze at the back cover that said that you were above the heads of the comic-buying audience when the high quality came on strong?

BILL: Two things were probably hurting us: One was the increase in titles. But then the horror comics were doing pretty well right on through. It was the other titles that were doing comparatively badly, like the science-fiction. And we really had no other compe-
tition in that area. There were a few other science-fiction comics, but nothing like the EC science-fiction. The sci-fi books sold very well; I think the best they did was 75% sales, which is phenomenal by today's standards. But back then 75% was just mediocre sales. ...I think the science-fiction books...by Georgel you may be right. Maybe we did get too good for the market. I never really thought about that; there's no question that as the quality went up, the sales slid down, but I never hooked them together.

Well, it finally got to the point that we were losing a little money on them, and we didn't give a damn. The sol-r1 never at any time made us rich...when I say we sold 75% originally, that was only during the first year, and I think they quickly dived down to 60%.

HILL: What's the break-even point and what's the good-return point in sales percentages, the way you're analyzing things now?

BILL: Well, in those days, we put most new titles out at 300,000 copies. That was a good place to start. Comic books are not exactly economically feasible to put out much less. And it would break at, oh, maybe 40-50% somewhere around there. So that's the point: if in the science-fiction field there were 100,000 copies, and we were publishing every one of them bought our comic, which they didn't, we still had to come up with a lot of comic readers to sell 60% of 300,000. And they didn't sell it for very long, by my records.

I'm very arch in my concepts, but about 10 or 15 years ago, we had a series of robberies. Some nut kept breaking into the office, robbing things. And one time when there was nothing else for him to rob, he gathered up all my records and started a bonfire with them. Worst thing he could do to me -- it broke my heart. He also burned up about 500 horror and science-fiction springboards that I'd never gotten around to using.

HILL: What exactly is a "springboard"?

BILL: Well, that was the idea which Al and I would use when we wanted to do a story. A typical springboard would be...[chuckle]...Here's an unpublished story; someone once asked me, "How in the hell do you make up a horror story?" So I sat there in thought and I made up the following horror story: what I'll tell you will be the springboard:

Now, you've got these two guys. The first one is a promoter, a wise-guy, and the other fellow is a sort of simple soul. The first guy comes up with this incredible idea that he's going to announce to the press. Whatever figure DuPont stock closes at that day on the New York Stock Exchange, by the next day, 24 hours later, his associate is going to weigh exactly that number of pounds. And so now you go through it...DuPont goes up ten points, and you see the guy stuffing food into his poor friend; DuPont goes down ten points, and he gets the poor slob doing exercises, steam baths, all that kind of stuff. And then one day somebody opens the door and says: My God! Because there's this guy split right down the middle. Of course, DuPont had had a two-for-one stock split....Springboard!

HILL: You love that sick twist in there, don't you. That sick humor touch.

BILL: Yes, always. Got to have it. That's the old EC type ending.

HILL: In the article in SPA FON #12 covering the first half of the WEIRD SCIENCE run, I put in that I thought one of your favorite gimmicks -- well, I wouldn't exactly label it gimmick, because I thought it was quite good -- was your favorite pitches was to build sympathy for some poor slob of a character during the early development of a story, who later on really gets massaged by the forces of evil at work in the story. And you did this very well. For instance, in the yarn "Seeds of Jupiters", where this main character, "Peachpit" was his name, played the stooge.

HILL: Peachpit! (Laugh)

BILL: At the end, a gruesome, grizzly monster comes crawling out of Peachpit's gut, grown there from a seed from space the pod-ster had eaten as a baby. By the time Peachpit's lying there dehydrated, a shell of his former self and reading it, I got worked up seeing this happen to the poor guy I had gotten to feel heart-warmed towards.

We don't have anything to compare to that nowadays in comics. So real psychological sensitivity to the modern mass-produced stories. No empathetic arousal by the way the innocent guys get dumped on. We do have the troubled, harried, super-hero who wanders about his super-life in thought. A comic book that goes on endlessly and is trite before long.

I don't find any good, self-contained stories, running six or seven pages, with the well-developed characters, differences in dialogue between people to help their differences in personality sharp. And then, too, there are very few yarns where the good, true-heart gets clobbered in short order.

