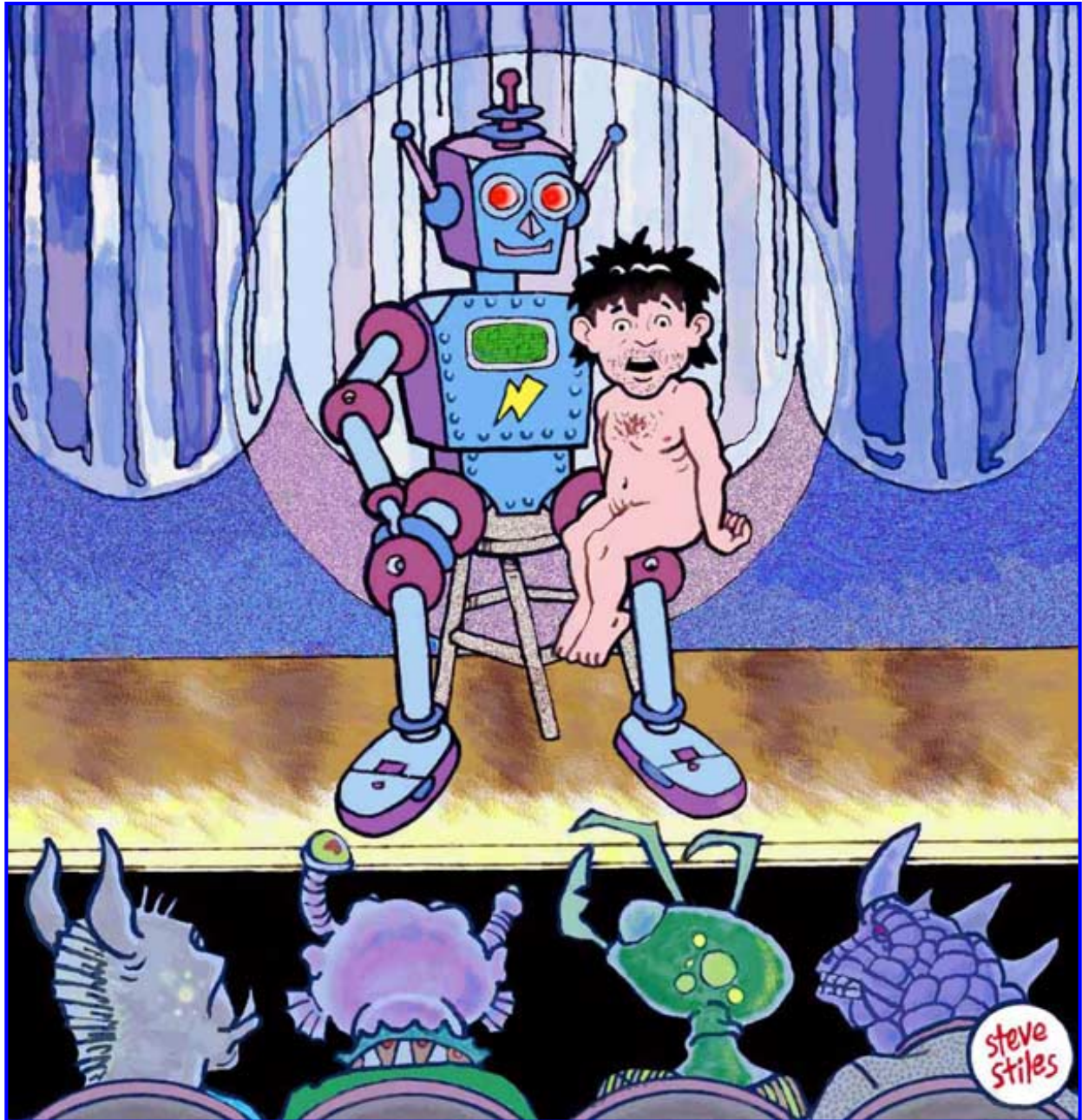




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The Dummy
by Steve Stiles

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I tell you, we are here on Earth to fart around, and don't let anybody tell you any different.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Inc. Technology* No. 4, 1995

THIS ISSUE OF *eI* is for my old friend Alexei Panshin.

In the strictly science fiction world, it is also in memory of Will Elder.

#

As always, everything in this issue of *eI* beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at earlkemp@citlink.net and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is *jefe* around here. If it wasn't for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make *eI* whatever it is.

Other than Bill Burns, Dave Locke, and Robert Lichtman, these are the people who made

this issue of *eI* possible: Victor J. Banis, Pat Charnock, Graham Charnock, Mike Hammer, Jacques Hamon, Frank Lunney, Gary Mattingly, Lynn Munroe, Jerry Murray, Suzann Murray, Alexei Panshin, Frank M. Robinson, Mark Schirmeister, Robert Speray, and Bud Webster.

ARTWORK: This issue of *eI* features original artwork by Ditmar, Mark Schirmeister, and Steve Stiles, and recycled artwork by William Rotsler.

We would be a lot safer if the Government would take its money out of science and put it into astrology and the reading of palms. Only in superstition is there hope. If you want to become a friend of civilization, then become an enemy of the truth and a fanatic for harmless balderdash.

-- Kurt Vonnegut

...Return to sender, address unknown.... 28

The Official *eI* Letters to the Editor Column

Artwork recycled William Rotsler

By Earl Kemp

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to earlkemp@citlink.net or by snail mail to P.O. Box 6642, Kingman, AZ 86402-6642 and thank you.

Also, please note, I observe DNQs and make arbitrary and capricious deletions from these letters in order to remain on topic.

This is the official Letter Column of *eI*, and following are a few quotes from a few of those letters concerning the last issue of *eI*. All this in an effort to get you to write letters of comment to *eI* so you can look for them when they appear here.

I got a letter from a sappy woman a while back - she knew I was sappy too, which is to say a lifelong Democrat.

--Kurt Vonnegut

Friday April 18, 2008:

Chris Garcia: Okay, there's a whole lot to say about this issue, but I'll open by noting that I loved the cover from Mr. Stiles. I picked up a bunch of old *Trap Doors* at Eastercon

(only I would go to England and bring back American fanzines) and I think issue 10 was one of them. I like the colouring especially. I'm becoming a big fan of folks redoing their old stuff in colour. It just feels right.



Now, the Fanzine Research thingee. That's a tough one. There's been a lot written about fandom and there are long lists of various collections, but largely the scholarly study of fandom has been something done from those on the inside. I've done a lot of research into various areas, but nothing that would be considered scholarly. There's a lot of great work done in the area of Zine Culture (hell, even ZineWiki is a great resource to keep up with non-SF zining) but there is little in the way of outside interest in SF zines. It's odd, but understandable. We've closed ourselves off to a large degree and that leads others to think we're not interesting. It happens. I do know a number of ethnographers who take a serious interest in SF fandom, though they are a small group compared to those who look at television and sports fandom. I'm currently working on an SF/Wrestling/Browncoats comparison article for a friend's mag that looks at the way they influence each other. One thing that I've learned is that looking to fanzines for the feel of the greater world of SF isn't a bad idea, but it's far less effective than picking up all the issues of the pros and reading them. That probably wasn't true for the 1960s and 70s, but it certainly is for the 1980s. If a future researcher wanted to

discover everything about the rise and reaction to CyberPunk, as an example, the fanzines of the time would probably give you tastes, but if there were recordings of panels from cons between the years 1984 to 1998, you could have the complete spectrum of reaction to what CyberPunk was.

Now here is a Centennial I can get behind! Screw that Heinlein dude, Williamson is where it's at! If I could make it to Pulpcon, I totally would. No dice, though. Well, more No cash. I really think the Cult of Heinlein has over-powered so many other authors who deserve a strong investigation. Williamson should be considered the pioneer and the worshipped master of the form. Hell, RAH petered out in the 1970s and Williamson was writing top-notch stuff into the 1990s!

I'm one of those people who thinks going into Iraq was a good idea, but not the way we did it. Take the shackles off the CIA, set up a few cells in the country, wait out a year or two and get rid of Saddam and that's a good thing. Invade with the force of the Army, waste thousands of lives, spend billions of dollars, it's all terrible. I don't think that makes Bush worse than Hitler, but it does make him one of those figures who will never be remembered in history without blood on his sleeves.

I think I remember the *Woman Chaser* coming through the theatres. I remember Patrick Warburton in the trailer for it and I wanted to see it and never did. I'll just have to Netflix it. I'd start by reading the book so I could properly complain about how they messed it up,

but time allows not for this.

Great Ditmar piece to close the issue! His stuff has a quality to it that is so purely SF, so slick with an undercoat of something more gritty and raw. I hope we Americans get to see more of his stuff.

Wednesday April 23, 2008:

Lynn Munroe: Another great issue on your ezine, always great to read anything by Moorcock and my wife was very happy to see a photo of her friends Linda & Michael Moorcock. The piece on Willeford was both scholarly and brilliant. Keep going at this genius level, it's working well for you.

Tuesday May 6, 2008:

Mike Deckinger: Of course I remember *The Smut Peddler*. It was released at a time when the more innocent and carefree nudies (as exemplified by Russ Meyers' early contributions), were beginning to fade from view, and ushered in the era of the "roughies"; B&W independent films that featured ample flesh displays and undue amounts of violence and misogyny. The key developers of "roughies" included the incredible husband and wife team of Michael and Roberta Findlay, Barry Mahan (Errol Flynn's drinking buddy), the delectable Audrey Campbell, star of the "Olga" series. and our very own William Rotsler.



The crusty character, in the still from *The Smut Peddler* also played the titular lead (adorned in scabby make-up and prosthetics), who, as noted, is only glimpsed in the trailer. The trailer itself was a marvel of manipulative direction. Since one of the shadowy plot elements centered on the production of a girly magazine called *Dream Girl*, re-enactments of an S&M photo-shoot were presented as if they foreshadowed actual scenes within the final product.

However, the sweaty viewer was not totally deceived. Additional unrelated scenes of European glamour girls rounded out the viewing experience.

Roughies only remained for a few years. Once the envelope was pushed to the limit, with the advent of hard-core, non-simulations, the soft-core genre dwindled and then disappeared.

I can understand that *The Smut Peddler* has become a rarity, but a sought-after rarity? Truly stunning.

I wonder if Rob Latham made any effort to investigate the efforts of Harold Palmer Piser. Piser, a non-fan, undertook a vast bibliographic project, encompassing all fanzines at the time (the 60s). His objective was to accurately catalogue EVERYTHING that had ever

been published. As an elderly retiree, he had an abundance of free time to devote to his handiwork. Unfortunately he died in the middle of the project, and nothing further was heard. One final word; it was said at the time that all his notes were destroyed following his passing. However, other reports seemed to suggest that his notes (covering some 90% of all fanzines under consideration) had survived and were being held for the benefit of anyone wishing to continue. If this is indeed true (and considering the stretch of intervening years since his death, recovery may no longer be possible) they could serve Latham's purpose.

Saturday May 10, 2008:

Elinor Busby: I enjoyed part of your ezine and parts were outside my field of interests, which is par for the course, really. Anything that strikes me as "guy stuff" is not within. That's odd, isn't it? I like guys. When I was young I would have been eager to broaden my field of interests, but at my age, I like what I like and let it go at that. Except that I've gotten kind of interested in politics and history and so forth.



Elinor Busby. Photo by Earl Kemp, Corflu, Las Vegas, April 2008.

Anyhow, I have two Sidney Coleman stories. When we met him, at Midwestcon in 1957, Buz and I amused ourselves by quoting to Sidney some of the things he'd said in your SAPSzine. He enjoyed having his wit quoted back to him. He told us a little about his origins. His father and uncle had been in business together during the Depression, as the Cohen Brothers. They got a phone call asking if this was the Coleman Brothers. Corrected, the caller hung up. One of them said to the other, "If we'd been the Coleman Brothers, we would have GOT that business." And so they became so.

The last time I saw Sid was in Brighton in 1979. We were at the Prince Regent's Pavilion, which is ornately "Chinese" in decoration. Sidney said, "This tells us nothing about Chinese decoration and everything about Chinese restaurants." My face probably fell, because I had been really getting off on it, and Sidney relented and said that it was joyous.

I may have seen Sidney since that time, because I remember his sitting in the Busby living room drinking dandelion wine, but I don't remember the year.

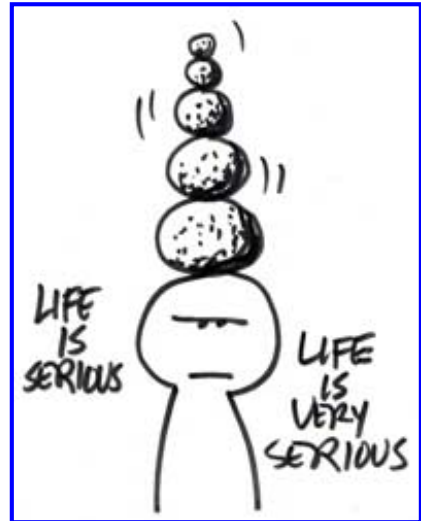
Sunday May 18, 2008:

Patrick Kearney: Greenleaf always interested me. I was particularly taken with those larger paperbacks, with two novels back-to-back similar to the Ace Double SF novels. I did a paperback catalogue for a bookseller friend devoted specifically to Greenleaf -- and thought the books looked pretty good. Indeed, Greenleaf published one of the great

original erotic writers, C.J. Bradbury Robinson (not a pseudonym!) whose work, in the form of *A Crocodile of Choirboys*, I first encountered in the British Library. I was later able to secure a copy for myself, but his books are as rare as hen's teeth on account of their theme. I have only one other, *Young Thomas*, which is not in the first bloom, condition-wise.

Monday May 26, 2008:

John Purcell: Once again, a fine publication. Rob Latham's article on "Fanzine Research" not only whetted my appetite for visiting the Eaton Collection some day soon, but reminded me to get my butt down to the Science Fiction and Fanzine Collection here at Texas A&M University. Hal Hall, the curator of it and other special collections, has been acquiring newer goodies since I was last there, and I would like to see what Hal has managed to lay his claws on. Besides, I still need to dig through the Cepheid Variable boxes when I get to really working on that history article about the TAMU SF club. There is only so much I can learn on-line, and the two or three boxes in the SF & Fanzine collection devoted to the club have more information I could use.



Other than that, I just wanted to let you know that I once again enjoyed the zine. Keep them coming.

Sympathy For the Devil*

A story about Robert Heinlein's "Solution Unsatisfactory"

By Alexei Panshin

We did the devil's work.

--J. Robert Oppenheimer

A lie is no good if it's not believed -- unless it is told to be disbelieved.

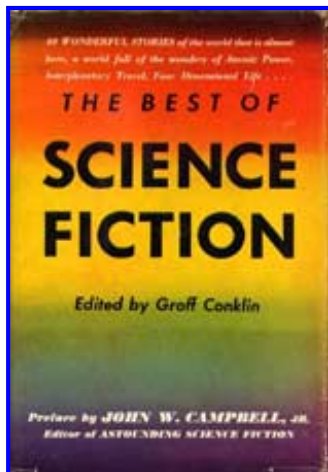
--Mellrooney

Part One: Making K-O Dust

1. The Riddle of "Solution Unsatisfactory"

After World War II was brought to a sudden conclusion in August 1945 by the detonation of a new American superweapon over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was a change in the status of science fiction.

Science fiction was the last pulp magazine genre, named as recently as 1929. It was rarely published in hardcover book form. It wasn't reviewed by reputable newspapers and magazines. And it wasn't to be found on the shelves of most libraries, and only by people prepared to hunt to find it.



Cover scan courtesy
Bud Webster Collection.

Now, with the appearance of atomic weapons in the world, it stood vindicated. Its direst imaginings had come true.

In the new postwar climate of elation and dread, it was suddenly possible to present science fiction as a form of literature almost as serious and farseeing as its most ardent fans and boosters had always wanted to believe it was.

In February 1946, just six months after the United States dropped the Bomb, the first hardcover science fiction anthology, *The Best of Science Fiction*, edited by Groff Conklin, was published by Crown. This was a fat book of forty stories intended to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the genre, from the near and infinitesimal to the most remote times and places – the far future, the stars and other dimensions.

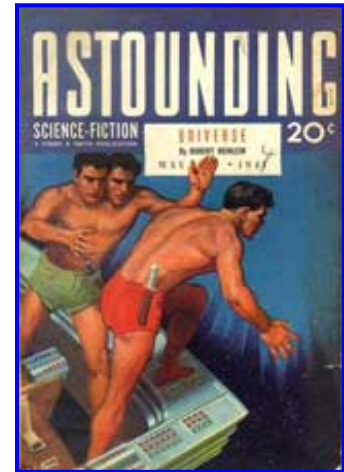
As an acknowledgment of the major new concern of the day (as well as to stake science fiction's claim to special regard) the initial seven stories were grouped under the heading "The Atom."

The lead story, a novelette entitled “Solution Unsatisfactory,” told of the end of war between England and Germany in 1945 after the dropping of an atomic superweapon made in America.

That was close enough to what had just happened to get people’s attention.

The author of “Solution Unsatisfactory” was given as “Anson MacDonald.” This was the byline the story had appeared under when it was originally published in the May 1941 issue of *Astounding Science-Fiction*. But it had actually been written by Robert Heinlein the previous December.

A year before Pearl Harbor and four years prior to the termination of the war currently being fought in Europe, Heinlein had dared to imagine the conflict brought to a conclusion by an atomic weapon of unprecedented deadliness made at a US Army facility in Maryland. In the story, the lab’s director, Col. Clyde Manning, then maneuvers to make himself dictator of the world in order to keep the overwhelming weapon he’s brought into existence in safe hands, namely his own.



The title Heinlein placed on the story was “Foreign Policy.” This suggests that he saw its central subject not so much as the development of atomic weapons as the impact their existence would have on the international balance of power.

It was the editor of *Astounding*, John W. Campbell, Jr., who altered the title to “Solution Unsatisfactory” in order to make it clear to the readers of his magazine that in his view the story was a thought experiment which didn’t offer an adequate answer to the problem it posed of controlling this demonic weapon once it had been made and used.

Four years later, as the architect and chief promoter of modern science fiction, as well as the original editor of one-third of the stories included in *The Best of Science Fiction*, John Campbell would be asked to contribute a preface to this pioneering anthology to justify and explain science fiction to an audience presumed to be unfamiliar with it.

Campbell viewed himself as a practical engineer concerned with what works. So in his preface he took advantage of the moment to use “Solution Unsatisfactory” as an example of science fiction in action. In the context of this book for a general readership he wouldn’t dwell on any inadequacy the story might have. Instead, he began by describing it as “uncannily accurate prophecy.”

This would be true, of course. But it would also not be true, as he had reason to know.

For one thing, Heinlein hadn’t been a very good predictor of the future course of the war. Almost as soon as his novelette was published, it had been contradicted by events. In this

story neither the Soviet Union (here called the “Eurasian Union”) nor Japan nor the United States ever directly participates in World War II.

On the timeline in which “Solution Unsatisfactory” was written and read however, just two months after the story appeared on the newsstand, in June 1941, Germany would invade the Soviet Union. And before the end of the year, Germany’s ally Japan would launch a surprise attack on the US Pacific Fleet stationed in Hawaii and America would be brought into the war, as well.

Having not foreseen this radical expansion of World War II, Heinlein hadn’t envisioned that the cities attacked to bring the war to an end would be Japanese. Instead, the metropolis atomically sterilized in his story was Berlin, the capital city of Germany.

There’d be another major difference between what had been written by Heinlein and what actually did take place. The weapon he imagined was radioactive dust – what today would be called a radiological weapon or “dirty bomb.” It wouldn’t be the brilliant humungous explosion capped by a roiling mushroom cloud that we’ve all become familiar with.

Writing in the immediate postwar moment, however, Campbell felt no inclination to linger on minor details like these. Instead he wanted to establish the premise that the projections of science fiction deserved to be taken seriously, and for this it was sufficient that in “Solution Unsatisfactory” Heinlein had foreseen the United States developing an atomic weapon, which had then been used to end the war. What’s more, he’d even gotten the year right. That was close enough to pass for uncannily accurate prophecy.

By contrast, even though Groff Conklin, too, saw the story as possibly predictive, the editor of *The Best of Science Fiction* would regard this more negatively than Campbell did. What concerned him about “Solution Unsatisfactory” wasn’t the part that had come true more or less, but the part, which hadn’t happened yet, but still might.

In Conklin’s introduction to the anthology, printed after Campbell’s preface, he said: “The story which leads off in this book, ‘Solution Unsatisfactory,’ is included here with the greatest reluctance. It is one instance where science fiction has dangerously sinister overtones of possibility.”

What disturbed the editor was not the invention of atomic weapons or the prospect of atomic war. What made him resist the story was its second half – the coming to power of a dictator who means to keep the Bomb under control by keeping the world in line.

The narrator of “Solution Unsatisfactory” says: “...Manning was no ordinary man. In him ordinary hard sense had been raised to the level of genius. Oh, yes, I know that it is popular to blame everything on him and call him everything from traitor to mad dog, but I still think he was both wise and benevolent. I don’t care how many second-guessing historians disagree with me.”

Conklin didn’t want to endorse anything like that. He had no use for dictators. If there’d

ever been any doubt about the matter, World War II had just shown what dictators were like. Yet the storyteller would end his account by inviting the reader to empathize with poor Clyde Manning, reluctant dictator of the world who is only doing what circumstances determine must be done.

The editor saw this as giving Manning far too much credence. In his introduction, he wrote, “I do not agree ... with the author’s political bias as it is exemplified in this tale. It seems quite dangerous to me.”

The person who would ultimately be responsible for the inclusion and privileged placement of “Solution Unsatisfactory” in *The Best of Science Fiction* was Conklin’s editor at Crown, Edmund Fuller. While working on this book, he’d developed so much of a taste for science fiction that Conklin sometimes suspected him of wanting to hijack the project and make it his own.