HILL: Let's take the typical springboard and describe writing a story even further. I'd get this idea and I'd write it down on a piece of paper. I had this gigantic batch of plots -- thousands of pieces of paper, each with a springboard on it. The big thing in my life in those days was to sell Al Feldstein a story. And when I got him interested, then he'd start working, and we'd go into the details more fully. And finally when we got the plot all worked out, he'd go out and write it. Of course, he's a great writer, a natural writer. But, he's also an artist was his secret. He and Harvey Kurtzman and Johnny Craig, being artists, could write visually, where the average comic scriptwriter in those days was not an artist. He was just a scriptwriter. Well, it's one thing to try to write a novel and another thing to write for comics -- you've got to think visually for comics, and these guys did. So that was one of the lucky things I did. I got three guys who were artists to write my stuff.

HILL: You considered Al a pretty good artist, didn't you?

BILL: Well, I don't think he was as good an artist as he was a writer.

HILL: Wait a minute on that. In your biography of Al Feldstein that ran on the inside front cover of your EC titles one month, you wrote that he did the best science-fiction covers in the field.

BILL: That's right, science-fiction covers. There's no doubt about it. That's what I've got him to do to represent his work on my wall here, my personal collection. His horror stories and covers were imaginative, but Al himself admits he's not the greatest artist. On the other hand, he's a great story-teller.

HILL: Did you have any strong sentiments about what was more important, the storyline or the art? Or did you think they were equally important, one not covering up for a lack in the other?
BILL: As a matter of fact, to give you an example of how I feel about that I can bring you up to date. In comics, when I first started out, the going rate for script was about six bucks per page, and the going rate for art was about twenty bucks, twenty-three to be exact. Oh, National paid better than that, I suppose, but the going rates were those among the smaller publishers like myself. Over the years the rates went up, but I always tried to get the script rates up more, much more quickly than the art rates. The ratio started about four-to-one, art over script. Today in MAD, my top rates are over two hundred a page for art and over two hundred apiece for script. So you can see that I feel the ratio is at least 100% important as the art. Maybe even a little more important, but I realize that it takes an artist a little longer to do a page than it takes a script-writer. Our top script-writer makes just as much as our top artist.

RICH: Are you as happy with your people today as you were in the days of EC? I know that’s a loaded question....

BILL: Do you mean talent-wise?

RICH: Yes.

BILL: Probably some of them are even more talented.

RICH: Bob Clarke and Al Jaffee seem to do very well.

BILL: Jaffee is a powerhouse. His principle talent is his script. He’s a good artist, but not a good scripting artist. This guy is a very, very funny man.

RICH: He’s got that sick stamp to his humor that comes from his love for MAD, and Al Jaffee, and Egan Wilson (PLAYBOY’s genius) in Jaffee. That’s the kind of humor that cracks me up, personally. Oh, what’s an example? Well, the one guy says to his friend, “Dad, I got a flat tire this morning when I ran over that milk bottle.” And the other guy naturally replies, “Well, why didn’t you drive around the bottle? Are you blind?” And the first guy answers, “The damn kid had it under his seat!”

BILL: I love sick humor, and of course, the old EC horror stories were largely sick humor. And that’s what people missed — that almost every one of those horror stories was tongue-in-cheek. I happen to be one of the chiefest people you’ll ever see. If I see blood, I faint. When I tell that to people, they think I’m putting them on because of the old EC horror stuff. Well, that stuff was strictly fantasy, and in the field of fantasy I’ll go as sick as you want. I’ll match anybody, but not for real. Or I’ll faint. Our horror stories were sick, and our science-fiction stories were largely sick. We had a lot of different kinds of science-fiction stories, but I enjoyed the ones with the sick twist best.

There was one about this gal who was in love with a million other girls, but she knocked her up, and then at the end, it turned out to be a typical Wood octopus monstrosity, and she realized that she had been knocked up by one of those tentacles. (Laugh)

RICH: The mental transformation theme, ones not playing cards, seems to be another favorite point of departure.

BILL: But again, some three years ago, I was discussing sales, and that nut that came in here and burned all my records. For that reason, I can’t dig the figures out to prove it, but I don’t think that the sci-fi made money for more than a year or so before going into the red. We just kept them on because we liked them. And finally they did so badly that we combined the two into one (WEIRD SCIENCE-FANTASY) and we turned it into a quarterly. We even tried it at 50¢, but that didn’t work.

RICH: Is it true that the distribution takes a heckuva lot of cut out of the sales money — that the money just barely trickles back to the publisher and the people who made the thing?

BILL: Well, in those days, we did get a nickel. This was low, and we were about the lowest in the industry. Most of the comic publishers got 35¢, and 40¢ for the biggest distributor, got 50¢. Now that quarter of a cent doesn’t sound like much, but when you cut out sixty issues a year, averaging three-hundred-and-fifty thousand copies each, selling prices of 50¢ or 65¢ of that, then multiply that by a quarter of a cent, that makes a vast difference, and it makes the difference between profit and loss. (38¢, $250,00 a year) That’s why, in addition to everything else, we had to try a little harder because we were getting a little bit less. Those quarter of a cent’s hurt.

RICH: Why were you getting less?

BILL: Well, because we were with a weak distributor. And with the 700 comic titles, wholesalers couldn’t care less. They couldn’t care if you dropped dead, they’d much rather sell 25¢ magazines, and since they weren’t aware of the EC insignia particularly at that time, they just took what came in, put them out for a few weeks, and then sent the rest back. I don’t think that they ever realized that the EC’s were selling better or worse than others — they just took what came in and hated them all.

RICH: You had one campaign there where the fans in each town would go to the dealers and put the EC’s out on top of the stacks. Did that help at all?

BILL: Well, after we put out four or five of the New Direction magazines, and they were still losing money, I thought it couldn’t go on. So I’d try anything. But I don’t think the fan campaign helped, not really. To this day I’ll push a new magazine and I’ll see a stack of MAD’s lying there, I just go over and pull it out front by habit.

Finally I dropped all the New Direction comics (BLACK MAGZ, PANTHER, INCREDIBLE SCIENCE FICTION, PSYCHOANALYST). And since MAD was such a success at a quarter, I thought maybe I could pull it off with the other titles, so we put out the Picto-Fiction. They don’t look like it, but they were an extremely expensive magazine to produce, even without color. The comics are so densely cheap to produce — they’re put on newsprint in four colors. In those days, you could still get a comic printed for under two cents which is fantastic. They were printed in volume, of course, and I guess that’s why. You had to print a quarter of a million to get the price. So when we went into Picto-Fiction, we went from one to two colors which is fantastic. And a thousand copies, they were printed in one volume, of course, and I guess that’s why. You had to print a quarter of a million to get the price. So when we went into Picto-Fiction, we went from one to two colors which is fantastic. And a thousand copies, they were printed in one volume, of course, and I guess that’s why. You had to print a quarter of a million to get the price. So when we went into Picto-Fiction, we went from one to two colors which is fantastic.

RICH: The EC emblem could really hold things back at the wholesale level, didn’t it? It cultivated a most terrible thing, where this little distributor we were with went bankrupt. At the time we had
re PICTO-FICTION's and MAD with this little outfit.

You have to understand the financial arrangements between a publisher and a distributor. The publisher sells his entire output to the distributor -- the distributor is his only customer. Now, he doesn't pay you for the issue at hand; oh, he gives you a little bit, but for the most part he pays you after they're gone. He owes you the money. So this guy had been our distributor throughout the whole thing, and he owed us about $100,000, which in those days was a lot of money for us. In March or April of that year he went bankrupt, owing me a grand total of $130,000. In turn, I owed the printer that much. So I was in a hell of a spot; I was coming on the end of the year and the distributor owed me to pay the printer with.

Well, this was bad enough, but I worked that out. Then, you see, the distributor sells MAD magazine to the wholesalers and they take over to him for them. Now, they have returns of MAD that don't sell, and they give them back to the distributor, who pays back for them. Then he subtracts it from what he owes me. But how the distributor went bankrupt, there's nobody for the wholesalers to give the returns to. So they all come and tell me they want me to pay for them. But, my God, how can I pay for them -- there's no getting that part of the magazine that they've got in the first place.

Well, they said, "If you don't pay us, we're throwing you out." This was another of the wild things where for many years everything I touched turned to shit, and the shit turned out to be gold. Later it turned out that the best thing that could have happened to me was the weak distributor going bankrupt. I got away from him; he was a terrible distributor. And I went to the American News Company, which in those days was in magazine distribution. And it was a whole different set-up. In American News, you get through an independent distributor, of which there are dozens, who go through wholesalers, or you went through the gigantic, monopolistic American News Company, which owned its own outlets.