Fuller was particularly impressed by the stories of Robert Heinlein and Anson MacDonald. Struck by the timeliness of “Solution Unsatisfactory,” he wanted to use it to lead off the book.

But Conklin didn’t want the story in his collection at all. He only gave in at last – “against my better judgment” – after seeing a headline in the *Washington Post* for November 2, 1945, which read: “ATOMIC WAR THREAT MAY FORCE U.S. TO SELECT DICTATOR.”

The story below the headline said that Harold Urey – a Nobel Prize-winning chemist who had helped develop the atomic bomb – had offered the opinion that the United States might have to establish a dictatorship in order to react to the threat of atomic war.

“I do not see any way to keep our democratic form of government if everybody has atomic bombs,’ Urey said. ‘If everyone has them, it will be necessary for our government to move quickly in a manner now not possible under our diffused form of government.’”

If an actual Bomb-maker of prominence was ready to suggest that with the Bomb on the loose, America might need to have a dictator in control, then, perhaps, distasteful though it might be, “Solution Unsatisfactory,” the story of a master Bomb-maker who carries out a *coup d’etat* and makes himself just such a dictator, *should* be in the book, if only as a cautionary tale.

Nevertheless, Conklin continued to harbor great reservations about this story, so that even though he may finally have given his assent to its inclusion, he still found it necessary to make it clear to everyone who read his book that he hadn’t wanted to do it.

So just what was “Solution Unsatisfactory” – this story that was both celebrated and condemned in *The Best of Science Fiction* even before it led the way in the first showcase anthology of science fiction?

Was “Solution Unsatisfactory” an uncannily prescient anticipation of American invention

of the Bomb, as John Campbell's preface and Edmund Fuller's premier placement of the story encouraged readers to perceive? Or was it an ultimately unsatisfactory first attempt to solve the problem of how a horrendous superweapon might be brought under control, as its Campbell-chosen title declared?

Was the story really about American foreign policy and how the existence of atomic weapons would force this policy to change, as indicated by Heinlein's original title? Or was it a dangerously sinister story about power politics and how a man makes himself world dictator, as Groff Conklin thought?

A case may be made for each of these interpretations. But objections can be raised to all of them, too. And none of them explains everything in "Solution Unsatisfactory." Unless, of course, the story is really an elephant in the dark, giving the appearance of being any number of different things while actually being something of another kind.

2. Manning Takes a Job

If for no other reason than because its narrator is not a reliable voice, it isn't easy to be sure what Heinlein's actual intention was when he wrote this story in December 1940.

If we believe the character who tells us the tale, Col. Manning never entertained any ambitions to make himself dictator. It was all a kind of accidental inevitability, something that circumstances happened to make necessary.

Before the war Manning was a military officer – "one of the Army's No. 1 experts in chemical warfare" – until a heart condition forced him into early retirement. Then he became a first-term congressman, a liberal.

Manning may be a liberal, but he's also said to be "tough-minded." Once he's come to recognize the logical necessity of a dictator controlling atomic weapons, he's not one to turn away from the job, even though he may find what he's called upon to do personally distasteful.

We could even think of what happens to Manning as a tragic act of self-sacrifice and empathize with the pain he must be feeling as he does what is necessary, even though it goes against his nature.

The full name of the all-but-invisible man behind the narrative voice of "Solution Unsatisfactory" is never given in one place, but we can add it up as John DeFries. As a high school teacher of sociology and economics, he was a member of the political search committee that chose Manning as an insurgent candidate for congress. He becomes Manning's campaign manager, and after that Congressman Manning's executive secretary. And then, when Manning is asked to rejoin the Army and head its atomic weapons program, at Manning's insistence DeFries is instantly commissioned and brought along as his adjutant.

DeFries is no disinterested bystander. He's Manning's main man. And when it is Manning's man who assures us that Manning is really wise and benevolent and a genius of hard sense, can his words be believed?

At times in the story, DeFries seems to be only half-aware. Manning even calls him "downright stupid" to his face, and he accepts this as a compliment. It's possible that he is a bit dim and is kept around as a convenient tool when one is needed. Or perhaps he really knows more than he's telling and is acting as a loyal mouthpiece, like a Presidential news secretary covering his boss's ass and passing on to us what the boys upstairs think we should be told. It's even possible that DeFries is a secret spin doctor himself, actively seeking to manipulate our perceptions and sentiments from the outset.

Whatever the case may be, however, it's apparent that DeFries is never frank with us. There's a great deal that he doesn't bother to explain, there are crucial points of transition that he slides right past, and much of what he does tell us doesn't stand up under examination.

If we persist in pursuing the questions that he fails to address, a very different picture of Manning begins to emerge.

At the outset, the narrator tells us that Manning is a strong liberal. He ought to know since he helped select Manning as a candidate and then worked for him while he was in Congress. But liberals, even of the tough-minded sort, are by definition dedicated to achieving gradual progress by working for changes in the system. They don't turn themselves into dictators. You have to be an extremist of one kind or another to take over the system altogether and make all decisions yourself.

It seems highly doubtful, then, that Manning, whatever he may actually have been, could really have ever been a liberal – which ought to make us question both DeFries's truthfulness and Manning's sincerity from the start.

Then we learn that despite his bad heart, Manning was personally singled out to be called back to active duty by the Army to head its atomic research and development program. And that seems unlikely, too.

In fact, this may have been the expression of a Robert Heinlein wish fulfillment. He'd been a Lieutenant (jg) when he was involuntarily retired from the Navy in 1934 after he developed tuberculosis. And he kept clinging to the hope that he would be recalled to duty when the US finally became an active participant in World War II.

However, this would never happen, even though Heinlein went knocking on a lot of doors after Pearl Harbor trying to make it happen. The best that he'd been able to do was to have an old service friend take him on as a civilian engineer at the Naval Air Experimental Station in Philadelphia.

Life moves on. And officers like Manning (or Heinlein) who've been retired from the

service for a serious uncured ailment are seldom if ever unretired and called back to active duty, let alone singled out to be given crucial command assignments.

Moreover, Manning already has a job, and one of some significance, too. He's a Congressional Representative with a district and a party and his own strong liberal principles to stand up for.

So when the congressman is first called to come to the War Department for a chat about returning to duty, he tells his secretary, "It's impossible, of course." He thereupon sets off for the meeting at so eager a pace that DeFries worries about his heart.

And, of course, it is every bit as impossible as Manning says it is. Congressmen with bad hearts don't jump ship in mid-stream to go off and be Army colonels, even important ones.

Sorry – I'm going to have to take that back, because DeFries goes on to say: "But it *was* possible, and Manning agreed to it, after the Chief of Staff presented his case."

A pretty impressive case it must have been, too, since the narrator tells us that no one has the power to make a congressman leave his post, and Manning had to be convinced.

But DeFries doesn't share any details with us of how this was done – nor even what the exact nature of the task offered to Manning was. These are points he goes gliding past, leaving us to try to figure out for ourselves what must have been said from what we see Manning do.

All we know for certain is that the general talked for a time and Manning, who's declared that leaving Congress is impossible and who must have reason to change his mind, found what he was told so compelling and persuasive that he agreed to the proposal. But, hey, if it was the Chief of Staff himself asking – I mean the top man in the whole damned Army – how could he say no?

We might not be permitted to hear the siren song that was sung for him, but we can hazard a guess as to what it may have been, since not much later the narrator says of Manning:

"...There was certainly no one else in the United States who could have done the job. It required a man who could direct and suggest research in a highly esoteric field, but who saw the problem from the standpoint of urgent military necessity."

DeFries can't possibly be talking from his own knowledge here. He's just been sworn into the service himself and he isn't any better qualified than the next former high school teacher to offer opinions about the Army or military necessity or who else other than Manning might be capable of carrying out this job. What's more, he admits that he knows no more about atomic physics than he's read in the Sunday newspaper supplement. He has to be repeating what he's heard from someone else.

However, if the source he had it from was the Army Chief of Staff as he was making his case to Manning, then we can understand how Manning's mind might have been changed. It has to be pretty heady stuff for someone who was a career military officer retired before his time to have the person in command of the whole Army tell you that he has a critical job and you're the only person who is capable of doing it.

But if indeed this was what convinced Manning, then he screwed up badly in allowing himself to be sweet talked into making such a disastrously wrong move. If Manning ever had it in him to be wise, this was the moment for him to speak.

If he were farseeing, he might have said something like this:

"Sir, the offer you are making is very flattering, but I'm afraid I must refuse for a number of reasons any one of which would be sufficient.

"First, I have a previous obligation to my constituents that I must honor. Having asked them to elect me to office, I can hardly turn my back on them now and walk away after serving for only a few months.

"Second, as you know, my heart isn't in great shape. I'm not sure it would withstand the stress of the work you're asking me to undertake. If I were to die along the way, or be forced to withdraw for reasons of health, and I'm as crucial to the task as you say, the program could be unnecessarily compromised.

"Third, as a human being and a liberal, I couldn't possibly direct a project like this one. I can see where it's headed, and its end is a weapon that will kill every living thing it affects, and that can only be used on helpless civilians massed in cities. In my opinion, to make and use that kind of weapon would be a crime.

"Lastly, speaking as a member of Congress, I have to tell you I think it would be a bad precedent and bad policy for us to introduce a weapon of indiscriminate terror. We would likely frighten our allies as much as our enemies, set off an arms race and destabilize the world. If you make an omelet, you have to eat it – you can't turn it back into an egg. With a weapon like this, we may find that we've won the war, but at the cost of the freedom for which we're fighting."

If indeed Manning is the only person in the country capable of directing this particular project – and he really were as wise and benevolent as DeFries says he is – then perhaps speaking out this way at this pivotal moment might have killed a bad idea at the very outset and spared both him and the world a lot of future grief.

But, of course, Manning doesn't say no to the Chief of Staff's offer. Rather, he accepts immediately and the two of them begin to discuss how his job switch is to be accomplished.

As a matter of fact, the only thing Manning is reported to have said during this entire

meeting is to be sure that he can have his man DeFries with him in his new post:

“There was talk of leaving me in Washington to handle the political details of Manning’s office, but Manning decided against it, judging that his other secretary could do that, and announced that I must go along as his adjutant. The Chief of Staff demurred, but Manning was in a position to insist, and the Chief had to give in.”

How sweet to be needed so desperately that you can even make the top general in the Army jump through a hoop!

3. The Invention of K-O Dust

So eager is Congressman Manning to get back into the familiar comfort of a pair of Army boots that he doesn’t linger in Washington long enough to make necessary phone calls and clear his desk. By the very next day, he and DeFries – now an instant new-made Army officer – are off to Maryland to begin taking charge of the Federal nuclear research lab Manning’s been given to command.

He doesn’t pause at Walter Reed Army Hospital first for a routine physical checkup, either, just to be sure he’s fit for duty. Nor, most strangely, does the Chief of Staff or anyone else in the Army bother to insist that Manning undergo an exam before he begins his new assignment, even though you would think the state of his health would be everybody’s first concern.

So why is everyone in such a hurry? What’s so unique and pressing about this particular task that the Army would find it necessary to look outside its own ranks and reach into Congress for a one-time officer with heart problems to place in charge here? And what military necessity could possibly be so urgent as to convince Manning to abandon his constituents and go rushing off to Maryland to assume this post?

We aren’t told.

It’s not because America is losing World War II and has its back to the wall. In the world of the story, it’s as late as 1943, and the United States, while continuing to supply England with ships and planes to keep her fighting, still isn’t an active combatant in the war.

In fact, rather than being immediate and pressing, the research the lab is doing into an Atom Bomb seems prospective and hypothetical. Things here at the lab are handled in a leisurely and informal way. Ordinary military discipline isn’t observed. And there doesn’t appear to be anyone from outside overseeing what they’re doing.

The narrator says:

“We were searching, there in the laboratory in Maryland, for a way to use U235 in a controlled explosion. We had a vision of a one-ton bomb that would be a whole air raid in itself, a single explosion that would flatten out an entire industrial center. ...

“The problem was, strangely enough, to find an explosive which would be weak enough to blow up only one county at a time, and stable enough to blow up only on request. If we could devise a really practical rocket fuel at the same time, one capable of driving a war rocket at a thousand miles an hour, or more, then we would be in a position to make most anybody say ‘uncle’ to Uncle Sam.”

But despite this happy dream of a war rocket armed with the Bomb and America with its foot on the neck of the world, the development of a reliable and controlled A-Bomb eludes them. DeFries says: “We fiddled around with it all the rest of 1943 and well into 1944.”

But if this is the case, what *was* the rush to get Manning on the job?

Eventually, however, the fiddling around has to come to an end. They’re forced to conclude “that there existed not even a remote possibility at the time of utilizing U235 as an explosive,” and to abandon their quest for a convenient one-county-size nuclear Bomb.

All is not lost, however. It isn’t necessary to close down the atomic weapons program with its unlimited budget and Manning doesn’t have to admit defeat and go back to Congress. Instead, he’s able to recognize the potential for an even more awful weapon in another of the projects under his authority.

In taking command of the lab, Manning has inherited the ongoing research of a Dr. Estelle Karst into the medical application of radioactive isotopes. Dr. Karst has no use for Manning and the work he’s doing and complains to him that her investigations have been hampered by lack of access to Dr. Obre, a spectroscopist whose services are being monopolized by the Bomb development project. She declares to Manning that Manning is “a warmonger” because he cares more about killing than curing.

She could be right about that, too. Manning was formerly one of the Army’s top experts in poison gas – the horror weapon of World War I, eventually banned – and when he familiarizes himself with her work, and sees the radioactive dust her program produces glistening in the air and hears of fish kills in Chesapeake Bay from her waste water, he gets a gleam in his eye. Saying, “I think we may turn up a number of interesting things,” he takes over Dr. Karst’s research and pours men and resources into it.

Manning will demonstrate the gratitude he feels toward Dr. Karst for the preparatory work she’s done by naming the radiological weapon he develops “Karst-Obre dust.” And after it has been used to kill every living thing in Berlin and Dr. Karst commits suicide, he’ll express his regret to DeFries.

“I wish,” Manning added slowly, “that I could explain to her why we *had* to do it.”

If Manning never lets Dr. Karst know why it’s necessary to commandeer her medical dust and alter it into a weapon of mass extermination, neither does he report to his superiors about what he’s up to. The Army Chief of Staff may have set him up here in the atomic

research lab, given him all the money and resources he could ask for, and put him to work making a Bomb, but when Manning closes the Bomb project down and begins making Karst-Obre dust instead, he neglects to inform anyone that he's doing it.

Nobody keeping an eye on the program. No limit on funds. And a colonel with a secret weapon and no sense of obligation to follow the chain of command. What an unusual way to run an army!

It isn't that Manning entertains no doubts. At one point, he declares, "John, I wish that radioactivity had never been discovered."

And the narrator says, "Manning told me that he had once seriously considered, in the middle of the night, recommending that every single person, including himself, who knew the Karst-Obre technique, be put to death in the interests of all civilization."

But DeFries can't understand these apprehensions. To him, the dust is just another weapon, only more potent, and we're the ones who have it.

He says to Manning, "I still don't see what you are fretting about, Colonel. If the stuff is as good as you say it is, you've done just exactly what you set out to do – develop a weapon which would give the United States protection against aggression."

Now, is *that* what DeFries thought they've been doing? If it is, then why didn't he just tell us so at the time Manning was given his assignment? More to the point, if Manning's goal all along has been to protect the United States from aggression, what on earth has he been doing trying to develop a one-ton A-Bomb capable of laying flat an entire industrial city?

It's no wonder that Manning tells DeFries he's stupid.

Manning spells out for his typist, go-fer, and apologist that this weapon is a loaded gun held to the head of every man, woman, and child on the planet. And if any nation should use it, every nation will have to have it, and nobody will be safe.

Manning says: "Once the secret is out – and it will be out if we ever use the stuff! – the whole world will be comparable to a room full of men, each armed with a loaded .45. They can't get out of the room and each one is dependent on the good will of every other one to stay alive. All offense and no defense. See what I mean?"

So concerned is Manning that two weeks after this, he calls the Army Chief of Staff and tells him that he needs to speak to the President. And he won't tell his superior why.



Alexei Panshin.
Photo by Frank Lunney, April
2008.

If it should seem out of line for someone who's only a colonel to insist on bypassing the chain of command to talk directly to the President of the United States, we have to understand that Manning is a special case. He reminds the Chief of Staff: "I took this job under the condition that I was to have a free hand."

We've heard nothing of this previously. It seems to mean that from the outset Manning has not only had no explicit orders, no one to report to, and no ceiling on expenses, but even a guarantee that he can do as he pleases. No wonder he leaped to take the job. Under those circumstances, it might almost make sense for him to think he could see the President alone if he should want to.

If this reminder of the autonomy he's been given weren't enough, Manning plays again on his personal dominance over the Chief of Staff. He says: "Don't go brass hat on me. I knew you when you were a plebe."

This suggestion that the Chief of Staff should ignore the difference in their rank and do as Manning says is a reminder of the long-ago situation when Manning was an upperclassman at West Point and the Chief of Staff was a first-year man and Manning could make him snap to.

We aren't permitted to hear what the Chief of Staff has to say in response to this impertinence and insubordination. But it doesn't seem to be to inform Manning that he's forthwith relieved of his command and should hold himself ready for court martial.

Rather, he responds by doing exactly as Manning desires, running his request for a personal meeting with the President upstairs to his own superior, who just might be able to arrange it. And what he has to say to him is apparently so compelling that within the hour the Secretary of War himself is calling up Manning on the phone.

We never learn what the Secretary has to say, either. We're just allowed to overhear Manning telling him, "All I want is thirty minutes alone with the President. If nothing comes of it, no harm has been done. If I convince him, you will know all about it."

This is really remarkable stuff – an Army colonel telling his ultimate superior, the Secretary of War, to get him an appointment with the President of the United States, but refusing to tell him what for. If he can't convince the President of what he has in mind, the Secretary doesn't need to know any more about it. And if he does convince the President, what it's about will be revealed to the Secretary in good time.

Underlings don't usually talk to their superiors this way and get away with it, yet somehow this wide-eyed insolence is enough to convince the Secretary of War to place himself at the service of his subordinate and use his influence to set up the appointment that Manning desires. Even more marvelously, the White House is so responsive to the urgency and persuasiveness of the Secretary when he calls that it agrees to give this obscure congressman/colonel exactly what he's seeking – a thirty-minute meeting alone with the President with no indication of what it might be for. And as soon as tomorrow!

This readiness to cooperate with Manning is all the more extraordinary since he will later tell DeFries that the President has a nose like a bloodhound: “In his forty years of practical politics he has seen more phonies than you or I will ever see and each one was trying to sell him something. He can tell one in the dark.”

DeFries waits patiently outside the Oval Office while Manning’s half-hour one-on-one with the President stretches into two-and-a-half hours. In view of the qualms Manning has expressed to DeFries, we can imagine that he’s been unburdening himself to the President, telling him about this horrible new weapon he’s made which is so awful in its consequence and so irrevocable that he hasn’t even dared to mention its existence to his superiors.

Instead, however, when DeFries is called within at last, it’s to be told that in keeping with Manning’s recommendation the dust is going to be given to the British to use to end their war with Germany. And DeFries has been chosen to take it to them because he knows about it but understands nothing of how it was made.

It seems that far from working to convince the President that the dust must never be used, Manning has spent his time talking him into injecting this new super-weapon into the European conflict the United States still has no official part in. The price of our intervention will be that we get to dictate the terms of peace to the Germans and British.

In short, it seems that Manning’s intent all along in insisting on speaking privately with the President hasn’t been to spare the Army Chief of Staff and the Secretary of War unnecessary and intolerable knowledge. Rather, it’s been to evade any intervening authority, including theirs, which might be inclined to stand in the way of his determination to see K-O dust – this weapon he’s said he should be put to death for knowing how to make, this weapon he’s said must never be used – employed as an instrument of war.

And he’s right to anticipate that such opposition would have been forthcoming, since later the Secretary of Labor will declare: “The dust must never be used again. Had I known about it soon enough, it would never have been used on Berlin.”

But Manning has an uncanny ability to operate the system without ever being held to account for it by acting as though its structure and rules are going to be observed by everyone but him, while somehow convincing people in positions of authority to order the things he wants done.

And whether it’s through the warmth of his smile or his possession of the secret power to cloud men’s minds, in the space of just two-and-a-half hours alone with a President of the United States who knows a phony with a dubious scheme when he sees one, he’s been able to mesmerize him into not only ignoring established governmental and military procedure and trashing the Constitution, but also, more practically, into foregoing the counsel of all his usual associates and advisors in order to introduce a hideous and destabilizing new

weapon into someone else's war and send Capt. John DeFries on a special mission to see that it's done.

Part Two: Using the Dust

4. The Death of Berlin

It might be possible to make a case that up until this point DeFries bears only limited responsibility for the events that have been taking place. To be sure, he was the leading member of the political committee which, snowed by Manning's charm, made the mistake of choosing him as a reform candidate for Congress. DeFries has served as a minder of detail for Manning both in Congress and in the Army. And he did stage manage Manning's successful re-election campaign in 1944 from his Army office, even though Manning has come to think of his Congressional career as old hat and it is against the law for DeFries to have done it.

Perhaps the most damning thing he's done is to speak up at the right wrong moment about the fish kills in Chesapeake Bay and set Manning to thinking of Dr. Karst's radioactive medical dust as a potential weapon of war.

Now, however, by agreeing to serve as the personal agent who carries the dust to England, DeFries compromises himself beyond all question. He joins the conspiracy. He becomes an active participant in an unconstitutional scheme.

It is a decision that will have fatal personal consequences. While "sitting on that cargo of dust" in the course of delivering Manning's weapon to the British, DeFries is exposed to "cumulative minimal radioactive poisoning" which in time is going to kill him.