So I went to American News (I left the whole independent outfit) and I said to them, "If you don't take me, I'm out of business.

Here's what I need to stay in business, and what I showed them was MAD and what they took me or throughout for a year and one issue I stayed with them, and that's when MAD really started to take off; it went off the charts and I started to sell a half million copies. Now, this is a very respectable sale. Then American News announced to me that they were giving up magazine distribution, and I thought I'd have to go back to those. But by this time MAD was strong enough and there was no problem. I went to Independent News, and everything's been fine since. To this day I have nothing to do with wholesaler's; I don't go to their conventions, and I have nothing to do with these guys.

RICH: What about future re-printing of EC stuff? I saw some things over there on the list of Woody Gelman. Is he onto reprinting EC as he did with FLASH GORDON?


RICH: Mostly color?

BILL: The contract calls for 80% color. I've got the original art and I've got the silverprints. Shob Stewart, who works for Woody over at Topps Chewing Gum first interested him in it. And I went through and picked the table of Contents. And then we went down to the vault, where I keep all of this stuff. I have virtually every penstroke of art that was done for EC. As I say, I'm very archaic conscious. Many publishers throw the stuff out, but not me; I keep every sort of it.

So we went down and pulled all the stuff and they're over there now photographing it. Of course, this is an authorization with Woody. He was going to try to get the thing out for Christmas time, but I don't think he's going to make it. And this one's going to be printed in Italy, tentatively 196 pages all told. (That's how we get the color in, by going to Italy for the printing.)

RICH: Reprinting what you consider to be the best of EC?

BILL: This is a combination, for the most part, of what Shob Stewart and I chose. Eliminating what was put out in the Ballantine books. The Ballantine books represented more my idea of the best stuff, balanced off, because I wanted to have a representation of all the artists. (If my four favorite stories were Wood's, for example, I didn't use them all.) Shob is very interested in doing horror stories, so he's heavy on Ingels. He even wants to use an Ingels cover for the book.

RICH: How about the rarest EC? SHOCK SUSPENSION S? There are a few stories drifting about on what happened and how many got out.

BILL: Well, as you recall, I told you about the wholesalers and about how they wanted me to absorb the returns. And I told them that I couldn't possibly refund because I hadn't gotten paid for the issue in the first place. So they said, "Goodbye, Charly!" and that was that. At that time, SHOCK 3 was already off the presses. 250,000 copies of the insides and the covers had been printed, and all were sitting at the Charlton Bindery in New York, ready to be bound. Incidentally, that's the bindery that still binds MAD. But we didn't have the money to bind them. We didn't have the money to pay for printing them, even. We were nearly broke.

RICH: You were in a real bind, huh?

BILL: (chuckle, grins, points to door out.) So I told the printers, "You know, I don't have the money to pay you. I can't pay you for the past stuff you did; I can't pay you for SHOCK 3. It's crazy to bind the thing because nobody's going to buy it, anyhow. The wholesalers just won't have it."

So, horrible as it sounds, it was agreed to destroy 250,000 copies of SHOCK 3. But I said, "Look, hand bind me X copies of SHOCK 3" and send them over to my office for my files!"

Which they did.

How the only question is, what was that X number of copies of that-who were hand-bounded. My recall is that I said 100. Subsequently I heard that I had said 200, and I've heard 300. I don't remember what I said, but I doubt that I would have asked for more than 100, because I didn't know what I'd do with those. I know I wanted to give a few copies to all the artists and writers that were in the book, and I know that I wanted to wrap twelve copies because I wanted twelve copies of the printing. And I know that I'd have to put this only binding volumes and in all's bound volumes. So I know how 15 copies were used -- twelve wrapped and three put into bound volumes. My recollection is that there were 30 left, and anyone who wanted them just took them. They probably sat around the office for a few months, and then were gone, got used or thrown out or something. Because at the time, who cared?

RICH: Do you know that the thing sells for $50-$75 now, to the EC completist?
BILL: The last I heard, it was around $50. That's understandable. I'm a collector myself in my own way. Certain wines and coins, you get hooked on something, you collect and you'll pay most anything to complete.

RICH: Well, the EC's certainly were the best in the comics field. Even the men in it today, like Jim Steranko, a top-notch Marvel scripter and artist, agree that Al Feldstein was one of the very best comic writers. And when you've both been the best artists of the day and Al Feldstein writing for you, you put out some damn good comics.

He hasn't written any comic stories since EC has he?

BILL: No, strictly MAD.

RICH: Does that keep him busy?

BILL: Oh, it keeps him busy enough. You know, none of us around here work very hard. (Belly laugh) Al's not married to his job like Harold Ross of the NEW YORKER was. Or any of those guys who run around putting in 72-hour weeks. Al and I work a 35-hour week; we do a better job this way.

RICH: Much more relaxed than the EC frenzy. But you liked those days well enough at the time, didn't you?

BILL: Oh, I loved them -- a lot of fun. I used to read all night getting ideas for those stories.

RICH: Getting back to art, there's a rumor that Frazetta was going to do the cover for the MAD PANCAKE cover after a certain point, but it fell through. Is there any truth to it?

BILL: No, I don't remember that. You know the story about the Frazetta MAD cover we did use.....

RICH: You mean the BUCK ROGERS cover you used for MAD 29. Yes, I saw it in the original with the Buck Rogers helmet back on the guy, and it was a gas.

BILL: That's the only piece of art that I used in my life that I didn't buy outright. And I recollect, I was paying sixty bucks for a cover in those days. And I think I offered him forty bucks for the rights of sixty bucks for the cover outright. And Frank, well, he was never one for the buck. He'd rather have the art. He kept it, and I think I paid Forty or Forty-five. Today it's probably worth $200. Beautiful work, and the other thing he's got is the Picto-Fiction story we never printed.

When I went bankrupt, all the boys were working on a Picto-Fiction story, and I lasted until the day after Christmas. I just didn't tell them I'd folded right before Christmas. Then I called everyone up and told them I'd had it, take it and keep it, and I think I paid Forty or Forty-five. Today it's probably worth $200. Beautiful work, and the other thing he's got is the Picto-Fiction story we never printed.

RICH: Is he going to do anything more for MAD?

BILL: I don't know; he's so damn busy, you know. But I'd love him to do some work for MAD.

RICH: How about Wood?

BILL: Well, you know, Wood and MAD parted under strange circumstances. Woody had gotten sick, and he had gotten very cantankerous. He had a headache for a long time, and that can make you cantankerous. His work had degenerated, and he took the very wrong road. It got very bad for a while, and as he left. But he got rid of the headache then, and now his work is very charming -- brilliant!

One of the last times I saw him, he said: "How's this for clever: that work I did for MAD stunk!" (Laugh)

But he never indicated that he wanted to come back. And, frankly, I don't think he wants the pressure.

RICH: He put the love into that old MAD comic humor stuff, showing a natural charm in it, and he had tremendous range, being able to do science-fiction, horror, and humor.

BILL: Funny thing -- Woody never used to smile; he was never happy about anything he did. I think he was just a sober man. He's a lot happier now, I feel. And certainly the stuff he does in WITZEND is so charming, so delightful. And that's probably what he means when he says his old EC work depresses him, compared to what he's doing now.

RICH: How about some of the other EC artists that are still around? You could never work Crandall into MAD, could you?

BILL: Crandall...... we gave Crandall one thing to do, a long, long time ago. But Crandall is not funny. He can do most anything, but I don't think he'd be effective in MAD. Ingels of course has disappeared. Krigstein won't do fine art; I know every one once in a while I get a notice in the mail that he's having a showing of his paintings. Apparently he's doing quite well.

Kamen is big in advertising art, for the Madison Avenue places. He drops in every six months or so and says Hi.

Jack Davis, you know what he's doing -- movie ads, TV ads, and everything under the sun. Bill Elder is drawing LITTLE ANNY FANNY; Kutsman is on that with him. Johnny Craig is working for an advertising agency, and I hear tell he's doing work for comics now again.

RICH: Yeah, he's doing horror stuff for Marvel now. For the new books they've on the fires for this Summer.

BILL: John was very slow. He did a lead story for two of the horror mags, and once in a while a story for other books. He rarely got in all those three horror books in two months.

He was sort of special. I can see that if you were an Ingels fan, you weren't a Craig fan. He was taken with Will Elder -- you know, every artist has his God. I was very fond of Johnny's stuff; thought it was great. We never put him in the science-fiction or in the grizzly horror. It was usually the more straightforward, the real tech stuff we gave to Cheinly (Ingels).