It seems odd that something like that could be allowed to happen. For one thing, it means that the scientists and technicians who've been manufacturing and storing the dust haven't had sense enough to put it in shielded containers. And neither have they kept DeFries from harm by issuing him a protective suit and armor of the sort they habitually wear when dealing with radioactive materials. They haven't so much as pinned a strip of film to his lapel to fog up and reveal exposure to radiation.

Who was asleep on the job?

It's all the stranger since DeFries himself certainly ought to know better. He's told us over and over again just how toxic the stuff is and he's fully aware of the need for safeguard against it. We've seen him suiting up before entering Dr. Karst's lab, and listened to him discussing protective gear as a possible defense against the dust with Manning.

So where was Manning in all this? Why wasn't he looking out for DeFries?

As it is, having been given responsibility for transporting the weapon to England, DeFries forgets everything he knows and doesn't trouble himself to ask anyone what precautions

he ought to observe in handling the dust. Instead, he watches over it like a first-time babysitter. If we take him literally, he actually spends a week sitting on top of the canisters.

He must *really* be stupid – and he will pay for it.

On the other hand, just like the Army Chief of Staff pushing Manning's case with the Secretary of War, and then the Secretary of War working to convince the White House that it ought to give Manning a private meeting with the President as early as tomorrow, while DeFries is carrying out Manning's mission, he's temporarily granted something of Manning's magical ability to turn the head of higher authority.

After he's arrived safely in England with his cargo of dust, DeFries is commanded to appear at a Royal audience. But he won't go. He won't leave the dust. Instead, he's called upon by a Member of Parliament and a "Mr. Windsor" – whom we are to take as the Prime Minister and King.

They ask him questions and DeFries answers them as best he can considering that ignorance is one of his major credentials for being here. Again, we aren't told what either the questions or the answers are. Nevertheless, this Army captain must have managed to be persuasive because the next thing we know the British are ready to use the diabolical new weapon, even though to do so means agreeing to American terms of settlement of the war.

Surrender to the US, that is.

The Prime Minister's government will fall over this. And the King will violate constitutional precedent. Nonetheless, it seems that both men must have agreed to the plan. We just aren't allowed to hear them doing it or why they do it.

After British warnings of direness-to-come and German failure to capitulate, thirteen British bombers – a strange and ill-omened number – leave England bound for Berlin armed with the dust. At Manning's request, DeFries is aboard one of them as an official observer, as though it were somehow possible for him to become neutral and objective once again after all he's done to make the bombing happen.

The planes approach Berlin from different angles and slice the city like a pizza, dropping canister after canister of Karst-Obre dust as they go. The canisters are armed with explosive devices to disperse the dust as widely as possible.

These prototype dirty bombs leave the streets and structures of the city standing intact. But so lethal are they that every living thing in Berlin is killed: Men, women, and children – guilty and innocent alike. Dogs and cats. Parakeets and pigeons. Rats and mice. Earthworms, ants, and butterflies. All of them dead.

The narrator doesn't tell us how many casualties this amounts to – but at the time that

Heinlein wrote “Solution Unsatisfactory” in 1940, the human population of Berlin was nearly four-and-a-half million people. And every last one of them imagined as dying from the dust.

As an index of the magnitude of the death toll resulting from this fictional bombing raid, when the United States dropped two Atomic Bombs on Japan in August 1945, the targets would be substantially smaller cities and the human deaths far fewer. A sober latter-day estimate suggests that 66,000 people were killed in Hiroshima, and another 39,000 in Nagasaki. In both cases, three-quarters of the population would survive, at least for the time being. With more than forty times as many deaths as from both Atom Bombs put together, the radioactive sterilization of Berlin in this story has to rank as the greatest atrocity in human history.

DeFries may have transported the devil dust to England, helped persuade British leaders to use I, and borne witness to the dropping of the canisters over Berlin. But he doesn't immediately appreciate the overwhelming, disproportionate, and irrevocable nature of the human catastrophe he's been party to.

In contrast, Dr. Estelle Karst understands as soon as the dust has been used that Col. Manning has abused her trust and perverted her research in the medical use of radioactive isotopes. Her choice of the dust to commit suicide is not an accident or a convenience. It's an act of moral protest.

The awfulness of what has happened only becomes apparent to DeFries after he has seen films showing the death of Berlin. He says, “You have not seen them; they never were made public, but they were of great use in convincing the other nations of the world that peace was a good idea.”

There's a gaping hole in the narrative at this point, all the more significant for being completely unacknowledged. What was American public reaction to the overnight death of four-and-a-half million people in Germany?

What did the newspapers and the radio pundits have to say about the British acting in such an overwhelming and barbaric fashion against the civilian population of an enemy city? Did they criticize them for having done it?

When did the American public learn that the weapon was actually a US invention, and England had only been given one-time use of it in order to test it on Berlin? Did the President speak up then and take personal responsibility for having sent them the dust and talking them into using it?

How did the Secretary of War and the Army Chief of Staff react when they found out that they'd allowed themselves to be deceived, used, and outflanked by Col. Manning?

And was there protest when the public discovered that it wasn't going to be allowed to see what this new American secret weapon had done to Berlin, but films were being shown to

people in other countries as a warning not to get out of line?

We're never told.

What we do learn from DeFries is that he himself is a changed man for having witnessed those reconnaissance films. They make an impression on him that watching canisters of K-O dust being dropped one by one from a bomber at night had not.

In the language of Christian belief which Heinlein absorbed as a child but ordinarily didn't use in his science fiction stories, he has DeFries say, "...So far as I am concerned, I left what soul I had in the projection room and I have not had one since."

Heed what the man is telling us: For all his superficial appearance of artless speaking, he has no soul.

If he had told us so at the outset, rather than at this late moment, it most certainly would have had an effect on what we've made of all he has to say. As it is, his lack of a soul – or lack of a conscience – might go a way toward explaining all the gaps, contradictions and unlikelihoods we've taken note of in this narrative.

5. Secretary of Dust

After the dusting of Berlin, Germany is ready to capitulate.

Britain is slower to surrender.

The immediate assumption of the British people is that the weapon which has ended the war is their weapon, and they're eager to make Germany pay for the years of bombing they've had to endure. Consequently, when the Prime Minister reveals the private bargain he's struck with the United States for its loan of the dust, his government falls.

However, British reaction turns around after the King, rather than uttering words that have been handed to him to read from the throne as is customary, speaks out on his own authority.

Once more we aren't allowed to hear what someone actually has to say at a crucial turn, only to accept what takes place as a result, even though what happens may be unlikely. In this case, the King advocates surrender. And so persuasive is he that his voice "sold the idea to England and a national coalition government was formed" for the purpose of yielding British sovereignty.

Lucky thing for them, too. Until the British unite in a national consensus to throw up their hands, Manning is prepared to convince them to do it by taking out London, with the prospective death of another eight-and-a-half million people, including his sometime allies, the Prime Minister and King.

Or, in the more delicate way in which DeFries puts it:

“I don’t know whether we would have dusted London to enforce our terms or not; Manning thinks we would have done so.”

What Manning thinks has now become significant. After Berlin, his power is greatly increased. Instead of being thanked for his services, given a retirement promotion to general, and sent back to Congress out of harm’s way, a place is made for him at the President’s side as a chief advisor and spokesman.

Once again, his right-hand man is brought along with him. Or, as DeFries tells us:

“By this time, Manning was an unofficial member of the Cabinet; ‘Secretary of Dust,’ the President called him in one of his rare jovial moods. As for me, I attended Cabinet meetings, too.”



Alexei Panshin goes to the movies.
Photo by Frank Lunney, April 2008.

Speaking in his new capacity, Manning completely dominates his first Cabinet meeting. As “Secretary of Dust,” it’s his estimate that only a small window of time exists – ninety days or less – during which the United States has the advantage of sole possession of the new weapon. He proposes that all aircraft around the world not in the service of the United States Army be grounded, including American commercial and civilian planes.

He says, “After that we can deal with complete world disarmament and permanent methods of control.”

When it is objected that this would be unconstitutional, he answers: “The issue is sharp, gentlemen, and we might as well drag it out in the open. We can be dead men, with everything in due order, constitutional, and technically correct; or we can do what has to be done, stay alive, and try to straighten out the legal aspects later.”

The Secretary of Labor – the newest and least powerful Cabinet member, but the most vocal among them now in resisting Manning’s appeals to fear and urgency – concedes that control of the dust is going to be necessary. However, he says:

“But where I differ from the Colonel is in the method. What he proposes is a military dictatorship imposed by force on the whole world. ‘Admit it, Colonel. Isn’t that what you are proposing?’

“Manning did not dodge it. ‘That is what I am proposing.’”

Let's not dodge this one, either. Instead of hurrying on just as though nothing remarkable has been said, the way the story does, let's consider what is happening for a second.

This is yet another unlikely event we're being asked to accept, another whopper like believing that an Army colonel could win a private appointment with the President of the United States for tomorrow while declining to tell anyone what it's about.

Now we're being asked to imagine that everyone at a Cabinet meeting has been told to shove over and an extra chair has been pulled up to the table so that this same Army colonel can sit in. And not merely as a guest, either. The President introduces him to the various Cabinet members by telling them to consider Manning a *de facto* Secretary on a par with themselves.

What's more, this new unofficial Secretary is given the floor. The President of the United States, apparently in complete agreement with everything he has to say, is content to sit back passively through the rest of the meeting and "let Manning bear the brunt of the argument."

Speaking on behalf of the President, this colonel-who-is-more-than-a-colonel informs the Cabinet Secretaries that since the United States has sole possession of the dust for the moment, US policy, effective immediately, is going to be to violate the Constitution at home and to impose a military dictatorship on the world.

Even if we grant Manning all the unique privilege we're told he now has in the story, the course he is indicating is such a radical break with the usual assumptions of American politics that we have to wonder at the temperate way in which his words are received.

As a reality check, imagine the reaction of the Cabinet in 1945 if Gen. Leslie Groves, the Army officer in charge of the actual development of the Atomic Bomb and a man not known for his modesty, had presumed to speak to the assembled Secretaries in such an arrogant, presumptuous, and authoritarian a manner as this. At the very least, I think he'd have instantly lost all credibility and that the good sense, if not the sanity, of the President would have been called into question for sponsoring this kind of power trip.

Even within the much more accommodating confines of "Solution Unsatisfactory," we have to wonder why the Secretary of War – whose equivalent today would be the Secretary of Defense – doesn't speak up.

I mean, there he is, seated across the conference table from Manning at the left hand of the President. The military is his area of responsibility. This officer ought to be under his authority. And not only has Col. Manning already broken the oath he's sworn to support and defend the Constitution and is proposing to do it some more, he's betrayed him personally.

Manning has developed a radiological weapon of unprecedented deadliness at the Army

lab he commands without informing his superiors of what he is doing. By some arcane means, he has managed to persuade the Army Chief of Staff and the Secretary of War to arrange an urgent private meeting for him with the President, while refusing to tell them why such a meeting is either necessary or appropriate. Then, over their heads, he has convinced the President to introduce this horrendous new weapon into the ongoing war between Britain and Germany, with the slaughter of millions of civilians.

As his reward for this usurpation of power, Col. Manning has been granted informal Cabinet status, and now speaks on behalf of the President. It's his assertion that America's enemies – and maybe its friends, as well – are on the verge of launching an attack on the United States with radioactive dust of their own. The only way to be secure in this brave new world of Manning's making is for the US to use its advantage while it has it and impose military dictatorship on the world. Right now.

Under circumstances like these, you'd think that the Secretary of War would have a question or two for him. As one possibility, he might ask Manning just who he has in mind for the job of world dictator?

But in telling about this crucial Cabinet meeting, the narrator doesn't even so much as mention the Secretary of War. Maybe he couldn't make the meeting and they had to go on without him, or perhaps he just had nothing to say that day.

What DeFries does recall happening in the wake of Manning's confirmation that he is advocating the imposition of a global military dictatorship is a counterproposal from the Secretary of Labor. He suggests that the present moment of opportunity be used to establish a worldwide democratic commonwealth, and then control of the dust be turned over to the new world government.

But Manning replies that this isn't feasible. While he personally would lay down his life in order to accomplish global democracy, most of the world has no experience of democracy nor any love for it.

He says:

“It's preposterous to talk about a world democracy for many years to come. If you turn the secret of the dust over to such a body, you will be arming the world to commit suicide.”

Manning then sets forth a scenario of an inevitable series of back-and-forth dustings which will kill three-quarters of the world's population and reduce human culture to the level of peasants living in villages.

If previously it has been the territory of the Secretary of War that Manning has usurped, it's now the area of responsibility of the Secretary of State he's attempting to muscle in on. Up to this point, however, the Secretary of State has been silent, too.

DeFries tells us, somewhat patronizingly, that he was “really a fine old gentleman, and not

stupid, but he was slow to assimilate new ideas.”

Now this sweet old fudd speaks up on behalf of a policy of isolation, as though he were an old-time backwoods politician addressing a bunch of yahoos from a stump rather than the man in charge of American foreign policy now faced with the diplomatic challenge of a lifetime. He suggests that we just “keep the dust as our own secret, go our own way, and let the rest of the world look out for itself. That is the only program that fits our traditions.”

But Manning dismisses this course of action, too. The research that other countries are doing – or might do – into the new weapon won’t permit the luxury of going our own way. What if it had been Germany who’d made and used the dust first instead of the US? They might have done something awful with it.

He declares that “it is the best opinion of all the experts that we can’t maintain control of this secret except by rigid policing” – just as though there were no problems with the words “best opinion,” “all the experts,” “maintain control,” “secret,” and “rigid policing.”

In the event, neither the Secretary of Labor’s internationalism nor the Secretary of State’s isolationism has a chance. The President’s mind is already made up in favor of Manning’s fear of Karst-Obre dust in the hands of others who might be as ready to use it as the two of them have been.

With two more unconstitutional moves, the President declares martial law in the United States and, in what is called a “Peace Proposal,” informs the leaders of every other nation that they must disarm themselves. As a start, all airplanes capable of crossing the Atlantic must be delivered into US hands and destroyed. Failure to comply with this will be considered an act of war.

Or, as DeFries translates this diplomatic ultimatum, the American answer to the touchy problem of a roomful of men all armed with .45s is, “*Throw down your guns, boys; we’ve got the drop on you*”

6. The Four-Days War

There are three gunslingers in particular that the narrator singles out as posing potential threat to the United States – England, Japan, and the Eurasian Union.

However, America’s friend and ally, England is no longer a problem. It’s already in the act of throwing down its guns, thanks to the King’s radio address.

(Unless, of course, like me you’re inclined to believe the persistent rumor that a canister of K-O dust went missing during the bombing raid on Berlin – I mean, all those planes, all those canisters, all that confusion – and only got found again afterward. And the British, not wanting to cause a fuss over nothing, were too polite to mention they had it.)

As for the Japanese, they may dismiss the lethal power of the dust as just a story, and they may be convinced that they cannot be defeated, but it's possible to bully them into submission by pressing the right psychological buttons.

DeFries tells us:

“The negotiations were conducted very quietly indeed, but our fleet was halfway from Pearl Harbor to Kobe, loaded with enough dust to sterilize their six biggest cities, before they were concluded. Do you know what did it? This never hit the newspapers but it was the wording of the pamphlets we proposed to scatter before dusting.”

Now, what do you suppose could have been said in those pamphlets – and, more important, with what spin? – that wouldn't just anger the Japanese, but which having been shown to them would be sufficient to make them instantly acknowledge their inferiority and bow low in submission? It must have been something devastating.

This leaves those unknown men who've been running the Eurasian Union since the death (on this alternate timeline) of Joseph Stalin in 1941. They've put Lenin and Stalin behind them. And they've held their country out of the war between England and Germany. Now they're quick to agree to American terms. They declare themselves willing to cooperate in every way with the President's ultimatum.

But they're only trying to trick the United States. Instead of delivering their long-range aircraft to a field in Kansas to be parked alongside the planes already surrendered by Germany and England, as they've been directed to do, they launch a series of bombing raids over the Arctic against New York, Washington, and other cities with dust of their own.

Exactly how successful these attacks were, we are never told. DeFries says there's no point in repeating what's been in the newspapers. But we're assured that the Four-Days War was a near thing which America should have lost – “and we would have, had it not been for an unlikely combination of luck, foresight and good management.”

How close did the United States come to losing the Four-Days War? At least some of the planes that failed to land in Kansas made it through to New York with radioactive dust. DeFries tells us “we lost over eight hundred thousand people in Manhattan alone.” Enemy planes must also have been successful in dropping dust on Washington since he says in passing that “Congress reconvened at the temporary capital in St. Louis.”

But the Eurasian Union is promptly paid back for what it's done. The US sterilizes the cities of Moscow, Vladivostok, and Irkutsk, with a combined population of another four-and-a-half million people. And, just that fast, the war is over.

The part played by luck in America's victory is that one of the planes sent to bomb Moscow went off course and arbitrarily picked the city of Ryazan as the place to drop its dust instead. Completely by chance, this industrial center turned out to be the location of

“the laboratory and plant which produced the only supply of military radioactives in the Eurasian Union,” so the Eurasians are unable to make any more dust.

Very good fortune, that. Like firing a gun randomly into the air and having the bullet fall to earth and kill a cat. And not just any cat, either – the King of the Cats. Right between the eyes.

As for foresight and good management, that’s Manning covertly at work. It seems that one more time, in his role as Secretary of Dust, his authority has grown.

DeFries says: “Manning never got credit for it, but it is evident to me that he anticipated the possibility of something like the Four-Days War and prepared for it in a dozen different devious ways.”

Manning or somebody ought to have been anticipating an attack on the US since once again, as on other occasions in America’s history, some of them alluded to in “Solution Unsatisfactory,” an incident has been deliberately provoked in order to provide justification for the United States to go to war.

The Eurasians were goaded into fighting.

Just consider: One of the reasons America had for dropping the Bomb on Japan to end World War II was to make an impression on the Soviet Union. And enough of an impression was made to set off the Cold War.

Imagine if you will that in 1945 the United States had gone on to order the Russians either to disarm or suffer the consequences and called this a “peace proposal” as in this story. An ultimatum like that would have immediately triggered a Hot War exactly as it does here.

Not only are the Eurasians deliberately pushed beyond their tolerance by the demand that they surrender all their long range aircraft to the US and then disarm themselves, the door for their attack has been left invitingly open. Eurasia’s bombers aren’t collected and destroyed on Eurasian soil. Instead, they’re pointed in the direction of Kansas and not inspected before they go.

No wonder the attack which follows has been anticipated. Air traffic in the United States is at a halt and military planes are standing by ready to intercept the Eurasian bombers and shoot most of them down before they can reach their targets.

America is also poised to make a counterattack. Vladivostok is a long way from anywhere; Irkutsk is off at the foot of Lake Baikal in Siberia; and it’s possible to get lost while trying to fly to Moscow and wind up in Ryazan. In order to successfully launch immediate coordinated strikes on targets like these, distant from the continental United States and widely separated from each other, advance planning and logistical work must have been done.

If we call preparation to meet the Eurasian attack and then strike back decisively “foresight,” the “good management” part is the holding of American casualties to an acceptable minimum.

New York City is largely empty when it is hit. A completely unfounded rumor of bubonic plague has been circulated and everybody able to do it has deserted the city. DeFries has no idea how so effective a whispering campaign was organized and carried out, but he gives Manning credit for having arranged it. And with such perfect timing that most people escape the Eurasian dust.

As for Washington, thanks to Manning’s doing, Congress has gone into recess. The President has granted a ten-day leave of absence to the civil service (an authority I wasn’t aware he had) and then left town himself to make a sudden political jaunt through the South. The only people who are still at home to receive the attack are the permanent population of the city.

DeFries suggests that it must have been Manning who put the thought of going off on a political swing in the President’s head. He couldn’t have split the scene to save his own skin: “It is inconceivable that the President would have left Washington to escape personal danger.”

That puts a nice face on it, but it’s bushwah.

Since the dusting of Berlin, international tensions have been running high. The President has declared martial law in the US and told all other governments that they must surrender immediately or fight the United States. As a precautionary measure, he’s closed down official Washington and sent it to visit the folks back home. The American military is on alert, anticipating imminent war with Eurasia.

This is no time for kissing babies, and Manning hasn’t suddenly turned into the President’s chief political advisor. He’s the Secretary of Dust. And when it’s the Secretary of Dust who whispers in the President’s ear that now might be a good time to pay a visit to Florida, the President doesn’t need to hear it twice. He’s on the next train south.

Anything else you may have been told is just a cover story.

It only takes four days for the war to be over – one day for the Eurasian attack, a day for assessment of the damage, American counterattack on the third day, and Eurasian surrender on the fourth. Very shortly, the President can join the other survivors at the new temporary capital in St. Louis.

So, how great has the cost been to America from this invited catastrophe?

With no newspapers to consult to find out what DeFries doesn’t tell us because it’s been in the papers, it’s impossible to say with any certainty. But the largest city in the United

States, hub of its commerce and center of its publishing and broadcasting industries, is now uninhabitable, and the nation's capital and all its buildings and records have been made inaccessible for years to come. The focal points of American life have been attacked, normal existence has been shattered, and refugees are everywhere.

If eight hundred thousand people are dead in Manhattan alone, then at least several million Americans must have been killed in all the cities struck – 666 times as many as the three thousand people who died in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Without luck, foresight, and good management, it would have been far worse.

Part Three: Manning and DeFries

7. Mr. Commissioner Manning

World order has now been re-established, at least for the moment.

However, a horrific new weapon has been unleashed, the world is no longer the same, and the problem originally set forth by Manning to DeFries still remains to be answered: How is Karst-Obre dust – which any nation can make, and which cannot be defended against – to be kept under control?

The Secretary of State's suggestion that the US should hold the dust a secret and go its own way has been overleaped by events. K-O dust has now been used and used again. It's no secret any more.

The immediate answer America arrives at to the problem of controlling other people's use of the dust – *“Throw down your guns, boys; we've got the drop on you”* – is only a temporary expedient at best. It can't be relied on to work for very long, as the Eurasian attack demonstrates.

So, who or what is to be in charge of overseeing the monstrous and deadly Karst-Obre dust and protecting the population of the world from it?

The Secretary of Labor's vision of a worldwide democratic commonwealth of nations controlling the weapon has been rejected. Most of the world simply isn't ready to handle that much self-responsibility.

Neither are the people of the United States. The President rules out unilateral US possession of the weapon because he doesn't think America is up to the strain.

As DeFries puts it:

“We were about to hand over to future governments of the United States the power to turn the entire globe into an empire, our empire. And it was the sober opinion of the President

that our characteristic and beloved democratic culture would not stand up under the temptation. Imperialism degrades both oppressor and oppressed.”

The solution that is arrived at is to establish a special body above and beyond all national governments – a “Commission of World Safety” – whose purpose is to control the dust benevolently. The Commissioners receive lifetime appointments to their post and take an oath to “*preserve the peace of the world.*”

The Commissioners are to be backed up by a “Peace Patrol.” The idea for this body – and perhaps for the Commission, as well, since one depends upon the other – is Manning’s:

“Manning envisioned a corps of world policemen, an aristocracy which, through selection and indoctrination, could be trusted with unlimited power over the life of every man, every woman, every child on the face of the globe.”

These patrolmen are to serve in any place except the country of their origin: “They were to be a deliberately expatriated band of Janissaries, with an obligation only to the Commission and the race, and welded together with a carefully nurtured esprit de corps.”

Working together, the President and Manning personally select the Commissioners and the initial members of the Peace Patrol. The very first Commissioner to be chosen, the chief amongst them, is (did you guess?) Clyde Manning. In yet another effortless promotion, “Colonel Manning became Mr. Commissioner Manning” – yes, *that* Mr. Commissioner Manning.

As chutzpah goes, this might be compared to Dick Cheney being assigned the task of choosing the best candidate to run for Vice President of the United States, looking the country over and picking Richard B. Cheney for the job.



Alexei Panshin.
Photo by Frank Lunney, April 2008.

Were it not for his self-selection, Manning would be an unlikely choice for Commissioner.

It was, after all, Manning who conceived and developed Karst-Obre dust, and men who invent a weapon for the military aren’t ordinarily allowed a determining say in what happens to it after it leaves their hands. They’re tech people not decision makers.

But Manning has gotten past this limit by inducing his superiors to aid him in circumventing themselves and then by putting the whammy on the President of the United States. Though he says that if the dust is ever used the world will be destabilized,

he's insisted that dust be dropped on Berlin anyway and been given his wish. The result is millions dead in Germany, millions more dead in the US, and still more millions dead in the Eurasian Union – as many as eleven million people in all.

Manning was prepared for the death toll to be much higher.

The casualties in New York would have been worse if that Black Death rumor hadn't worked so well to empty Manhattan, and if the fleeing people hadn't shown such admirable restraint while waiting in line to use the bridges and tunnels. And had it not been for that lucky dusting of Ryazan, millions more Americans would have died and the US would have lost the war.

Another eight-and-a-half million people could have been killed if England hadn't decided to surrender, and London had been taken out as an object lesson. And if the Pacific Fleet had sailed on to Japan to dust its six largest cities, a further fifteen million people might have died.

Apparently, Manning understood that the initial death toll from use of his weapon might be as many as forty million people or even more, and accepted the possibility. What's more, he's foretold the death by dust of three-quarters of the population of the earth if his plan for a military dictatorship imposed by force isn't adopted.

Not only is everybody in the world already suffering nightmares thanks to Manning, it seems that Manning is capable of killing every one of us in order to save us all from the genie he's let out of the bottle.

True, in his new role as First Commissioner, he will be restrained by the oath he swears to preserve the peace of the world. But such an oath is subject to interpretation. He's also a man who has been known to take an oath and then break it.

In view of Manning's responsibility for the existence of Karst-Obre dust, his willingness to use it and indifference to how many casualties it causes, and his personal history of insubordination, we have to ask whether someone like him, who looks on the dust as a loaded gun held to the head of every man, woman, and child on the planet and is prepared to use it that way, is the best possible choice to be the person in charge of worldwide oversight of this weapon?

Would the US Senate be likely to confirm the nomination of this man to be Head Fox in Charge of All Chickens? He's stirred up some bad feelings.

Manning has double-crossed powerful people in the course of his rise to power. By ignoring standard operating procedure and the chain of command, he's offended and angered others. Because of him, millions of people are now dead and millions more like DeFries have been condemned to die a lingering death from cumulative minimal radiation poisoning if not from cancer. Life as usual has been radically disrupted, untold numbers of people have been displaced from their homes, and billions of dollars have been lost.

Manning has to have made enemies along the way.

By this time, he must be a highly controversial figure, this Army officer detached from his command. Or is he really a congressman? This unofficial Cabinet officer. This mysterious man who lurks in the President's attic and creeps forth to whisper dire things in his ear.

Whether the colonel who invented the dust and then pressed for its first use has any business acting as Secretary of Dust, let alone being made World Czar of Dust, ought to be under question. Manning may not have gotten the credit he deserves for the dozen devious things he did to prepare for the Four-Days War, but he's in a perfect position now to be given the blame for anything and everything that's gone wrong at home and abroad since the war between England and Germany suddenly got so out of hand.

Can he escape all responsibility for the actions he's taken?

Under circumstances like these, it seems unlikely that Clyde "Devil Dust" Manning's confirmation as the most powerful person on Earth could have been nearly as uneventful a matter as the narrator would have us believe.

This is one more crucial transition that DeFries slides past.

When Manning moves on to his new post as Commissioner, DeFries goes with him yet again.

From his beginnings as just another high school teacher with an interest in politics, DeFries has now traveled to Congress with Manning to be his secretary, followed him into the Army to serve as his adjutant, and sat at his elbow in Cabinet meetings. Each new place that Manning has gone, DeFries has been right there beside him.

It's not clear what special skills he possesses that make him so useful, but his continuing presence appears to somehow be essential to Manning.

Nothing is ever said in the story about the home lives of these two men. Is either of them married? With all the job changes they make, did their kids complain about being forced to switch schools again?

Or perhaps they're bachelors, which would explain why both of them are able to pack up and move at a moment's notice. We might even imagine their living arrangement as resembling that of lifetime FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and his Assistant Director, Clyde Tolson, who shared a house together and were buried in adjoining graves when they died.

8. Who's on Top?

Even after the establishment of the new oversight agencies, it still remains an open

question who actually controls the dust.

Is it the Commission of World Safety and that new aristocracy, the Peace Patrol? Or are they just a front for the United States of America?

From the point of view of the rest of the world, it would be difficult not to think so. For all their nominally international and disinterested nature, the Commission and the planetary police both wear a Made in America label:

They're the result of an initiative put forth by the United States at a moment when the US has exclusive possession of the weapon and has demonstrated its readiness to use it.

The first Commissioner to be chosen is the US Army officer who invented the dust. He and the President of the United States pick the rest of the Commission.

The majority of the Commissioners are American. And it's the US Senate and not an independent international body which confirms their selection.

Even the arms, ammunition and aircraft of the Peace Patrol must be given to it by the United States.

Ultimate authority appears to remain with the US President.

That's an illusion, however.

In fact, Manning is in charge, just as he has always been. DeFries may keep suggesting that the President is a strong and savvy master of politics. He may characterize him as "a good President." But what he actually shows us is somebody who is putty in Manning's hands and does everything he wants him to.

The President falls under Manning's spell from the moment the colonel is shown into the Oval Office for their first one-on-one meeting. If Manning says dust should be dropped, the President drops dust. If Manning suggests the President leave town, the President heads south. And if Manning tells the President that he thinks it might be a good idea if he were to be placed in charge of overseeing the dust, the President names him First Commissioner.

It's Manning who calls the tune, and it's the President who dances.

Years pass with the President doing whatever he can to lend Manning assistance in the transfer of control over the dust from the United States to the new agencies that Manning directs.

The radioactivity in Washington was short term, and has abated, and the capital has been re-occupied. However, the emergency controls that were established in the US prior to the Four-Days War have never been lifted. Even after six years, commercial aviation still

hasn't been allowed to resume operation.

Given America's privileged position, the economic and political restraint observed by the US has been remarkable. DeFries says:

"The President was determined that our sudden power should be used for the absolute minimum of maintaining peace in the world – the simple purpose of outlawing war and nothing else. It must not be used to protect American investment abroad, to coerce trade agreements, for any purpose but the simple abolition of mass killing."

To every appearance, America continues to run the world. In actuality, however, it's been engaged in a gradual process of ceding all of its special advantage to the Commission of World Safety. How this has been managed without active opposition within the US isn't explained.

But then, before the shift of power can be made complete, the comfortable working relationship between Manning and the President comes to an abrupt conclusion. On February 17, 1951 – a day that conceivably might be the sixth anniversary of the dusting of Berlin – the President is killed in a plane crash.

The narrator tells us no more than this. He never says a single word to suggest that foul play was involved. However, I think questions have to arise any time a plane with an important political figure aboard falls out of the sky.

In this case (and let me say again that DeFries never suggests it) my first guess is that the person behind the fatal crash was the Vice President of the United States.

We're told that the Vice President was a compromise candidate placed on the ticket to preserve party unity when the President was re-elected in 1948. He was an opponent of the legislation which originally brought the Commission of World Safety into being. DeFries calls him a confirmed isolationist.

But that's not true.

At least, what I take the Vice President for isn't someone who wants the United States to keep the dust a secret and go its own way in the manner that the old Secretary of State did, but rather somebody who sees America as having a power advantage over the rest of the world, and who can't bear to stand by and watch the President give it all away.

The first thing the new President does after he's sworn into office is to send for Manning.

DeFries expects to accompany him to this meeting just as he always does. But Manning tells him he has another job for him to do. He opens his safe and removes a sealed envelope containing orders that were apparently prepared some time ago in anticipation of a moment like this and gives them to his assistant to execute.

For once DeFries won't claim our attention because he was present at some pivotal historical moment only to skip over what was actually said and done when it comes to telling us about it. This time – even though he wasn't there himself – he's able to tell us more than he usually does.

When Manning arrives at the White House, it's to find the President waiting for him with an entourage of bodyguards and supporters. If I read the new President as a proponent of American private interest and not an isolationist it's because one of the allies he has at his elbow is a House committee chairman who wants to re-establish commercial air travel, and another is a Senator who would like to use the Peace Patrol to safeguard American-owned assets in Africa and South America.

The new President attempts to assert his authority over Manning. He reminds him that he's still a member of the US military by addressing him as "Colonel Manning." And he informs him that he's relieved from duty – something which perhaps might more usefully have been said to him back in the old days when he first got out of line.

It's too late now. Manning tells the President that he's to be addressed as "Mr. Commissioner Manning" and says that his appointment is for life. It can't be rescinded.

When the President tries to place him under arrest, Manning points to six bombers in the skies over the Capitol. They're piloted by members of the Peace Patrol, none of them American. Unless Manning is given his way, everyone present is a dead man.

It appears that DeFries has carried out the orders he was handed.

Thanks to the former President, the United States has turned over all means of resistance. And the new man lacks the nerve and sense of social responsibility necessary to call Manning's bluff by having him shot down in his tracks as the threat to the world he's demonstrated himself to be.

Instead, just that easily, the new President gives in -- although, as usual, we don't see him do it.

We may find we have to reconsider. Judging by who ultimately benefits from these changes in power and by the fact that DeFries doesn't tell us the truth about who and what the Vice President really is, perhaps it wasn't he who caused the old President's plane to crash after all.

9. The Cheese Stands Alone

The American President's capitulation represents the surrender of everybody. Now that Manning's disguise has at last been cast aside, he stands revealed as Big Cheese of the World.

This last self-promotion to military dictator of the planet has to be the least likely of the

many unlikely promotions that Manning receives in the course of this story. It's a big leap from pointing at half-a-dozen bombers overhead to establishing your authority as supreme ruler of the world and making it stick. But as far as DeFries is concerned, we can just consider it done.

How Manning manages to dispense with the other Commissioners and take sole control of the Commission of World Safety is not revealed to us. But maybe there's no need. In the six years the Commission has existed, we haven't heard so much as a peep out of any other Commissioner.

Beyond the Commission, however, Manning's power base isn't obvious. It's not clear what people, organizations, or nations would have reason to support him or why anyone would choose to obey his orders. And the lack of challenge to his assumption of authority isn't explained. He's in charge now, that's all.

Henceforth, Manning is to be military dictator of the world and the Peace Patrol will serve as his handpicked enforcers.

DeFries says:

“There were incidents thereafter, such as the unfortunate affair at Fort Benning three days later, and the outbreak in the wing of the Patrol based in Lisbon and its resultant wholesale dismissals, but, for practical purposes, that was all there was to the *coup d'etat*.

“Manning was the undisputed military dictator of the world.”

But now that Manning has gone to such effort to make himself ruler of the world with the power to tell everybody what to do, how does he use this authority? What is his ideology? What are his programs? What edicts does he make?

That we aren't told. Manning's accession to undisputed power is as far as the story goes, as though this was the point it had really been aiming for all along.

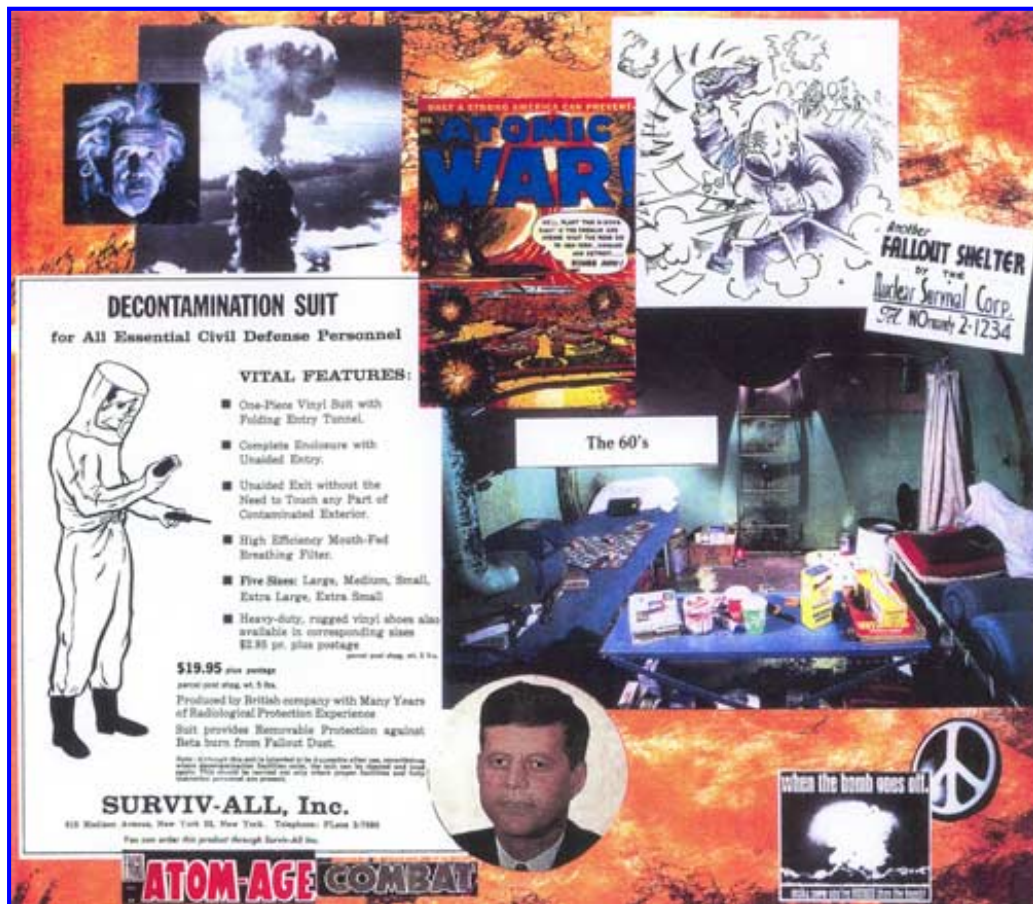
All that remains in DeFries's account are a few paragraphs of summation and a final bid for sympathy for Manning.

He says:

“Whether or not any man as universally hated as Manning can perfect the Patrol he envisioned, make it self-perpetuating and trustworthy, I don't know, and – because of that week in a buried English hangar – I won't be here to find out. Manning's heart disease makes the outcome even more uncertain – he may last another twenty years; he may keel over dead tomorrow – and there is no one to take his place. I've set this down partly to occupy the short time I have left and partly to show there is another side to any story, even world dominion.

“Not that I would like the outcome, either way. If there is anything to this survival-after-death business, I am going to look up the man who invented the bow and arrow and take him apart with my bare hands. For myself, I can’t be happy in a world where any man, or group of men, has the power of death over you and me, our neighbors, every human, every animal, every living thing. I don’t like anyone to have that kind of power.

“And neither does Manning.”



Collage by Mark Schirmeister.

Poor Manning. Forced to run the world all by himself because the prospect of K-O dust in the hands of others who just might be tempted to use it isn't acceptable to him. And never mind that he himself is the person responsible for the dust and its use in the first place, or that he's quite ready to use the dust again to back up his authority now if anyone tries to challenge it.

The poor man is dying, too. He might drop dead as soon as tomorrow.

We haven't heard a word about Manning's heart since Congressman Manning set off at too brisk a pace for the War Department to listen to a no-strings-attached job offer the

Army Chief of Staff wanted to make him. And his heart disease hasn't visibly slowed him down for a moment at any time since. It's only now, when a little sympathy is desired, that the precarious state of Manning's health is being brought up again. But we won't quibble about that.

The unfortunate part is that there's nobody to succeed Manning as dictator of the world. Certainly not DeFries, who not only is dying himself, though taking a good long time about it, but who's never shown a sign of being anything more than a convenient tool.

If Manning truly is concerned for the good of all, it's not clear why he's taken no thought for who is to be in charge after he's gone, especially since if he were to start on a search tomorrow he might live long enough to find a responsible successor. Things being what they are, however, his lack of provision for the future is just one more unfortunate circumstance the world is going to have to cope with when he's dead.

The nearest Manning has to a plan of action is to perfect the Peace Patrol and make it self-perpetuating and trustworthy. If he could manage to do that – and it's by no means certain that he can – then the Patrol might be able to keep a lid on things. But Manning needs twenty years to bring this off and there's no guarantee that he has that much time.

He's also hampered by the fact that everybody in the world except John DeFries hates him.

DeFries would like us to know that Manning's been misunderstood. The true purpose of his account has been to show a world which doesn't properly appreciate Manning how things appear from his side.

The person really at fault is the man who invented the bow and arrow and set off the arms race in the first place. (If DeFries could only get his hands on the bloody bastard, why, he'd murderize him, he'd tear him limb from limb, that's what he'd do.)

Manning, in his wisdom and benevolence, has just been doing what's necessary to keep the problem under control. If he had his druthers, he'd really prefer that nobody had the power of death over you and me, our neighbors, every human being and every living thing.

But if someone has to do it, well, he's tough-minded enough for the job. He'll do it even though he'd really rather not.

That's DeFries's story, at least.

But if he's right in saying that every story has another side, then we have yet to hear the other side of this one. DeFries may be aware of what everybody else in the world thinks of Manning and why, but we can only guess. His version is the only one we've heard.

We may never be able to say exactly what has happened. However, by taking things slowly and not allowing ourselves to be hustled, it has been possible for us to assess the

likelihood of the account that DeFries has given us.

He may imply that we're lucky to be able to get the inside story from him at a moment when he feels a need to tell it. He may be folksy and confiding. He may be certain and plausible. But he's a partisan with all the verbal moves of a con man.

Over and over, when exactly what happened matters, his story has gotten vague. Again and again he's set us up for one thing but delivered something else and then moved right along as though nothing had happened. And he's told lies – lots of lies.

By his own admission, he has no soul.

So what are we to believe?

10. Manning's Nature

If the events of this story have been nothing but a series of accidents, imperatives, and improvisations, as DeFries would like us to accept, then what a strange and unlikely trip it's been to watch the metamorphosis of Clyde Manning, retired early from the Army with a heart condition and reduced to addressing women's clubs, into Mr. Commissioner Manning, master of dust and ruler of all.

However, if that was his goal all along, then he finally got where he was aiming to be.

But which of the two is it?

Why Manning behaves the way he does is a mystery. Aside from DeFries's crucial murkiness and uncertain reliability, again and again in the course of the story there's a difference between what Manning says and his real intention:

When he addresses those women's clubs after he's first retired from the Army, he's suave and urbane, and makes an excellent impression. He's just dazzling them with charm.

When Manning answers the inquiries of a political search committee looking for a candidate to replace a two-bit chiseler in Congress, he allows them to think he's a liberal. He's only feeding them what they want to hear.

He flatters Dr. Karst by telling her that he sees interesting possibilities in the medical research she's been pursuing. He really means he perceives the basis for an unprecedented weapon of mass annihilation.

Manning tells DeFries that if the weapon he's made should ever be used, the world will be destabilized. Shortly thereafter we learn that he's talked the President into using it anyway.

And he assures the Cabinet that he would willingly lay down his life in order to achieve

global democracy. But this is just him striking a pose for effect. All that we are shown is Manning making unilateral decisions for everybody in the world.

DeFries presents Manning as a genius of common sense responding to changing circumstances by doing what needs to be done – as though he had no responsibility for the new conditions that he's reacting to. However, if we judge Manning not by what he professes, but by what he actually does and its result, he looks very much like someone who's been aiming to make himself dictator of the world all along, following a path as straight as a dog's hind leg to get there.