Davis could do anything.

RICH: Contrasted to Craig, I understand Davis was one of the fastest.

BILL: Oh, yeah. jeep, you! We used to do cartoons of him with his art machine...... just turn the crank and the art falls out at the other end. He worked for MAD again now, and he doesn't do nearly enough. He can do about twenty pages a year, and that's all we can get from him.

Orlando is over at National. And you know about Williman, Frazetta, and friends.

RICH: How about George Evans?

BILL: Gee, I don't know. We sort of drift a-
part when we don't have a business connection. But he did a lot of great stuff. This book
that Woody Gelman's doing -- again, we tried
to balance it, and we've got a couple of damn
dave evans stories in there.

BILL: Oh, no. One of the contributing reasons
I gave up the horror comics is that I wouldn't
do them if I couldn't do them my way. I think
a lot of the success of the horror comics is that
they were horror comics more than it was that
we did them.

This is something hard to accept. Hugh
Heffner put out a magazine called "Playboy" which
went to oblivion after two issues. And then he
put out a magazine called "SHOW BUSINESS
ILLUSTRATED" which only lasted a year or so.
He put a lot of money into them, and they were
flips. I'm sure he was very surprised in both
cases, because he has been so very successful
with "Playboy." One gets to think he can do
anything. But when you come to think of it,
everything Heffner's been successful with is
sex, and he's the number one sex success in the
history of the world. That's his medium.
And it's the same with me. I was very
lucky with horror, and I was very, very lucky
with MAD, so why should I knock my brains out?
This book for Nostalgia Press is just for fun; I
get next to no royalty on it; it's just to do it.

Also, at the same time, we're doing a $10
MAD hardcover for this Summer. I have high
hopes for it; it's going to be something dif-
fent. 250 pages, 48 pages of color plates
including the original "Superduperman," "Bat
Boy and Robin," and "Woman Wonder" in color
in addition to which, we're running six of the
Annual gimmicks.

BILL: Well, that was for MAD, not EC.

And we were disappointed at the time,
since we thought we were hitting an older crowd,
and we always aimed higher. We thought our
readers were smarter than we expected, so it's a lucky thing.
We found the mean readership in that poll to
be around 11, but you have to understand that
first of all, that poll was around ten years
ago. It could be outdated now, and secondly,
that's the mean readership, and it goes from
there in both directions. Everybody knows that
we have younger readers, college students, and we have ten
year-olds. What the ten-year-olds get out
of MAD, I don't know.

BILL: I have always believed it's healthy. How-
ever, I'm no doctor, and I'm no psychiatrist,
and I'm no psychologist; and many psychologists
who are quite respectable, un-Worchester type
psychologists take the opposite point-of-view.
There must be a breaching point somewhere.
Some say, if you read about violence, you
won't commit it, and I take that point-of-view.
However, I'm prejudiced. You could make a case
that MAD is corrupting; it depends how far you
want to go. But I believe that kids are ac-
tive or passive, and the kid that sits home and
reads is passive. The kid that is apt to do
anything is not apt to sit home and read.

BILL: (Laugh and from simultaneously - runs
out of room to catch his 5:30 car ride home.)
It's a MAD, MAD, MAD world, thank God.

THE ABOVE interview was conducted on the af-
fternoon of Wednesday, April 2, 1969. I think
a measure of periscope color concerning the
surroundings at that time might be interesting
to the Spa Foners of America.

Mr. Gaines was dressed in a blue two-pocket
shirt and dark slacks, sitting behind a neat
and spotless desk, with a "No Smoking" sign pla-
ced squarely in the middle of it. During the
interview he was seated in a cabernet chair,
smoking a pipe, and his hands on the desk,
looking into the eyes of the writer.

A ready laugh, a smooth informal manner,
and an engaging, ever-present grin are the things
about him that stand out in my mind. On the
walls surrounding us were paintings by Al Feld-
stein -- of a science-fiction scene (the cover
of SQUAT TIME), by Johnny Craig -- of his
famous "Crypt-Keeper," and by Graham Ingles --
a spooky, cocky gray-eye tablecloth, with the stoop-
shouldered "Old Witch" standing drooping in an
unkept grayroom. There was smoking, done
in bravado with big, loose brushstrokes.