The most mundane explanation I can offer for him (and it's clearly insufficient) is that -- like Robert Heinlein at the Naval Academy -- Manning was assigned to engineering at West Point and not placed on the command track. He always had dreams of being in charge, but was never allowed to be. He's resentful about that, and this is his way of showing everyone better.

Dr. Karst accuses him of being a warmonger -- someone who learned to love the stench of rotting corpses on the battlefield or maybe somebody who'd been too late for the Great War and now is trying to catch up. And Manning does proceed to kill a lot of people just to demonstrate he can.

But there's more to the man than someone who merely wants to run up the body count as efficiently as possible. He's got a vicious streak, as well. Something in Manning takes active pleasure in the pain he causes.

He links Dr. Karst's name to the horrific weapon he makes from the medical dust he co-opts from her knowing that nothing could be more excruciating to her than to be "honored" in this fashion. DeFries says he doesn't know whether Manning ever told her what he intended to do with the dust he's permanently attached her name to. I believe he did, which is why she committed suicide after Berlin.

DeFries declares that there are some people who see Manning the dictator as a traitor and a mad dog. This has to be a specifically American reaction. It takes people from the United States to perceive him as a traitor.

It's certainly true that Manning breaks the military oath he's sworn, violating the US Constitution rather than defending it. He casually sets off a war which results in the death of millions of American civilians, a war that would have been lost had it not been for luck. And ultimately, he even stages a *coup d'etat* which overturns the American government.

Yet, he's not the usual kind of traitor to the United States who betrays his country for money, for sex or because of allegiance to a foreign power. Manning isn't greedy for money, he's got all the sex he'll ever need at home, and his only loyalty is to himself.

Should we take him for a mad dog, then – solitary, antisocial, rabid, and ready to sink his teeth into any available target? There's no question that Manning is ruthless enough to

kill eleven million people in the space of a few weeks and not care if the number is higher, or that he's prepared to set a series of events in motion which will either make him world dictator or knock humanity back to the Stone Age.

Within the context of the story, his readiness to be this excessive – doubtful and dangerous though it might seem to us – appears to be the only reason for the extraordinary support he's given. Manning wants to develop a horrifying weapon, see it used, and make it his excuse for taking over the world. And because he does, one person after another bends himself out of shape to see that he can.

He might be a trickster figure like Loki, the Norse god of discord and mischief who hangs out with the gods of Asgard and plays games with their heads but who owes them no allegiance and is destined to stand against them in the final battle.

It's certainly true that everyone in this story who trusts in Manning eventually gets betrayed by him. He's got the power to mess minds, even over the phone and at secondhand. People in authority unaccountably do whatever he wishes. He has a particularly tight hold on the psyche of the American President, who prides himself on his ability to spot a phony, but is never able to spot one in Manning.

There's even a whiff of sulphur hanging about Manning.

He defiles DeFries, corrupting both his body and his soul. He takes a simple-minded schnook of a high school teacher who only wanted to see a dirty congressman voted out of office, and before he's done with him makes him a crucial figure in the development and the pivotal agent in the first use of an archetypical weapon of mass annihilation that Manning himself calls "devilish stuff."

If that were not enough, Manning hands DeFries the order to initiate the coup which makes Manning dictator of the world. And DeFries carries out this little chore for him.

Of course, he doesn't tell us this directly. DeFries never comes right out and admits to us that even though he's been passing himself off to us as "an ordinary sort of man who, by a concatenation of improbabilities, found himself shoved into the councils of the rulers," in fact he's the person responsible for putting Manning in power. If not for him executing Manning's orders, the coup could never have happened.

Poor deluded DeFries! Robbed of what little soul he ever had by Manning. With the blood of millions on his hands, thanks to Manning. A traitor to the United States because of his greater loyalty to Manning. Now slowly rotting all over from radiation poisoning, courtesy of Manning. And in a world united in hatred of Clyde Manning, the only person with anything good to say for him.

But then even the Devil needs a defender. It's a job.

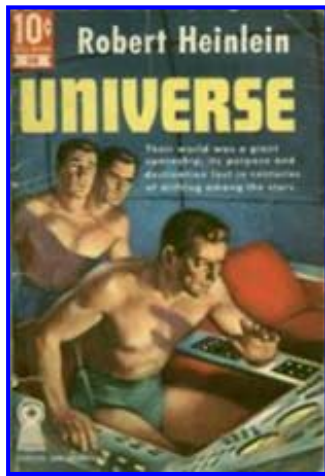
What a diabolical story this is! If Manning really was the Devil all along, and not just

some prematurely retired military man daydreaming about what he might have been and who he might have done if only he'd been given the opportunity, it would explain a great deal.

Part Four: Interpretations

11. Pointing in Four Different Directions

“Solution Unsatisfactory” is like nothing else Robert Heinlein would ever write for *Astounding*, either under his own name or as Anson MacDonald.



A chart in the same May 1941 issue of *Astounding* in which “Solution Unsatisfactory” appeared demonstrated that all the stories that had been published there under the Heinlein name were part of a common fictional future. The one partial exception to this, a novelette entitled “Universe” also published in that May 1941 issue of the magazine, would later be confirmed to be part of the Future History, too.

The pseudonym Anson MacDonald was reserved for stories which didn't fit within this framework. That would include some of Heinlein's most provocative work like *Beyond This Horizon*, a novel which set forth an alternative line of future historical development; the time travel tangle “By His Bootstraps”; and “Waldo,” in which reality shapes itself according to how we conceive it.

But “Solution Unsatisfactory,” the second of the seven stories under the Anson MacDonald byline, wouldn't be like the rest of MacDonald's or Heinlein's work. As a memoir of American military and governmental operations a few years in the future, it might well be the most apparently “realistic” story ever published in the pages of *Astounding*.

Underneath its plausible surface, however, it was a pack of lies.

That “Solution Unsatisfactory” should seem so sure of itself at the same time that it contained so many untruths was completely by intent. Heinlein was bent on fooling the readers of *Astounding* by appealing to their taste for certitude and then covertly working to subvert it.

He would take in Crown Publisher's editor Edmund Fuller, too, four years later. So successful was Heinlein at the appearance of just knowing the facts and reciting them, and so immediately striking would be the resonances between “Solution Unsatisfactory” and the actual end of World War II, that Fuller would insist that the story ought to be put at the front of *The Best of Science Fiction* as a demonstration of science fiction's ahead-of-the-headlines relevance.

So devious and tricky was “Solution Unsatisfactory,” however, that what he actually wound up publishing wasn't the example of confident prophetics he'd intended to present but rather a four-way quarrel over what the story meant.

12. Foreign Policy -- What Foreign Policy?

The first person that Robert Heinlein set out to mislead was John W. Campbell. When the editor of *Astounding* initially announced “Solution Unsatisfactory” in the April 1941 issue of the magazine, he informed his readers that the author's title for it had been “Foreign Policy.”

Even though he may have altered the title, however, Campbell was sufficiently taken by it to repeat in his preface to *The Best of Science Fiction*: “The author's original title for this story was 'Foreign Policy' -- in reference to the fact that the United States never has had a consistent, predictable, or understandable foreign policy.”

The opening lines of the story reinforced Heinlein's faux title by declaring emphatically that its subject was American foreign policy and how the dust forced it to change. It begins:

“In 1903 the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk.

“In December 1938, in Berlin, Dr. Hahn split the uranium atom.

“In April 1943, Dr. Estelle Karst, working under the Federal Emergency Defense Authority, perfected the Karst-Obre technique for producing artificial radioactives.

“So American foreign policy had to change.

“Had to. *Had to*. It is very difficult to tuck a bugle call back into a bugle. Pandora's Box is a one-way proposition. You can turn pig into sausage, but not sausage into pig. Broken eggs stay broken. ‘All the King's horses and all the King's men can't put Humpty together again.’

“I ought to know – I was one of the King's men.”

The narrator is saying that taken in sum the invention of the airplane, the splitting of the atom by a German scientist and the atomic research of Dr. Estelle Karst forced American foreign policy to alter, and that everything else followed inevitably. Once it had the dust and the means to deliver it, what else could the US do?

But what he is actually doing is feeding us the story's first lies.

Because the false information given us by DeFries comes before we're able to know that he's lying, it's only natural to take everything he has to say at face value. Rather than

orienting us within the story, however, the effect of those initial dry statements of fact, some of which aren't facts, followed by a barrage of cleverness for emphasis and distraction is to lead us astray from the outset.

Estelle Karst wasn't working under the direction of the Federal Emergency Defense Authority, a body we never hear of again. She was doing medical research for the US Army under the command of Col. Manning.

American foreign policy did not have to change because Dr. Karst perfected the Karst-Obre technique in April 1943. She didn't perfect it in April 1943.

She didn't perfect it at any time.

K-O dust was in no way her doing. It wasn't produced until late in 1944 after Manning had separated Dr. Karst from the fruits of her work and eased her out of the picture.

So, as definite, exact, and authoritative as the things we're told about her may sound, none of them is true beyond the fact that Dr. Karst worked with artificial isotopes. Instead, the effect of what the narrator says is to point a finger at her and assign responsibility to her that she doesn't deserve.

DeFries is also lying about his own role. As one of the King's men – or, more properly, as Manning's man – his job was always to assist in kicking American foreign policy to pieces. It was never to attempt to put it back together again afterward.

The phrase "foreign policy" is used on three occasions in the course of the story. And each time it has a different significance.

The first time it's used it means that as an inevitable consequence of Dr. Karst's medical research (or rather Manning's development of K-O dust) the US has to use the dust as a weapon in the war between England and Germany. Has to, *has to*.

The second time it's used, it means that the dust having been dropped, the US must take charge of the world and rule it benevolently for the next hundred years.

The third time it's used, it means that because American politicians can't be trusted with that much power, control of the dust is to be turned over to Manning.

Whatever this sequence may be, it doesn't amount to a consistent, predictable, and understandable new American foreign policy. And after this point in the story, with



Artwork recycled William Rotsler.

Manning now established in place as First Commissioner, we hear no more about it.

“Foreign Policy” was an intentionally deceptive title for a deliberately misleading story. It set forth a promise the story was never intended to keep. It focused attention where it didn’t belong and led it in the wrong direction. Then it flowed into the desert sand and disappeared.

No wonder John Campbell felt the title needed to be changed.

13. Watching the Watchers

The title he substituted, “Solution Unsatisfactory,” was more in keeping with the nature of the science fiction he aimed to publish in *Astounding*.

The proper business of science fiction as the editor presented it wasn’t to predict the future as much as it was to anticipate problems the future might bring and then deal with them imaginatively before they happened.

By retitling this story and thereby re-emphasizing it, Campbell turned attention from American foreign policy to control of the dust by what he described as “a dictatorship and a super-police force of the most ruthless and autocratic kind imaginable.”

We're told by DeFries that this super-police force, the Peace Patrol, is the only thing standing between humanity and self-destruction. In the name of keeping the weapon under control, these global policemen are prepared to use the dust to kill the President of the United States and even their own Commissioner Manning. They're prepared to go anywhere and do whatever is necessary to see that nobody in the world has the dust or the means to use it but them.

In order to offset any inclination toward national favoritism, the Peace Patrol consists of men without a country, expatriates severed from their cultural roots, never allowed even to pay a visit to the places they were born. Instead, they're turned into a new aristocracy loyal to each other and to the Patrol, above and apart from the ordinary mankind they serve.

Manning's plan for this group of law-enforcers to become a new elite separated from their origins and bonded to each other had better work. As DeFries says, “There would be no one to guard these selfsame guardians. Their own characters and the watch they kept on each other would be all that stood between the race and disaster.”

If this solution seemed less than satisfactory to John Campbell, the reason may have been that in two stories published in *Astounding* during 1940, “The Roads Must Roll” in June and “Blowups Happen” in September, Heinlein had already set forth the problem of a fallible mankind attempting to control overwhelming future technology. And in neither case had the problem been convincingly resolved.

In both these stories once people put a new technology in place – in one case highways that move, in the other a nuclear power plant – they then become hostage to it and to the good sense and stability of the men responsible for operating it. In both cases, too, the situation becomes all the more precarious when the new technology is taken to the brink of disaster and the superior men in charge find themselves threatened by torturing storms of emotion suddenly bursting free of the inner compartments where they're usually kept in lock-down.



The answer that Heinlein attempted to offer in the course of these stories -- greater and greater watchfulness with added layers of ever more able men keeping guard -- had become untenable by the end of “Blowups Happen.”

But now once more in yet a third story, another advanced technology, Karst-Obre dust, has to be used. It's capable of killing most of humanity and knocking civilization back to the Stone Age. And all that prevents it is the superior personal character, constant vigilance and emotional stability of the chosen men of the Peace Patrol.

This third time around, however, John Campbell was no longer willing to accept that character, ability, indoctrination, training, and oversight were going to be enough to deal with the problem.

The Peace Patrol is a disaster waiting to happen. It can't possibly work as it's supposed to.

It's a thin force, predominantly American in origin. It isn't fully operational. Its schools aren't even in place, and who can say what someone who hasn't been properly trained and indoctrinated at the Academy might do?

Nonetheless, even though there are as yet relatively few Patrolmen and they're inadequately prepared, they're already expected to be everywhere at once all over the world right now, peeking in windows, poking through trash cans, sniffing out secret underground laboratories, preventing the dust from being made.

Realistically, they're never going to be able to do it, no matter how bright and dedicated they are or how hard they try.

As in Heinlein's two earlier stories, once again this is another untenable situation in which overconscientious men of superior ability and exceptional responsibilities must attempt to do the impossible by bearing down harder and harder, holding on tighter and tighter, and becoming more and more frantic until at last they reach the limit of their ability to cope and come to pieces.

Given this group of stressed-out men who've been taught to regard themselves as a breed apart, the only people worthy of possessing the dust, it seems just a matter of time before John Campbell's fears come true and the Patrol starts using the threat of the dust to coerce and control lesser folk. In fact, they've already begun to do it with their bombers in the skies over Washington.

Not their least problem is that the last line of defense against the dust is the Peace Patrol.

At the same time, the Peace Patrolmen are also the only ones who *have* the dust.

It seems their work is cut out for them. These elite, tightly-bonded, alienated men are just going to have to keep a closer and closer watch on each other at all times to be sure they're sure the dust is safe.

With more hope than sense, DeFries may insist, "It stood a chance of working. Had Manning been allowed twenty years without interruption, the original plan might have worked."

But Manning doesn't have twenty uninterrupted years to devote to getting the Patrol squared away.

In fact, the Peace Patrol may already have been fatally compromised thanks to Manning and his coup. It's a subordinate arm of the World Safety Commission. As soon as Manning seizes sole power, the World Safety Commission loses its former authority and the Patrolmen no longer have a job.

Whom are they to serve now? Do these men of the utmost ability and character simply fall into line and become Manning's personal military force? Or is their individual bonding, their esprit de corps and their hubris great enough for them to attempt to seize power for themselves? Or do they just throw up their hands and go back where they came from?

That outbreak in the wing of the Peace Patrol based in Lisbon with its resultant wholesale dismissals may be a sign that the Patrol has already begun to come apart under the strain.

If the future of the human race depends upon perfecting the Peace Patrol and even

DeFries is not sure that the Patrol can be made both self-perpetuating and trustworthy then it seems that the fate of the world is in unstable hands.

So when John Campbell retitled this story, he was correct – the solution it offered to the problem of control of the dust wasn't satisfactory.

However, recognizing this and even making a point of it would not prevent the editor from buying and publishing the story anyway.

14. Dirty Bombs Don't Work

And that is where things might have remained, with “Solution Unsatisfactory” a half-forgotten curiosity buried in the graveyard of old magazine issues -- a story which might have been about American foreign policy but really wasn't or else a story which offered an inadequate solution to the problem of control of an atomic weapon too awful to tolerate. But then World War II was ended by the dropping of two American Atom Bombs on Japan and overnight “Solution Unsatisfactory” came back to life with a new emphasis.

In the immediate postwar moment, with *The Best of Science Fiction* in the making, this story became a bone of contention between the editor of the book, Groff Conklin, and Edmund Fuller, overseeing the project for Crown.

I think the argument between them developed this way:

In the early fall of 1945, while they were still in the process of selecting work for the anthology, Conklin handed Fuller a copy of the May 1941 *Astounding* for him to read the cover story, “Universe” by Robert Heinlein.

In this novelette, a society living aboard a giant spaceship traveling from Earth to the stars has forgotten its original purpose. When one man sees the stars again and then tries to remind his fellows of what they no longer correctly understand, not only isn't he believed, he finds himself sentenced to death for heresy.

This commentary on human shortsightedness and resistance to truth was written immediately before “Solution Unsatisfactory.” Both stories would then see publication, along with the Future History chart, all three together in the same May 1941 issue of *Astounding*.

In the six-and-a-half years of the Golden Age of *Astounding*, from the middle of 1939 to the end of 1945, this issue would be pivotal. It both consolidated the changes Campbell had been making in the magazine and set forth the nature and scope of the new modern science fiction that he was working to put in place.

These two stories -- one of them by Robert Heinlein with an interstellar setting hundreds of years from now, the other by Anson MacDonald taking place in the United States the day after tomorrow -- set forth the size of the territory encompassed by Campbellian

science fiction, while the Future History chart indicated its depth and connectedness. The readers would rank “Universe” top story in the issue with “Solution Unsatisfactory” a solid second.

After he read “Universe,” Edmund Fuller approved it for use in *The Best of Science Fiction*.

But then, paging on further through the magazine, “Solution Unsatisfactory” would catch his attention. Reading it only a few weeks after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the conclusion of World War II, he was amazed to see just how on target the story had been, with an American atomic weapon bringing the war to an end in 1945.

How right that was! It seemed perfect to go in the book.

But when he brought the story up with Groff Conklin, Conklin surprised him. He wanted no part of it. He'd never liked “Solution Unsatisfactory.” And he didn't like it any better because it had made a lucky guess or two.

Just how prophetic was it, anyway? The resemblance to current events that had captured Fuller's attention all happened by the time the story was half done. In getting caught up by the similarity to the end of World War II, he was managing to ignore the rest of what took place in “Solution Unsatisfactory” -- the runaway Cabinet meeting, the Four-Days War with its millions and millions of casualties, the fatal plane crash, Manning making himself dictator. Did that foretell the future, too?

Conklin didn't think that declaring successful prophecy and shouting hurrah for science fiction was reason enough to use the MacDonald story in his anthology, let alone for putting it in a place of special prominence.

But he wasn't able to dissuade Edmund Fuller. Fuller recognized a good sales hook when he saw it and he didn't want to let go of this one. He kept coming back at Conklin about using “Solution Unsatisfactory” in *The Best of Science Fiction*.

And after the editor saw a newspaper account in the *Washington Post* in which a Nobel Prize-winning scientist said the existence of atomic weapons meant the United States might have to be ruled by a dictator, Conklin finally capitulated. With the argument he'd been making about the story's accuracy of prediction gone, he felt he had to concede to Fuller and give him his way.

But then just as soon as he did it, he regretted having done it. He still couldn't abide the story.

So he didn't let go of the matter, either. Instead, in the course of the introduction he wrote for *The Best of Science Fiction* placing this unfamiliar sort of story in context, Conklin would express his discontent and hang a warning sign around the neck of “Solution Unsatisfactory.”

He wrote genially, or almost genially. He said his say in bits and pieces, a little here and a little there. But he got it all out:

He said that science fiction was a branch of fantasy. It was an exercise of the imagination offered to readers as entertainment. Its value was that it took them to places they had never been before. But it wasn't prophecy except by accident or by appearance.

He wrote, "That professional S-F writers (as they are familiarly known in the pulp-magazine trade) were able to write with some knowledgeable of the nature of atomic fission as far back as 1940 does not prove they had second sight. It only proves that they read the right science journals...."

He said that Edmund Fuller was still his friend. But that he'd learned to like science fiction so well in the course of working on the book it sometimes seemed he was about to take over the project and run away with it. In the name of Crown Publishers, Fuller had forced "Solution Unsatisfactory" on him against his better judgment.

Conklin said he thought "Solution Unsatisfactory" was dangerous. He didn't want to endorse its power politics or to help the story come true. Reader take heed.

Edmund Fuller didn't -- or else couldn't -- keep Conklin from casting doubt on the opening story in his very own book. But neither was he willing to remove "Solution Unsatisfactory" from the anthology.

The answer he found was to invite John Campbell, the original editor of this story, to write a preface to put in front of Conklin's introduction to help offset the damage. And Campbell obliged him.

In his preface he too would discuss the nature of science fiction and talk specifically about "Solution Unsatisfactory":

Campbell said that some SF stories were simple adventure. Some like "Universe" were philosophical in nature. But some were prophecy, and "Solution Unsatisfactory" was a Grade A example. He said he knew it had been read and discussed by physicists and engineers working on the Manhattan Project to build the Bomb.

The prophetic success of this story was no accident. A good science fiction writer armed himself with the facts. The author of this one had experience both as an engineer and as a politician and consequently knew what he was talking about.

He recalled a conversation he'd had in 1942 with a friend who was fond of fantasy but didn't like science fiction. He specifically disliked "Solution Unsatisfactory."

John Campbell -- who was founding editor of the fantasy magazine *Unknown* as well as editor of *Astounding* -- said: "...this man felt an overwhelming pressure on the part of the author to convince him that the story was possible, and could happen, a driving sincerity

that oppressed and repelled him.”

His friend wanted his fantasy to stay fantasy. He didn't want his fantasy coming true, and “Solution Unsatisfactory” was more plausible than he was quite comfortable with.

Campbell concluded his preface by adding that “secrecy” was no answer to the existence of atomic weapons. Congressional Representatives -- and, by implication, the reader, too -- ought to study the Smyth Report on Atomic Energy.

This was a reference to “Atomic Energy for Military Purposes,” an official report by Henry De Wolf Smyth released on the heels of the Bomb in August 1945 to inform the American public about atomic weapons in a properly authoritative way.

Campbell would show it to Edmund Fuller. And to further counter Groff Conklin's introductory comments, Fuller would see that “Solution Unsatisfactory” was preceded by three consecutive numbered paragraphs excerpted from the Smyth Report.

These prefatory paragraphs had not been published with the story when it originally appeared in 1941, of course. Neither would they be printed with the novelette when it was republished in the 1965 Heinlein collection, *The Worlds of Robert A. Heinlein*, or in the much larger 1980 version of this book, *Expanded Universe: The New Worlds of Robert A. Heinlein*. They were included in *The Best of Science Fiction* for the express purpose of contradicting Conklin and verifying the authority of “Solution Unsatisfactory.”

The paragraphs said it was possible to extract deadly radioactive fission products and use them “like a particularly vicious form of poison gas.” And also that while the United States had not pursued such a weapon itself, serious consideration had been given “to the possibility that the Germans might make surprise use of radioactive poisons, and accordingly defensive measures were planned.”

With this testimony that the US had thought of the possibility of something like the dust -- although not exactly -- and feared its use during the war, and even planned to defend against it -- though Smyth didn't say how -- there was reason to take the story that followed not merely as fantasy written for entertainment but to see it by the light of America's new atomic weapon and read it as serious prediction.

There would be two problems with this, however.

In the fall of 1945 it may have seemed obvious and overwhelming to read “Solution Unsatisfactory” as being about anticipation of the Bomb. But this take on the story was simply the perspective of a particular instant. Its power wouldn't last.

The postwar moment passed as all moments will. New headlines came along to replace the old ones and the apparent predictive success of “Solution Unsatisfactory” would not be repeated by other science fiction stories. Gradually, the onetime impact of this story's fictional anticipation of the end of World War II wore off until the-same-but-not-the-

same mirroring of a portion of the story by the end of the war came to seem more like a coincidence or a similarity or even a bit of trivia than the vindication of science fiction it had briefly appeared to be.

The second problem is that time would reveal that dirty bombs do not work. As tests by the US government have demonstrated and *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has made a point of repeating, when radiological dust is spread by conventional explosives, more damage is done by the explosives than by the dust. Far from sterilizing a whole city, killing the entire population, at best it would only have a chance of triggering cancer in a few people. Most likely, it would blow away in the wind.

The main effect of a dirty bomb would be to cause fear.

15. Dr. No No No

This leaves one last interpretation of “Solution Unsatisfactory” – on the face of it the most simple, obvious and complete. That's the way Groff Conklin, the leading anthologist of science fiction through the 1950s, saw the story.

According to this reading, “Solution Unsatisfactory” is about the rise to world domination of a ruthless man using K-O dust as his means.

That this could be what the story is about is something the narrator attempts to deny and obfuscate at every turn, from the opening where responsibility for the weapon is assigned to poor Estelle Karst and her medical dust, to the end where the villain of the piece is suggested to be the man who first made the bow and arrow and touched off a human arms race which hasn't ended yet. In either case, DeFries suggests it wasn't Manning who done it. He was just a victim of circumstance.

But, in fact, Manning's quest for absolute personal power is confirmed by every event in the story. It's Manning who brings the weapon into being. It's Manning who insists that it be used. It's Manning who asserts the necessity of a military dictatorship. It's Manning who draws up plans for seizure of power. And it's Manning who points to the Peace Patrol bombers in the sky over Washington and takes over the world.

It is this assumption of power by one man that is the politics that Conklin so abhorred. And he certainly wasn't wrong to believe that adopting Manning as a model of behavior could prove dangerous.

If a youngster of ten or twelve read “Solution Unsatisfactory” in its original appearance in *Astounding* in 1941, or in its favored position in *The Best of Science Fiction*, someone like a young Donald Rumsfeld, say, or a Dick Cheney -- and found it impressive, it's possible that he might grow up believing that special exemptions from ordinary honesty and decency are permitted to a wise and benevolent genius of hard sense who happens to know better than everyone else.

If such a reader of “Solution Unsatisfactory” were to rise to a position of power the result could indeed be dangerous. From reading this story, he might have learned the mouthing of euphemisms and false pieties to divert attention from true intent; evasion of accountability for the consequences of one's actions; deliberate violation of the Constitution of the United States; the invitation of attack as an excuse to go to war; the institution of a permanent state of martial law in America; the use and threatened further use of horrific weapons in order to convince other countries not to make those weapons themselves; and the extra-legal seizure of power.

However, when Groff Conklin suggested that behavior like this might be the politics of the author of “Solution Unsatisfactory,” I don't believe he was right.

Robert Heinlein had a need to fly the flag and also an urge to revolt -- both of these in the name of freedom. In the '30s, he'd been an active participant in Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California campaign for governor, regarded by many as radical and socialist. In his later years, he was perceived as a libertarian and an extreme conservative.

It's not simple to pinpoint what his politics were in conventional terms. However, I cannot believe the revolutionary patriot present in Heinlein at all stages of his life, and not least at the time he wrote this story, would ever have permitted him to support a man like Clyde Manning.

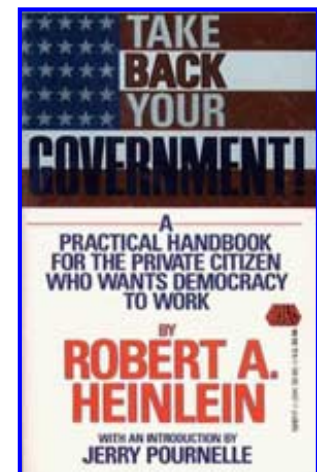
“Solution Unsatisfactory” actually has no readily identifiable political content at all, just like Heinlein's postwar political operating manual *Take Back Your Government*, eventually published in 1992. Instead, in keeping with the conventions of pulp storytelling, which weren't prepared to alienate any part of an audience prepared to buy a copy of this month's magazine, there's an avoidance of specific political identification in any conventional sense in the story.

At every point that the subject of recognizable policies and affiliations might be brought up, DeFries finesses the issue:

What party does Manning represent in Congress? We aren't told. We aren't so much as given the compliant President's name, let alone his political orientation or which party he belongs to. And Manning offers the world no political program or direction beyond his own personal control of the dust.

Rather than resembling Hitler, Mussolini, or Stalin, or any other known dictator, Manning doesn't really seem a creature of politics at all. He's more a story figure. His nearest relatives are James Bond style supervillains ready to hold the world at ransom with threats of mass destruction if they aren't given all they demand by a chosen hour.

Though it might be frightening to imagine a man like Clyde Manning making himself dictator of the world -- and even though this interpretation manages to account for more



of the content of “Solution Unsatisfactory” than any of the other candidates proposed -- there’s something fundamentally implausible about it.

It takes a *lot* of special arrangement of circumstance, deliberate looking away, unlikely assistance and handwaving to promote Major Clyde Manning from prematurely retired Army officer to Big Cheese of the World, ruler of all.

And even if we should accept all the unlikeliness for the sake of the story and agree that someone like Clyde Manning really might succeed in putting himself in charge of everybody in the manner he's said to have done, we have to wonder by what means he would be able to hold on to power and for how long?

He’s a solitary figure. Unless some remnant of the Peace Patrol chooses to support him, Manning has no military muscle to enforce his will. He has no secure base of operations. He has no economic foundation or political allies. Everyone in the world hates him. He has no successor, and his future lifespan is limited.

Not an unstressful set of circumstances for a man with a bad heart, and a situation that is destined to come to an end in pretty short order.

In fact, if Manning doesn’t drop dead from the strain of it all, in all likelihood there are enraged common men brandishing slide rules and monkey wrenches at the gates of his castle even as we speak.

It seems that one way or another, shortly after this story ends the breach of normal reality that is Manning is destined to go *poof* and disappear.

Part Five: Solving the Riddle

16. Nothing Can Be Believed

We’re left with an enigma. If on examination, each and every one of the various attempts to take “Solution Unsatisfactory” at face value proves to have been partial at best -- deliberately misleading, an unsatisfactory solution, the perception of one particular moment, or just a bogeyman -- what makes this story so hard to pin down? What did the author intend by it?

Let's begin by recognizing that “Solution Unsatisfactory” is not on the level. It may have a believable surface, filled with the promise of testimony from someone who ought to know. And it may be told in a confident manner, with authoritative-sounding detail buttressed by historical references and some true scoop. But that's all window dressing.

As we’ve seen, the teller of this tale is a liar. Beneath his presentation of himself as an ordinary man who just happens to have been a conveniently placed witness to important historical events, DeFries is in fact nothing less than Manning’s chief henchman.

And the story he has to tell is about a man who can't be trusted. Manning betrays everyone he deals with. If he isn't actually the Father of Lies, he's a master of deceit. He's able to lie six different ways in a single breath. We've seen him do it.

But it's not only the narrative voice and the central character of "Solution Unsatisfactory" that are deceptive. False speaking is built into the very bones of this story as a principle of its construction. It opens with that flurry of lies about Dr. Karst. It closes with an assurance of Manning's personal regret we have no reason to believe and every reason to doubt. In between it's filled with one untruth after another.

One tip off to the consciously fraudulent nature of "Solution Unsatisfactory" is the series of job promotions that enable Manning to do his dirty work. Each is unlikely, and every one of them is accomplished by a wave of the hand.

Reluctantly, Congressman Manning has command of the atomic weapons program thrust upon him: "But it *was* possible, and Manning agreed to it, after the Chief of Staff presented his case."

Col. Manning morphs into Secretary of Dust: "By this time Manning was an unofficial member of the Cabinet...."

The completely unauthorized yet unaccountably powerful Manning is made the initial member of the World Safety Commission: "...Colonel Manning became Mr. Commissioner Manning."

All it takes is a wink and a nod and he's on to the next higher station of power.

In a similar fashion, the key facts and crucial persuasive statements in "Solution Unsatisfactory" are hidden away behind gloss-over phrases that assume the existence of some improbable result without bothering to tell us how such a thing could ever happen.

The King of England speaks to the British people and advises them to surrender: "In this greatest crisis in his reign, his voice was clear and unlabored; it sold the idea to England and a national coalition government was formed."

New York is duped into evacuating itself: "And then, there was the plague scare. I don't know how or when Manning could have started that – it certainly did not go through my notebook – but I simply do not believe that it was accidental that a completely unfounded rumor of bubonic plague caused New York City to be semi-deserted at the time the E.U. bombers struck."

And the Cabinet Officers give in to Manning's desire to run the world: "They came around."

"Solution Unsatisfactory" is a series of straight-faced whoppers covered over by a plausible line of misdirective patter. It's made out of contradictions, unlikelihoods, and

impossibilities, exaggerations for effect, sleights of hand and bait-and-switch, with new lies standing on the shoulders of the lies that came before.

Could it really be possible for a freshman congressman to be instantly transformed into a colonel, be placed in charge of an urgent weapon development program, and then be left to his own devices with no limit on funds and no supervision?

If we're supposed to believe that nuclear weapons are so esoteric that Manning can be billed as the only person in the United States capable of developing them, how is it that the Eurasian Union manages to have huge quantities of the dust at the same time the Americans do, and that everyone else is going to have it within three months? If it was all that obvious and inevitable, why wasn't poor Manning just left in peace in Congress?

How about an army colonel walking into the Oval Office on an urgent appointment made at a day's notice for a half hour alone with the President, and then emerging two-and-a-half hours later with a glassy-eyed President ready to atomically sterilize Berlin to end a war the US isn't fighting?

Is it likely that a King of England would ever pay a petitionary visit to a US Army captain seated atop a throne of canisters in a secret underground airplane hangar and strike a bargain with him there to surrender British sovereignty to the United States in exchange for sufficient Devil Dust to take out the city of Berlin?

And just imagine an army officer with no official standing except his concurrent status as a Congressional Representative assuming control of a Cabinet meeting after the President has introduced this unknown person with a flash of his trademark grin and the announcement, "This is Clyde Manning, everybody. Clyde is my new Secretary of Dust. I want you to give a listen to him. He can be very persuasive." With the colonel then proceeding to insist that the Constitution be trashed and a military dictatorship imposed on the world.



Would the Cabinet really fall in line behind Manning and this new policy?

Isn't that a whopper? I hope it is.

And could it really be possible for the wording of a pamphlet to be so compelling that a country like Japan would surrender without a fight rather than permit its citizens to read it?

How ever so much better the dropping of that kind of pamphlet on Germany would have been than dropping the dust. We have to wonder why pamphlets like that aren't written all the time as a substitute for war and as a sufficient answer to the existence of the likes of

Clyde Manning.

There is a name for stories which have a superficial appearance of plausibility but an underlying content that begs to be doubted. I think "Solution Unsatisfactory" was a hoax, a deliberate attempt to trick the reader and trick the reader again.

This is a story that doesn't mean what it seems to say. It isn't sincere about its lies, either.

The truth it has to tell is hidden.

17. The Truth That Could Not Be Spoken

Was Robert Heinlein really capable of playing mind games of this kind?

At the time, it wouldn't have seemed likely. Except for one short story in *Astounding*, "And He Built a Crooked House," a bit of foolery in which a California hillside house folds into a fourth-dimensional shape after an earthquake, and another story in *Unknown* entitled "They," in which ordinary reality is a falsity constructed to keep the protagonist distracted, the pre-war Robert Heinlein had an air of being a very solid and reliable writer. He was the author of interconnected Future History stories for *Astounding* -- fiction that was sincere and straightforward.

The actuality was a bit different, however.

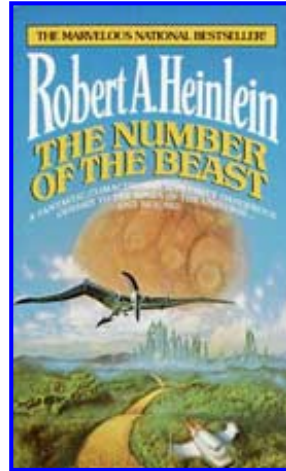
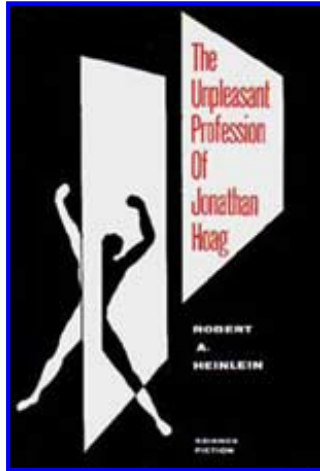
Robert Heinlein, writer of dependable stories, was not only responsible for the work of Anson MacDonald as well, but of even stranger writers for Campbell.

He was capable of many things that could not be contained within the bounds of the Future History. Over the course of his career, he would write some very unstraightforward stories:

There was Heinlein's final story for John Campbell before joining the war effort, the 1942 John Riverside fantasy short novel, "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag," in which our world is suggested to be a promising but flawed piece of art destined for dismantling -- but we will never find out for certain because the story ends first.

In 1958, there would be the Moebius-strip short story, "All You Zombies," in which a person is both mother and father to her/himself and the existence of the rest of us is a matter of doubt.

And in Heinlein's longest work of fiction, *The Number of the Beast* (1980), the book is full of anagrams and puzzles, the realms of the imagination are countless, and the author is ultimately revealed as a persistent intruder in his own story, a mysterious figure who keeps causing turmoil for the four central characters.



For someone with a head full of ideas like these, it was perfectly possible to craft a pseudo-realistic story that concealed a hoax which served to divert attention from the unspoken ending of the story, all in order to obscure a truth he wasn't willing to speak directly.

The inevitable ending of the story from which DeFries's lies distract us is that all of Manning's actions have been dedicated to bringing ultimate catastrophe into being and making it happen. When his work on earth is through at last and he finally dies -- which could happen just as soon as DeFries finishes speaking and we're done feeling sympathy for poor Manning -- all hell is going to break loose.

If Manning's long-term goals are fulfilled, three-quarters of humanity will perish with him and for those who survive, life will be much more simple.

Alteration in American foreign policy can't avert this. A monopoly on the weapon counts for nothing. Elite international peace patrolmen aren't sufficient to prevent it. Nor will one tough-minded man keeping watch over mankind guard us from harm. It will happen.

Manning's culminating evil act, after first conjuring up the means for disaster to occur and demonstrating its awfulness, and then seizing dominion over the world, will take place at the proper dramatic moment. Then his hands will uncup and like the opening of a new Pandora's box unleash the irrevocable power of death upon you and me, our neighbors, every human, every animal, and every living thing.

That's what's going to happen because that is what has been set up to happen.

Like every other crucial turn in this story, however, we won't read about it when it does. The Devil Dust will begin to drop only after the music for Manning has stopped playing and the curtain has fallen.

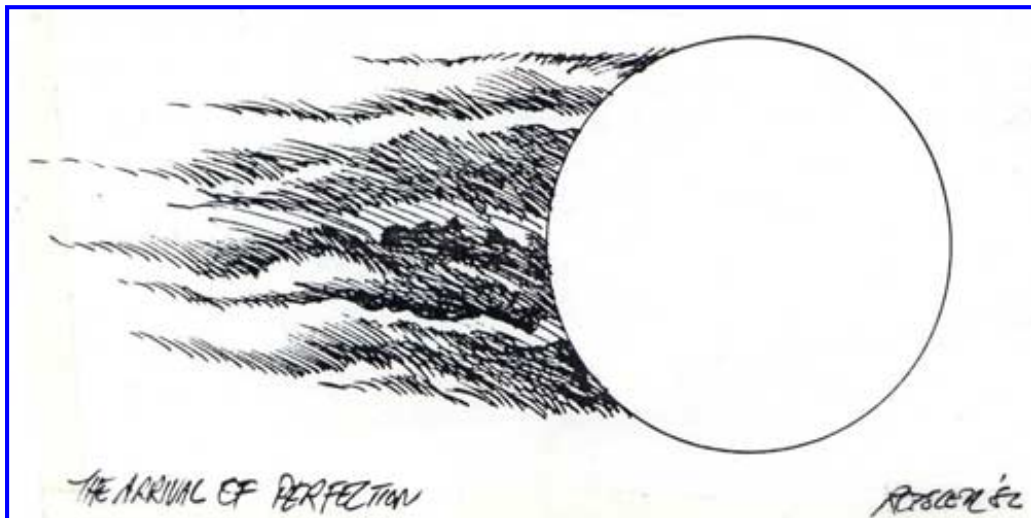
That's a bitter conclusion to hide. But it's the way this story really goes -- though the story being what it is, it will probably be played out in terms of a free-for-all among nations

paying off old scores and scrabbling for power using the dust they've been cooking up all this time in the secret labs the Peace Patrol was never able to find while there still was a Peace Patrol.

But why tell this implicit story under cover of a narrative that doesn't mean what it says and isn't willing to say what it does mean?

An epigraph from George Bernard Shaw in Heinlein's next-to-last novel, *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls*, declares: "The truth is the one thing nobody will believe."

As though in illustration of this, "Universe," written just prior to "Solution Unsatisfactory" and published under Heinlein's square writing name in the May 1941 *Astounding*, was about a man who attempts to tell the truth to his society and is sentenced to death for doing it.



Artwork recycled William Rotsler.

Robert Heinlein had been keeping clipping files of news stories on technological change and social behavior since 1930. After doing this for ten years, I think he believed himself to be in possession of a truth that John Campbell and the readers of *Astounding* wouldn't want to hear. It was so contrary to the mythos of the magazine that if by chance they did take in what he really had to say, he thought he would be made to pay for having spoken.

The unacceptable truth he saw was that the ability of society to produce new and ever more powerful technology had already reached a point that tested the capacity of fallible human beings to deal with. And sooner or later devices of our own making that were too much for us were going to escape our control and come back to haunt us.

During the course of 1940 he'd pointed to this fatal human weakness in "The Roads Must Roll" and "Blowups Happen" -- stories which had pull-the-punch endings in which human

frailty is upset and control is re-established, but unconvincingly.

In "The Roads Must Roll," a striking work force deliberately brings a moving highway to an abrupt stop causing horrendous casualties. When the man in charge of the road tries to cope with the emergency, he comes very near to cracking:

"He had carried too long the superhuman burden of kingship -- which no sane mind can carry light-heartedly -- and was at this moment perilously close to the frame of mind which sends captains down with their ships."

The answer ultimately found to the clash between advanced technology and human vulnerability pointed to by the story is pure whistling-in-the-dark: "Supervision and inspection, check and re-check was the answer."

Supervision and inspection, check and re-check would be the starting condition in "Blowups Happen." Psychiatrists keep ordinary workers in the world's only atomic plant under close observation at all times, watching for any signs of unusual thought or behavior.

This time, instead of moving roadways adapted from the stories of H.G. Wells, the future technology involved would be something to which Heinlein gave serious credence and that genuinely unsettled him.

In "Blowups Happen," it's suggested that the Moon is the sterile ball we see today because of an atomic disaster long ago. If the atomic plant in this story should explode, the same thing could happen to Earth.

And in this story, someone in authority -- one of the psychiatric observers -- does flip out under the strain of the situation and deliberately try to induce the disaster himself. But the catastrophe is averted by physically overpowering him at the last moment. An answer of a kind is then found in shutting down the plant and moving its operation into earth orbit.

But this was no solution, either. Check and re-check might not be a sufficient answer to the underlying problem of human-monkey cleverness producing technology which even superior people aren't able to deal with without going down with their ship or blowing up -- but out of sight, out of mind was no improvement. Human frailty remains.

It was in the wake of the publication of "Blowups Happen" in the September 1940 issue of *Astounding* that Heinlein wrote "Universe," a story about the difficulty of trying to convey truth to an audience that wasn't disposed to receive it.