Having its best effect viewed from across the
room, it was terrific to the taste of an EC
addict. The lighting, soft and cold moonlight,
was incredible. The lighting, soft and cold moonlight,
was incredible. The lighting, soft and cold moonlight,
was incredible. The lighting, soft and cold moonlight,
was incredible. The lighting, soft and cold moonlight,
was incredible. The lighting, soft and cold moonlight,

Outside Bill Gaines' office, the corridor
linking to the other EC offices is lined with
EC original covers by Mingo and Press.

In the waiting room outside the complex
stands a full-scale cut-out of Alfred E. Neuman
in a Hawaiian shirt with a lei. The waiting
doomsday at all those who wait to go within
the EC world of art is doomsday.

Also typical of the atmosphere within
EC is the cut-out of the EC Magazine, which hangs
on the walls in Mr. Gaines' office. And there it
waits, white walls and steel frame, the EC
magazine on the wall, a constant stream of water pouring
out of it, as if magically supplied.

To me that is incredible, blowing water
from the thin air typifies the steady stream
of creative magic Bill Gaines has been pouring
forth for the last 20 years, with the help of
the geniuses he has drawn to him -- a constel-
lation of marvels who help him to make
our world a little bit livier, a lot more en-
joyable.

Long live Bill Gaines and the EC tradition!

finis
POEMS IN OLD UNDERWEAR

"GOOD, IT’S RAINING"

Hearing Chok-Chok's roar, Smith began to sing his song, "Rain, rain go away come again another day!"
Chok-Chok seemed to be deaf that morning. He continued to blister and foam and drip, drip, drip.
Smith went on with his tune, "It’s raining, it’s pouring, the old man is snoring."
Crackle-bam-pwop!
Spider-strands of summer lightning crackled across the misty sky.
No, Chok-Chok wasn't deaf.

John Guzowski

SECOND COMING

And Jesus spoke unto the sailor's widow
and said, "Come into my mind
and I will give you the sun of tomorrow's
paradise horizons
to brighten the light of today's
sorrow deserts."

And the woman looked upon His face
and felt the wonder of His words
but answered, "I have no mind that you may sense,
I have no sorrow that you may touch,
I have nothing that can be fathered
and made to grow in the garden
of Thy Love."

And then the world was silent
as the Christ's eyes became twin novas,
giving still more light to the noonday.
He looked upon the woman
and quicksilver surged through her veins
and her body twisted with spasms
and her mind burned and erupted
and became a worm's nest of life and coiling,
serpent flesh
and she died in a moaning wall of hunger.

And then Jesus the Christ gazed upon the dung round,
once a woman,
and through sad tears murmured
"Much had you to give."

John Guzowski

THE HANGMAN

Whenever there's a time to pitch dung, a bell to be rung, a man to be hung,
He's there.
Whenever there's a wrong over right, a sandwich to bite, a nose to be tight,
He's there.
He's the jolly, holly hangman, and he's ready to do you in.

He comes around at evening time, when all the city sleeps.
He does his work efficiently; he plays his game for keeps.
He wears a big, black poncho, and a pair of fourteen "ph's,
And if you hear him coming round, your blood is sure to freeze.

He's the jolly, holly hangman, and he's ready to do you in.

Whenever there's a word to be spoke, an oxteam to yoke, a neck to be broke,
He's there.
Whenever there's a death in the town, a house to tear down, a woman to frown,
He's there.
He's the jolly, holly hangman, and he's ready to do you in.

He plies his trade most earnestly; he really knows his stuff.
He makes it look so easy; you know it is no bluff.
The body jerks there skyward, smears along the rope.
The bloated tongue shoots outward, the fingers start to grope.
But eyes no longer seeing, and mouth no longer live,
Continue to bulge outward in struggling to survive.

The hangman now is smiling; he senses what's to come,
The end of another life, my friend; are you sure you don't want some?

Jay Broecker

POETIC JUSTICE

I was sitting across from an atheist,
at church yesterday.
He put six slugs and a button
into the collection plate.
I put three slugs
into the minister
and tried to escape.
But it was fatal, futile, and fatal.
My bloodlust was satiated.
(I hadn't time to contemplate,
so the murder wasn't premeditated.)