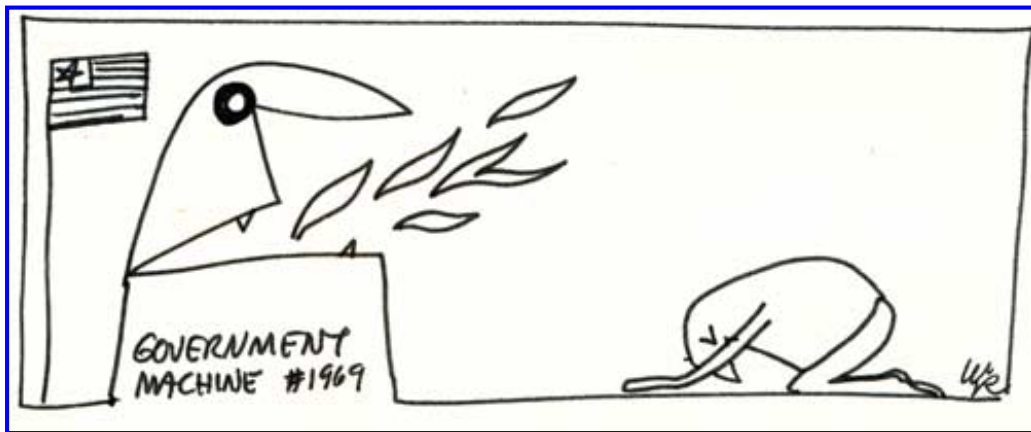
Then he took a deep breath and wrote "Solution Unsatisfactory," in which he finally did let out the truth he saw, or something closer to it. But he did it under the protective cover of every straight-faced lie he could tell.

The problem Heinlein perceived is given in the first lines of “Solution Unsatisfactory” before the lies begin: the invention of the airplane in 1903, followed by the splitting of the atom in 1938.

Heinlein thought of himself as someone who could look out of a moving train, see another train coming the other way on the same track and predict a collision. And it was his conclusion that the combination of airplane and atom must inevitably lead to the delivery of atomic weapons from afar. In the worst case scenario so cheerfully set forth in passing by DeFries, county-flattening A-Bombs would be sent by rocket -- American, by preference.

If “Solution Unsatisfactory” can be said to be truly prescient about anything, it is nuclear proliferation. Heinlein imagined a coming world like a saloon full of drunken cowboys packing sixshooters. “All offense and no defense,” as Manning says to DeFries.

That was the situation Heinlein foresaw in 1940. And almost seventy years later, this scenario has yet to be played out to its conclusion.



Artwork recycled William Rotsler.

The character of Manning was just Heinlein's device for dramatically foreshortening the coming state and then getting out of the story clean with plausible deniability before the moment when everything goes to hell.

And even so, in order to indicate his dark truth at all, Heinlein had to bury the bone deep:

He placed a false title on the piece. He disguised it as a memoir told years later. He phrased it as a bunch of lies. He threw in misdirection at the beginning and the end. He set up the collapse of civilization to happen and then closed things down fast before it did. And then he published the story under a pseudonym.

18. John Campbell's Response

We can say it again -- no wonder the editor of *Astounding* chose to call Heinlein's novelette "Solution Unsatisfactory."

John W. Campbell, Jr. was a man with insight into the nature and meaning of the stories that he published in his magazines. He didn't say everything he thought, a good many of the things that he did say were for effect, and, as the preface to *The Best of Science Fiction* demonstrates, he was perfectly capable of putting forth more than one idea about "Solution Unsatisfactory" at a time.

I think he understood more of the story's true nature than he was ready to admit.

So why, then, did he buy and publish a story like this that came to him with a deliberately misleading title, that didn't satisfactorily resolve the situation it presented, and that was full of lies to boot?

The most obvious reason was that he had to.

In order to fill the pages of his magazines every month, the editor needed at least one professional writer he paid at a better rate in order to guarantee himself a regular supply of copy. L. Ron Hubbard, who would eventually found Scientology but who was then an all-purpose pulp story writer, was the first to serve this role. And Hubbard did an adequate job of it for three years until he joined the Naval Reserve and then was called to active duty in 1941.

During the summer of 1940, Campbell came to a similar professional understanding with Robert Heinlein. Heinlein was the most able and reliable of the new writers he'd drawn to *Astounding* and *Unknown*, far better at playing the editor's game than the man he would replace.

But while Heinlein may have been the logical candidate for the job, the arrangement would be an insecure one from the outset.

With the check for "Blowups Happen," Heinlein had paid off his mortgage, the reason he gave for having taken up story writing in the first place. So when Campbell offered to buy all the work he could supply at his best rate, he agreed -- but with a proviso. He would turn out copy only as long as the editor accepted everything that he sent him. If Campbell should ever reject one of his stories, Heinlein was through.

Consequently the editor didn't have much choice when Heinlein sent him "Foreign Policy." He had to buy it whether he liked it or not if he wanted Heinlein to continue to write for him.

And there were a number of things about the story Campbell didn't like. The title didn't work. And he wasn't satisfied with the abrupt ending. In the ordinary way of things, he'd have returned a story like that to the writer and asked him to finish it properly -- except he wasn't able to do it.

And he also couldn't help but notice that it was full of deliberate lies.

“Foreign Policy” must have seemed like a test of their relative power by Heinlein, a deliberate attempt to use his new-found leverage on the editor and see how much he could get away with.

However, during the Golden Age, John Campbell was highly creative. And he didn't choose to contend with Heinlein. That would come later.

Instead, like the dervish who picked up a coconut a monkey threw at him, drank the milk, ate the meat, and shaped what remained into a bowl, he found things to do with this story.

Heinlein may have been intentionally acting as a devil's advocate in writing “Foreign Policy” and forcing it on him. But the editor didn't have to take it negatively. In order for modern science fiction to address future problems, future problems had to be identified.

So Campbell changed the title of Heinlein's story from “Foreign Policy” to “Solution Unsatisfactory,” and by doing it redefined the novelette as a problem in need of an answer. He altered the fact that it wasn't satisfactorily resolved from an intolerable omission into the focus of the story.

Then, as the last item to go in the April issue of *Astounding* he'd completed and was about to hand to the printer -- the “In Times to Come” spot -- he spelled out explicitly for his readers that “Solution Unsatisfactory,” the Anson MacDonald story which would be appearing the following month, was incomplete and invited them to do what the author hadn't been able to do. He wrote:

“Read the yarn, and let's have your suggestions as to how to get a satisfactory solution that does not involve either, (a), a dictatorship and a super-police force of the most ruthless and autocratic kind imaginable to preserve any remnant of civilization as we know it, or, (b), a chaos ending only when the simplest industrial facilities -- even the one-man shop -- have been wiped out.”

The editor would print two responses to his challenge, one in the July 1941 issue, the other in November, both from the same reader, L.M. Jensen of Cowley, Wyoming.

In his first letter, Jensen said, “Every person must *believe beyond any possibility of doubt* they are being 'watched' and curbed continually by a superbeing.”

In other words, “God help us all!”

In his second letter, Jensen said, “It will be a race to determine whether society can advance to the point where it can take care of itself before such a weapon is invented.”

Two days before Christmas, 1940, he had a writing conference with his young storywriting apprentice Isaac Asimov. At that point, Asimov had only managed to sell to him twice, most recently "Reason," a story about an uppity robot he was running in the April issue .

The editor had been giving thought to this story, and he wasn't comfortable with the idea of a rebellious robot. That was a prime example of human technology out of control.

Now Asimov, having sold him one robot story, had the idea for another. How about a robot that was telepathic?

Campbell answered by setting forth the fruit of his thinking -- three laws of robotics he wanted Asimov to consider: First, a robot must not cause harm to humans or allow them to be harmed. Second, it must follow human orders. After that, but only after that, a robot must preserve its own existence.

If fallible human beings weren't up to the job of guarding themselves against their own technology then build the technology to do the job for them.

The editor asked Asimov to imagine what a telepathic robot bound by these rules might find it necessary to tell lies about, and asked what would happen if it did lie, and sent Asimov home to write a story.

So when Campbell came to assemble the May issue of *Astounding* it would be no accident but more in the nature of a covert editorial comment when in between Heinlein's two novelettes -- one about the perils of knowing the truth and revealing it and the other which told the truth in a way the author pretended he didn't mean -- he placed a story called "Liar!"

Though Asimov had no way of knowing it, his story would serve as a response to "Solution Unsatisfactory" twice over -- once calling it for the lies it told and again addressing the problem of uncontrolled technology it didn't resolve.

But Campbell wasn't done. Fourteen months after the publication of Heinlein's novelette, he published a second fictional reaction to it by A.E. van Vogt, the most visionary of his new contributors and Heinlein's successor as his contract writer, as the lead story in the July 1942 issue of *Astounding*.

The editor would call no attention to what he was doing except for the title of van Vogt's story, which echoed the title Campbell had placed on Heinlein's novelette.

Just like "Solution Unsatisfactory," "Secret Unattainable" took place during the current war and had a "realistic" form. But instead of being a memoir, it was presented as a file of documents captured from the Germans after the war is over.

These documents detail the promising beginning and the catastrophic outcome of a super-scientific project designed by a scientist named Kenrube -- the building of a machine to

bridge hyper-space and produce limitless quantities of raw materials to fuel the German war effort.

But when the full-scale version of the machine is demonstrated, it behaves contrary to expectation and there's a disaster. Many people are killed and the Fuehrer himself barely escapes with his life.

Professor Kenrube anticipated that something like this would happen, and counted on it to happen. He explains:

“My invention does not fit into our civilization. It's *the next*, the coming age of man. Just as modern science could not develop in ancient Egypt because the whole mental, emotional and physical attitude was wrong, so my machine cannot be used until the thought structure of man changes.”

Kenrube appears mysteriously at the scene of the catastrophe as it is unfolding even while being held a prisoner elsewhere. Here he reveals that his machine will only do unanticipatable, incomprehensible and undesirable things for the Germans:

“It is not that the machine has will. It reacts to laws, which you must learn, and in the learning it will reshape your minds, your outlook on life. It will change the world.”

The answer offered by van Vogt to the problem of coping with the dangers of technological advance set forth by Heinlein in “The Roads Must Roll,” “Blowups Happen,” and “Solution Unsatisfactory” was that the time has come for us to move on to the next age of man, and the catalyst for this will be nothing other than our own advanced technology and the problems it poses.

In a new era, when people have learned to think, feel, and act differently, Devil Dust and rolling roads will become as irrelevant and outmoded as chariots, mummies, and pyramids and be left behind.

But if Kenrube's actual purpose is to stimulate this kind of change, we're offered reason to think again about Clyde Manning.

It's true that Manning in “Solution Unsatisfactory” deliberately presents people with science-beyond-science that causes catastrophe -- but that's also what Kenrube does in “Secret Unattainable.” Kenrube doesn't even claim that what he's doing *has to* be done to end the war. He's certain that the Nazis are going to lose in any event because of the way they think and act.

And if it's true that Manning is a traitor, so also is Kenrube. Any distinction between them is only a matter of partisanship and point of view. Professor Kenrube has our sympathy because he betrays the Nazis, the bad guys of World War II, while we're more ready to point a finger at Colonel Manning because it's the United States of America that he turns on.

But both of these men are traitors to their national governments, and both men cause disasters with super-science. The difference is that Manning is deadly serious about what he's doing and is willing to kill three-quarters of humanity to see it done, while Kenrube is out to make a point and sow a seed for tomorrow.

However, if Kenrube is ultimately to be applauded for what he does because his underlying motive is to change the way people think and stimulate a transition to a new age of man, then Manning may be entitled to the same benefit of the doubt.

If what Manning is doing isn't merely sparking a change from one era to the next, but providing the necessary provocation for an even more radical transformation in the human condition to take place, then perhaps he might not merely be a mad dog, or the Devil in disguise, or the living representative of the dangerous consequences of modern technology after all, but actually be the misunderstood genius that DeFries claims him to be.

It all depends on what he is aiming for.

We might consider this: In the last story that he contributed to *Astounding* before becoming editor of the magazine, John Campbell himself pointed to the sort of human development that might be sufficient to justify a Manning and earn him forgiveness for what he does.

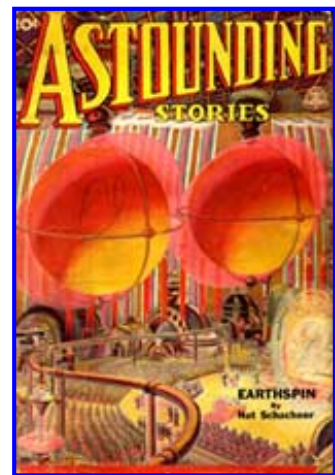
In "Forgetfulness" (*Astounding*, June 1937), an expedition of aliens not too different from ourselves lands on a far future Earth after an interstellar voyage that has taken them six years. Here they discover abandoned crystalline cities with machines they can't understand, but which they recognize as the work of the godlike beings who long ago brought them fire.

Nearby, they find the descendants of these city builders living simple lives in domed houses set among the trees. They no longer recall how the cities and machines were made. Atomic power means nothing to them.

The invaders determine to move these fallen creatures out of the way, take possession of the cities, and recover the lost secrets of the machines.

But in fact our descendants are not degenerate; they've moved on. Humanity abandoned the cities and machines because it no longer had need of them.

Anything they have to do now they're able to do with mind. And by mental power alone they're able to instantly send the invaders back where they came from.



One invader explains to the others:

“Seun is not a decadent son of the city builders. His people never forgot the dream that built the city. But it was a dream of childhood, and his people were children then. Like a child with his broomstick horse, the mind alone was not enough for thought; the city builders, just as ourselves, needed something of a solid metal and crystal, to make their dreams tangible.”

John Campbell's ultimate answer to the threat posed to our existence by our own artifacts was that mankind needs to grow up and leave its crude childhood toys behind. Growing up is the only satisfactory solution to Heinlein's nightmare of self-induced human disaster there can be.

Whether we will be able to do it has yet to be seen.

Afterword

19. After the Bomb

Robert Heinlein wouldn't go back to writing for *Astounding* after World War II. Instead, he sought to break free of the confines of the pulps and working for John Campbell to find less specialized and better paying markets for what he wrote. Sometimes he would be successful, sometimes not.

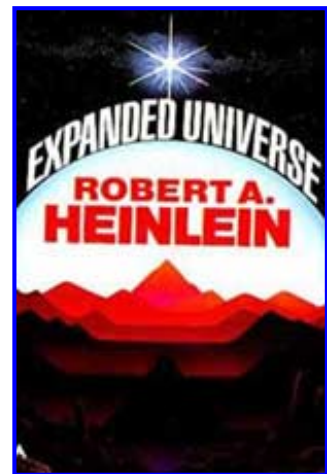
One thing he did in the immediate aftermath of the war was to produce one article after another -- by his own count as many as nine -- warning of the dangers of a nuclear world and how they might be survived. But he wasn't able to sell any of them.

In two of these articles eventually included in *Expanded Universe*, Heinlein recommended that people leave the large population centers and head for the hills. Heeding his own advice, he moved from California to the mountain town of Colorado Springs, Colorado.

However, in due time he would be followed to Colorado Springs by the North American Air Defense Command which located itself inside Cheyenne Mountain immediately next door. The place he had selected as a refuge from the Bomb became the number one nuclear target in the United States.

Heinlein would respond by building and stocking a fallout shelter. He recommended that others do the same.

--March 2008



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The Department of Anthropology rejected my M.A. thesis, which proved that similarities between the Cubist painters in Paris in 1907 and the leaders of Native American, or Injun, uprisings late in the nineteenth century could not be ignored. The Department said it was unprofessional.

Kurt Vonnegut, introduction to the collection *Bagombo Snuff Box*, 1999

On the Trail of the Lonesome Pine

By Pat Charnock

[*The story so far.* After a week in San Francisco, Londoners Pat, Graham, and their two grown sons have arrived in Las Vegas for Corflu.]

After one evening in the consuite, I was beginning to get the idea that Corflu was a convention like no other. Next morning, when we were gathering to get into cars and drive out into the Mojave Desert, I KNEW it must be a convention like no other. They never used to have deserts on the programme at Eastercons.

We'd already spent one day driving through the desert on the way to Las Vegas, and I'd never seen terrain like that before. Sand and scrub and stones for miles and miles and miles. It was amazing to me that people tried to live there. Oh, many people had obviously failed, as evidenced by the high numbers of abandoned houses and businesses we spotted from the road. But I was keen to get a closer look at this desert and learn more.

And who better to teach us than Ken Forman? I'd never met him before, but he'd impressed me online with his knowledge of water issues, antelope, ground squirrels, and Stihl chainsaws.

So on the Friday morning we shuffled back into the consuite and Ken, in shorts and workmanlike salmon pink waistcoat (if that isn't a contradiction in terms) ushered the drivers into another room. Graham refused to tell me about the briefing afterward, but I imagine it consisted of stuff like: if they get bitten by rattlesnakes, leave them behind for the coyotes. But he came back with a map of Pine Creek Canyon and said we had to find the pines, and the water.

Ken told us to take bottles of water, and hats, and sun block. Water was no problem, I'd stocked up at the hotel shop. Grah and I had hats, and the young 'uns had faith in sun block and the undeniable fact that they still had hair on their heads.



Graham told me that he had to drive 15 miles to Red Rock Canyon, where we'd get a final briefing. The route was easy – go east on 159. We started in convoy but soon fell behind the others. Don't worry, said Grah, it's an easy route. And it was interesting to be driving through a city I didn't know. Oh look – there's Barnes and Noble, bookstore. Just before

Pottery Barn. And there's Borders! And yet another casino hotel, in the Red Rock resort! Then we were out of the city, driving through desert again, and we could see the rocks ahead of us.

[Grah and I had an argument about this. He thinks I should tell you about the scenery, the beauty of the rocks, how red they were. What a contrast they were to the flatness of the desert we'd driven through. But I don't. I think I'm telling you my story about me, and maybe a few other people. And as I'm writing this, for once I'm going to win.]



There was a turnoff for Red Rock Canyon, where Grah drove straight past the visitor centre where we were to assemble. Flustered, he took the next left, and turned round, and retraced his wheels. But we weren't the last to arrive, and the expeditionary party waited ten minutes or so for Andy Hooper and his group.

So we stood in the car park at the visitor centre, and slathered sunblock on ourselves, and Ken gave us a really interesting talk about what we might expect to see. Apparently he used to do this sort of thing for a living, and it showed – he certainly knew his stuff. But when he faltered a moment, somewhere in the Cambrian, Jim Young leapt in, and interposed his own geological interpretation. Apparently the rocks were red because of the oxygen. Either excessive oxygen when they were forming made them red because of a reaction with the iron in the rock, or it was the lack of oxygen. Maybe it was the lack, or anaerobic thing, wot did it. Anyway, Red Rock Canyon had VERY red rocks. Then Ken wrested our attention back, and warned us we might meet snakes. The nicest snakes we might meet were the diamondback rattlesnakes, and the small green ones we should run like fuck away from, and interpose someone else's more slowly running body if possible. And we should drink water, lots of it, even if we didn't want to.

Finally we gave up waiting for Andy, and encarrered again. We were headed for our jumping off point – a parking lot two thirds of the way around the scenic drive -- slapping on the factor 30 as we went. And it was beautiful, the rocks were spectacular.

When we got there, Andy and party were waiting, wondering why we'd taken so long.

Who else was there? I can't tell you all their names, because I still don't know them all. There was Earl, looking much fitter than me, Bill Burns, looking irrepressibly young, Ken, Pat Charnock, Dan, James and Graham Charnock, Murray Moore, Gregg Trend, Jim Young, Elaine and Steve Stiles, Teresa Cochran and James Taylor, Andy Hooper and Carrie Root, Randy Byers, Elinor Busby, Rob Jackson, Lise Eisenberg, to name a few.

That was the first time I wore the stupid hat. Before I left home, I went to see my doctor. “Doc,” I said, “I’m going to Las Vegas. It’s hot there, but I’m allergic to any kind of face cream, so how can I use sun block?” My doctor looked at me in exasperation, and told me to wear a hat.

I don’t wear hats with ease. I’m probably the only person you’ve met who’s never owned a baseball cap in her life. If I was invited to the Queen’s garden party and told I had to wear a hat, I’d regretfully decline. So this prescription was anathema to me.



While I was in San Francisco I went looking for the hat. It had to be squashable so I could stick it in my luggage; it had to have a big brim, so I wouldn’t need to worry about getting sunburnt; and it had to look moderately okay. I’d overlooked the obvious factor that it would be much better if it didn’t blow off; luckily I had a hair slide with me to keep it secure. It looked totally naff, and it still kept blowing away.

We decarred, Grah and I slapped our hats on our heads, and we set off to follow our glorious leader, Ken, up hill and down dale (well, down dale on the way there, and the reverse on the way back), in search of the elusive water of Pine Creek that we were under no circumstances to drink. About 25 gallant walkers set out that day, and most of us straggled back to base, eventually.



There isn’t much there, I’m not exaggerating. What I don’t understand is how so much vegetation actually lives in the desert. Ken talked about the process of repopulating the desert with vegetation -- redensertification. It’s a process that happens naturally after a fire. Apparently you start with seeds of one type, which create the living conditions for plants of another type, and so on through about four distinct stages. What we were seeing was the final stage of desertification. And pretty basic it was too, although some of it was even flowering and colourful.

(My dad would have loved to see the flowering cactus – he so rarely got his cacti to flower,

bless him. And a council flat in Kilburn would hardly have been as ideal conditions as the Mojave Desert.)

There was next to no wild life. A few bugs, one lizardsy thing, but none of the snakes Ken warned us about.

We were heading down the valley. Walking in Red Rock Canyon wasn't easy as the ground underfoot was stony and sandy. I wanted to look around me as I walked, but the stones were everywhere, and you had to keep your eyes on the path or you could easily twist an ankle. Most of the vegetation was low scrub, a few cacti, the occasional mariposa poppy, but no trees. Except down in the valley was a line of trees. There was obviously something going on down there, something...unusual. And Ken led us to it.