Jay Broecker

IDENTITY REMAINED FOREVER

Donnerwetter, donder, blitsen!
Rose the stormtrooper's loud curse.
Relentless actions, pounding humans
into dust where once was flesh.
The supple skin of countless thousands
brutalized till soft was cold,
And thrown into the yawning chasms
of a nation full of graves.
The SS troops were prize possessions
of the lunacy within.
The bowels of nation where once people
laughed with mirth not cressèd with tears

The inhumane mass group behavior
seemed so unidentified,
But was made up of sole people
clustered into murderers.
A single one with besmirched garb on
Paused at once to see a corpse,
Laying, staring in his face,
Dead in err -- his mother was it,
Lying in a wet clay rut
Where the herds of humans died.

He cradled then the slack and filthed head
Crying tears of bloody pain.
And he too, one of prized position,
Fell dead there soon without his coat.

Rich Hauser
MANNED by the multi-limbed, single-breasted she-locus of the devil-king Horguth, the Wall was considered invulnerable.

Fifty cubits of hand-hewn stone could be counted from the Wall's base to its ramparts, and fifty more in its thickness.

For two centuries, scores of millions of haggard, crippled slaves gave their sorrows and their lives to it.

Finished, it defied a dozen Gargantuan well-bred and their vile, desert hardened hordes.

Asgar stood upon the down-like grass, surveying the black majesty of the horizon-spanning Wall. He frowned, lifted a cigar to his lips, and drew a cloud of blue haze. He savored its goodness, allowing it to drift into his lungs.

Moments passed.

He turned to his lieutenant and asked, "That height of ebony, can it be scaled?"

"'Hey, Sirrah," Smithgun replied.

"Can we not pierce the Wall with our engines of war?"

"Hey, Sirrah," the worried aide murmured.

Again, Asgar frowned. He glanced at his cigar and allowed it to fall. Suddenly, his eyes fixed on a section of the Wall which he had previously missed.

Asgar then spoke the words which would henceforth cause his name to be cherished and toasted wherever fighting men would gather to recall distant moments of valor, war, and bravery: "Ode, they forgot to close the gate."

MY PRISON

Once in the heart of an August night,
When no bird heard another's flight,
And all the leaves of all the green trees
Solemnly hung limp and still,
I, singly out in nature's preserve,
Thought I saw raw fantasies
Dancing out amongst the trees.
Where a hillocks rusty roll
Gave the moonlight bright green nerve,
I thought I saw a zephyr awake
In and out amongst the bushes,
Bending branches with wind-pushes.

The zephyr had a form, I fancied,
The moonlight seemed to follow it,
But what I saw is hardly portent
(Dancing out across the glade)
'Cause the cause of strange new visions
Hardly carries much a portent
When I am a lunatic
Trying to escape my prison,
But my prison lives within.

---

THE OLD DIME MAN

The man who collects old dimes came here last week.
He grumbled with his toothless jaw and stared with vacant eyes, longingly, at a place of steak I had.

Something once wild and free and living, rosted on my fork.
I pondered chewing it, to make my fat belly even more.
The old bone man was just thanking me for some scraps
The dog had left.
When I thrust him down into my dinner plate,
Almost searing him to death.

---

SEA WITCH

Beneath a starless sky
Enveloped in an ocean mist
Of darkest night,
Upon a hungry reef
The sea witch stands.
Without a moon
Yet bathed in eerie light
She stands.
Naked
Her ivory form
Glistening
In the icy spray
Her raven hair
Billows in the gale.
A soft, pale glow
Illuminating her bosom
Riding a spirit
Dark and mysterious.

Her outstretched arms
Conduct her symphony
Of murky waters
Seething
Tempests rise
Oceans rage
At her command.

Her beckon
Brings the Kraken
From the deeps.

Her eyes
Reflect the sea
The soul
In pools
Of darkest emerald
Depths.

About her
Crash the tides
Rocks are beaten, crushed
By boiling surf
While her feet
Pale, delicate
Are gently washed.
Her slender ankles
Lightly caressed
In swirling currents.

What awful power lies within her grasp.
A soul Tormented
Imprisoned in the sea
And yet.
She smiles
Delight
Upon her face
A mystery
Enchantment of the sea.

Inspired by Frazettte's Painting
Won an Alabama State Award

By James E. Thompson

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THE WORLD'S MOST ALL-ENCOMPASSING HIGG-POE

Life,
Love,
Death.

Idea by Jay Broecker
Written by R. Hauser
Edited by J. Guzowski