Water, of course. There wasn't much of it. If you'd been in England you'd have sneered at the algae-ridden pool he found, but out here in the Mojave, in the heat, it was really something special. But not good enough to put in your water bottle.



There was a spring, flowing to a pool, where there were bugs swimming. It was only a few inches deep, but it was shaded by a tree or two, and surrounded by vegetation. And there was a picnic table nearby where we all posed for group photos. It was a pleasant spot, and much preferable to climbing out of the valley. I didn't want to leave, but they insisted that I go too.

I don't like walking uphill. So I ambled slowly, and told myself my excuse was to keep an eye out for Gregg. I'd never met Gregg before, but he was ambling uphill even slower than I was, which gave me a good excuse for stopping and resting. We both made it to the top, and found everyone else waiting for us, quite patiently.

So now I sit in front of my computer and flick through my photos, and dust off my memories of Corflu Silver. As memories go, that hike in the desert with Ken Forman and the rest of you guys is up there with the best.

All photos by Earl Kemp, Corflu, Las Vegas, April 2008.

It seemed a good idea, for example, when nothing much was really going on, ... to be beneficially excited by minimal stimuli, such as idiosyncratic arrangements in horizontal lines of twenty-six phonetic symbols, ten numbers, and eight or so punctuation marks, or dabs of pigment on flat surfaces in frames.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, "Timequake"

Loathing and Fear in Las Vegas

By Mike Hammer



Mike Hammer, cleverly disguised as suave, debonair man-about-town Graham Charnock.

Who would have thought the stick-insect-frail old OBE in Hitchin could have had so much blood in him, Mike Hammer thought. The OBE had died messy, squealing like a stuck pig, partly because after shooting him with some surgically placed shots in the larynx, the right eye, and the left testicle, Mike had slammed a steel railing spike through his upper thorax pinning him to his World of Leather sofa. Mike Hammer sat down next to the jerk and wiped the blood and shit from the soles of his shoes. Then he wiped it from the soles of his own shoes. Well, you know what stuck pigs do?

Shame that his wife and children hadn't been there to share the experience, or those of the OBE either. He tucked his 45 down his trousers after wiping the smegma from the tip. He looked at the hastily scrawled message on a napkin the guy had given him before he had died. It said "Old Man Corflu Silver."

The Old Man. The very name made Mike grind his teeth his anger, which resulted in him loosening a silver crown and swallowing it. The Old Man had been responsible for Mike losing a lot of silver crowns over the years. The 'Old Man' was a charismatic creature, half-mythago and half-legend and half-goat, who claimed to be older than time itself and a direct descendent of something called Cthulu. Mike had been looking for him for a long time, without unduly worrying that the three halves added up to one and a half people, or entities. In fact he'd been on his trail ever since he'd picked up the initial contract from his Mafia/Illuminati contact Kyril Bonfiglioli, who had actually witnessed the infamous last testament of Ditch O'Schultz, a famous Irish navy. The guy, that was the Old Man, not Ditch O'Schultz, had led him a merry dance across most of Europe including large tracts of Ashford and West London. The piece of scum had apparently been leeching the life out of others for decades, by writing articles in things called fanzines based upon his warped and deviated experiences. If anyone deserves to die, he thought, it was him. That was the Old Man of course, not Mike Hammer.

He got his secretary Roberta "Big Bells" Hansen to work on it and ten days later she had booked him on a flight to Las Vegas, which apparently was somewhere in the USA. She told him Corflu was not, as he had feared, some sort of communicable disease but a convention where various depraved idiots got together and didn't even have sex, except apparently for one named Nic Farey who was at it all the time like a rabbit. She told him the Old Man had booked on a flight there several days earlier, and he should look out for

him by his penchant for wearing gaudy Hawaiian shirts.



Earl Kemp gives the secret fraternal salute to Nic Farey. Exceptionally good photo by Gary Mattingly.

asked if he could have a smoking gun room and whipped out his hardware, but the chick behind the desk didn't seem to appreciate the joke. He hastily stuffed his pistol back down his trousers.

He thought he might have difficulty finding out where these freaks hung out, but the first person he met whilst waiting for the lift was a limey called Fat Johnny who claimed not only to know the Old Man but to have seen him in room 2045. Mike let Fat Johnny waddle off, suppressing an urge to put a couple of slugs into his butt. Time for target practice later, he thought.



Marty Cantor

Las Vegas was a sleazy town with a whore willing to turn a trick on every corner, so it took him quite a long while to make his way from the airport to the Plaza Hotel. He marvelled at its cheap opulent decadence whilst a bellboy gave him a blowjob. What other casino hotel would have its carpets held together with duct tape, he thought, gazing down whilst keeping as tight hold of the bellhop's ears as he could.

He checked in. The bitch on the desk told him he couldn't have a smoking room because they had all been reserved for some dude called Ted White. That was another name for his list, he decided. He

He went up to his room on the sixth floor, to freshen up and to strip, oil, and grease his weapon. After that he felt the need to cool the huge vein throbbing in his temple, but the ice machine was out of order so he had to go up to floor seven to get ice. First of all he made the mistake of going down to the third but that was the floor with the pool and they didn't have ice machines. If he'd had a gun with him he would have shot out the elevator, which he realized in retrospect would not have been a good idea, since he would then have had to use the stairs. It made him think there was a place after all for some, admittedly proscribed, gun laws. When he was coming back from the seventh floor, a huge wave of Chinese tourists surged passed

him, like people fleeing a vast earthquake. He considered whacking them all, but thought he'd better not in case it amounted to an international incident. Apparently the Chinese

were all heading for the seventh floor because seven was a lucky number in China, except possibly not for those who had relatives living in Earthquake Zones.

After waxing his legs and chilling for several hours, listening to Elliot Smith & Jeffrey Lewis on his Ipod, whilst a porn channel flashed in the background, Hammer went up to room 2045. On the way he wandered by mistake into 2001, where some kind of Space Odyssey nude orgy was going on. He made his excuses and left after shooting several people in the legs and one of them in the lower bowel.



Joyce and Arnie Katz.

Someone had tied the latch on 2045 off with a towel. Neat touch, thought Hammer, and it saved him jemmying the lock, as he cautiously pushed open the door and put his jemmy away safely in one of the pockets of his cargo pants (Wranglers, \$17.66 at Wal-Mart). He had hardly gone a few steps inside however, and didn't even have time to prime his pump action shotgun, before people were greeting him and shaking his hand and pretending to recognize him from years ago, although it was patently obvious they had never met him before in their lives. Someone gave him a name badge, and another guy with a shopping trolley gave him a magazine called No Award. Hammer presumed from his shaggy hair and his shambling gait he was homeless and gave him twenty bucks in small change, but the guy spilled it on the floor. Someone offered him a slice of pizza, that was Mike not the guy peddling No Award, but another person intervened to say it was far too early for pizza, and that wouldn't happen for several days, or at least until Scott and Luba got back with the pizza.

This is definitely the place, Hammer thought. It was as if he had warped into some sort of party where no one had bothered to book hookers, and old guys got together to slap themselves on the back and talk about old times. And pizza.

He took a look around. A guy called Katz and his half-American Native Indian squaw, Joyce, seemed to be in charge, but not so much in charge because they largely ignored him, somehow failing to see the threat he represented to their cosy conclave. If only they had realized what kind of heat he was packing.



Steve Stiles and Dan Steffan.

He fell into conversation with a skinny guy called Robert who was wearing a psychedelic tie-dyed T-shirt who told him he had once worked on a hippie commune. Mike's trigger finger started itching uncontrollably. A guy called Jay Kinney joined them and shook his hand, tickling his palm with his forefinger and giving him a sly nudge nudge wink wink salutation whilst rolling his left trouser leg up to his calf. Again Mike's trigger finger started itching but he backed off. He would enjoy whacking all these fruits later. At one point he dropped the Old Man's name in conversation but everybody either gasped in disbelief or clammed up in denial. One guy called Steffan actually fell down on his knees and bleated, "please don't make me tell, please don't make me tell."



Ted White and Robert Lichtman.

It can wait, Hammer decided, going up to his room and calling room service for a room service. Unfortunately they didn't seem to know what he was talking about.

In the morning, after travelling to the seventh floor to get more ice and meet more Chinese, he met Nic Farey outside the elevator. "Fuck me, mate, you look rough," said Nic, "Looks like a donkey has crept into your stall and shagged you while you slept. Looks like you'd woken up with a brass player's trombone in your mouth, if you catch my drift. You look like a lumberjack who's blunted his chopper and run out of wood. Or else a wanker who'd just met someone from Hitchin who spoke in a false acquired Cockney Mockney estuary accent, with a hint of Aussie

thrown in, but who is really sensitive despite all this. I know what you're thinking, you're thinking why don't I shoot this git in the kneecaps now and get it all over with, but that would mean, just like me, you would be denying your more sensitive side. There's a party in my penthouse room later, by the way, but you will have to come up the back stairs because the elevators don't work. I understand The Old Man will be there. He'll be the one wearing the 'Fuck Off' hat."

Hammer let Farey limp away, although he did wonder why he was limping, and why he appeared to have three legs.

The Old Man. So finally the showdown was on. Hammer went to his room and did twenty bench presses, then another forty because he didn't really understand what he was thinking about. The maid had changed his sheets despite the fact that he had left the notice on his door saying "Do not change my sheets unless I am laying naked on my bed with a huge erection."

At last the time had come. Hammer checked that everything was cocked and primed, especially his guns, and made his way up to the penthouse floor. Under the pretence of being a security guard reporting a complaint about the noise in the party, Hammer dived

into Farey's room with both guns blazing, Everybody hit the floor, except the broad called Bobby, who was in the bed and obviously didn't feel she had any further to fall. Splinters of glass flew from shattered bottles of Jim Beam. Doctor Rob squealed something about homeopathic remedies for gunshot wounds, and Frank and Ted merely nodded and remained as calm as only true stoners can be. After everything had calmed down, there remained only the stink of cordite and an empty Fuck Off hat. Looked like the Old Man had slipped through the net again.

Hammer went back to his room, fired off a few blanks, and packed up his guns. The Old Man had escaped him for now, but there was always tomorrow. He went down to the Casino and put twenty dollars into a machine, played it and came away with a cash voucher for 23.60. He decided to keep it as a souvenir that he had actually won at Las Vegas, although, as Roberta Hansen reminded him when he got back home, he had actually lost \$20. Easy come easy go.

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Special thanks to Graham Charnock for forcing Mike Hammer to write this article for *eI*.



Mike Hammer. Self-portrait by Graham Charnock.

On reading: "With my brains all fired up, I do the nearly impossible thing that you are doing now, dear reader. I make sense of idiosyncratic arrangements, in horizontal lines, of nothing but twenty-six phonetic symbols, ten Arabic numerals, and perhaps eight punctuation marks, on a sheet of bleached and flattened wood pulp!"

-- Kurt Vonnegut, intro to the collection "Bagombo Snuff Box"

Sleazy Sunday

By Jerry Murray



Jerry and Suzann Murray.
Photo by Earl Kemp, LAPB,
Mission Hills, CA, March
2008.

Suzy and I left San Diego at six in the morning and got to the Mission Hills Convention Hall in San Fernando Valley just after nine, when a few dozen collectors of yesterday's pulp literature were still lining up to pay five bucks to delve through the wares on display at the 29th Annual Paperback Show & Sale. Worming their way through the gathering crowd, some exhibitors were still hustling their wares to assigned tables in three exhibition rooms in the rather modest convention hall. All in all, the show's awakening minutes were too energetic giddy for us to stop and search for Earl, the guy who invited us to the show two weeks earlier.

As the former editor of Greenleaf Classics, Earl Kemp bought most of the many paperback novels I wrote forty years ago, in the halcyon decade of my meteoric career as a freelance writer of pornography, a.k.a. dirty books, erotic fiction, or just plain smut, but now affectionately referred to as sleaze, and avidly sought by collectors.

Some of my old paperbacks can be found for sale on Amazon for over \$100, those with especially lurid cover art going for \$300, and the originals of the best cover art of the era can sell for well over \$1,000. There was plenty of sleaze on display, plus thousands of old comic books and antique magazines, carefully protected in plastic envelopes, an indescribable amount of miscellany, tons of pulp science fiction classics, and striking collections of original cover art from both sleaze and sf paperbacks. Since Earl is still widely known and respected as an editor of both genres, he attends the show every year as one of thirty or so guest celebrities mingling at large, warmly greeting fans and friends, and in Earl's case, scheduled to sit with other celebs from eleven till noon and autograph books he had edited and chat with his fans.

Earl now lives in far-off Kingman, AZ, and when we finally spotted him amid the chattering crowd, it was wonderful to see him serenely smiling at us and coming to meet us with open arms. Far too fast for us to remember names, he introduced us to a dizzying bevy of collectors, authors, dealers, and Tom Lesser, the man who sponsors the show. At Tom's request, Earl had given him a partial list of my many pseudonyms for distribution to collectors who might want me to increase the value of my bygone and out-of-print literary efforts by sitting at the celebrity table with Earl and signing their paperbacks with my name and my appropriate pseudonym.

Browsing the busy aisles with Earl brought the show to life--meeting more of his friends,

seeing a few of my old books on display, and watching fellow showgoers suddenly exhilarate at turning up their special kind of collectible. We had gawked and pointed and laughed and shaken hands through half the show before we browsed right into big tall Larry Ross, a buyer of some of my first very tentative submissions. A minor paperback publisher way back then, Larry's bigger shticks were publishing monthly porn newsletters and selling nudie magazine packages to Earl. Now semi-retired, he still dabbles on the fringes of the perennially lucrative commercial sex biz. As with Earl, I had some whacky good times with Larry on our way to becoming good friends, and I had invited him to drop in and see us at the show. Not having seen Earl in years, and amazed at the scope of the show, Larry joined us in browsing and jostling our way through the aisles, talking and laughing and rapidly reminiscing before he had to leave to pick up his daughter at LAX.



Jerry Murray, Earl Kemp, and Larry Ross.
Photo by Suzann Murray, LAPB, Mission Hills, CA, March 2008.

Suddenly it was celebrity time, and I was seated at a table with Earl and Victor Banis, a versatile current author who wrote a number of gay sex novels in the good old porno days of yore, which I also did under the pseudonym of Murray Montague. After taking turns telling each other what a great friend Earl has been to us and other writers, he and Earl were kept busy signing books and talking sleaze and science fiction collectibles with their fans. While Suzy took a walk, I sat at their table, smiling, crowd-watching, and quietly enjoying myself until Bob Speray, Miriam Lini, Tony Jacobs, anonymous other showgoers, and show promoter Tom Lesser began bringing me stacks of my old paperbacks, transforming me into an instant celebrity.

I'm sure I scrawled the names of the real me and the "author" in well over fifty books, all the while kidding around with my devoted fans and laughing out loud at some of the titles, blurbs, and cover art on the tangible reminders of my scandalous past. Many of the old paperbacks had titles and pseudonyms I'd completely forgotten, each one evoking a

memory or two of where I was and what I was doing when I typed the manuscript on my yard-sale Remington portable, and in my later years, on my brand new Olivetti electric.



Show scenes by Suzann Murray.
LAPB, Mission Hills, CA, March 2008.

Time and again I told my adoring fans that my porno years were the best times of my life. I hadn't time to tell them that the era included a decade of total freedom in which I professionally answered to no one but great guys like Earl and Larry, who paid me well to live where I chose, take my wife and kids on tours all over the western states, and meet creative colleagues from here to Mexico while entertaining untold numbers of readers with harmlessly naughty books about the pleasures, perils, and laughs to be found in the wide world of virtual sex. Nor did I have time to introduce Suzy to all of them as my permanently current wife, who was very much a part of that giddy era. Thanks to her, those best years have continued, because she has happily become the most important part of my life.

As splendid as that life was, writing erotic fiction wasn't as easy as it might seem. Authors used so many pseudonyms to avoid legal harassment as the definition of pornography continually changed, much thanks to Earl, who spearheaded a global civil rights movement that altered the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First Amendment. Broader limits of free speech gradually changed the images of writers like us from scurrilous hacks to respectable pulp fiction authors.

Yearning to continue living the good life as the genre began to fade, I enrolled in a post grad creative writing seminar at SD State College. In teaching us how to write novels, our instructor, a PhD. of Literature, read excerpts from the extremely thick manuscript he was working on to illustrate good and bad examples of syntax, plotting, and characterization. In mid-semester he asked who among his dozen seminarians had received a rejection notice. Everyone, including our professor, raised a hand. When he asked who'd been published, a man said some of his poems had appeared in print and he'd sold a short story, a woman said some of her prize-winning recipes had been published, and I confessed to selling well over a hundred sex novels.



Forrest J Ackerman, William F. Nolan, and Ray Bradbury. Photo by Earl Kemp, LAPB, Mission Hills, CA, March 2008.

For the rest of the semester, our professor deferred to me in answering many questions about writing salable manuscripts. At semester's end, he invited Suzy and me to dinner, and sought my advice in writing and publishing a sex novel written in collaboration with his wife. I don't know if they sold their manuscript, but the experience raised my self-confidence to a point where I was later able to write my way into a job that provided me with fifteen years of working at home and abroad in return for a reliably good salary, extensive travel with Suzy, and wide popularity as an electronics trade journal writer

who had the ability to make a reader who starts one of my technical articles, finish it. It was a truly marvelous final career, but not nearly the fun I had as an undisciplined and unfettered writer of sleaze.

On leaving the Paperback Show and Sale, we had to weave our way through dozens of people, paperbacks in their hands, sitting, standing, and chatting in the hallway that led to the table selling admission tickets. When we wondered why the lolling latecomers outnumbered the fans we'd seen buying tickets at the start of the show, Earl smiled and said, "They're here early to wait for Ray Bradbury, who rarely leaves his house at his age,

but said he could be here for no more than an hour, and they're hoping to see the great, talk with him, and ask him to sign one of his books."

I couldn't conceivably handle a celebrity as renowned as Ray Bradbury's, but I'm overjoyed by having been invited to be an official celebrity guest at next year's show. So Suzy and I will be seeing this year's friends again and meeting even more of my rather minimal hordes of faithful fans at the 30th annual show. And between now and then, we're hoping Earl and I can coalesce on a literary idea born at the show.

Tired but happy when we got home from San Fernando Valley, we were hyped by an email from Larry, Ross who had returned to the show with his daughter, hoping she could visit with Suzy and me again after a long absence. But we had left by then, and after striking up a conversation with a serious collector, Larry mentioned some original cover art stashed away in his garage, and the two of us went there and conducted some business very satisfying to both parties.



Our Sleazy Sunday turned out to be great day for one and all!

This is a huge country. There are primitive tribes here and there who have customs and moral standards of their own. It's the way I feel about religious fundamentalists. They really ought to have a reservation. They have a right to their culture and I can see where the First Amendment would be very painful for them. The First Amendment is a tragic amendment because everyone is going to have his or her feelings hurt and your government is not here to protect you from having your feelings hurt.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Playboy*, May 1992

Skimmed Milk

By Frank M. Robinson



That's me in make-up and in a scene. (Photo by Brandon Boyce). It was the "moving billboard" for Harvey outside his camera store. Each of us held up a sign with a letter on it so the entire line spelled out MILK FOR SUPERVISOR. Nineteen all told, I guess. Clever idea way back when. I'm in costume--blue jacket, Greek fisherman's cap, Milk T-shirt....

Harvey's camera shop. It looked very close to the original. First scene, "Danny" (Lucas Gabreel, star of *High School Musical* on HBO) is sorting film in the corner, Scott Smith (Harvey's lover, played by James Franco) is at the desk, and two of Harvey's political consultants are talking in the background. I'm sitting in a corner as "wallpaper"--saying nothing at all. (All of Harvey's old people--those of us still alive--had cameos as a courtesy). I'm to be seen, not heard.

Franco--nice guy, very much an agent provocateur when it comes to film--notices that I'm twiddling my thumbs trying to look fascinated, grins and asks me: "Hey, Robinson--did you get laid last night?" I was a) astonished and b) felt challenged. (Hey, fellas, I've been writing dialog all my life.) I say, "Yeah, Scott, I got laid last night" and told a dirty joke I made up on the spot.

I cracked up everybody on the set and was promoted immediately to SAG. Subsequently ad libbed dialog with Sean Penn and others (no lines were ever written for me). Was in a total of 17 scenes--most of them "riot" scenes (marches on City Hall, etc.) After my last

An amazing experience. They had a guy picked out to play me--met him later on--and then Sean Penn, Gus van Sant (director), and Lance Black (screenwriter--smart, talented, a workhorse and friendly) came over to the house and Penn interviewed me for an hour and a half about Harvey (I used to be Harvey's speechwriter). Afterward, took them all to dinner at an upscale Burmese restaurant on Castro. Sean had to leave early and I entertained Gus and Lance with tales about *Rogue* and *Playboy*. Naturally they were fascinated (translation: bored stiff).

After I wound down, Gus asked if I wanted to be in the film. I told him I'd never acted, couldn't act, and I'd forgotten every line when I was the lead in a grammar school play. He said it was only going to be one word. "Dogshit." I said I thought I could manage that, and my career as a movie star was born.

First scene I was in was set in Harvey's old camera shop. They rented the old store on Castro and remodeled it into a reasonable facsimile of

scene, I asked Gus for my gold watch. Instead he gave me a little eulogy before the entire cast and crew. Loud applause and hugs all around. Next day they shoot Sean giving a speech before a crowd of gays in front of City Hall and I recognize it as one I wrote. Very proud. Day after that they interviewed me for an hour on the "making of" part for the DVD.

Movie will be released on November 20th. I don't know how well it will be received but I've read the script (had read several others years ago) and it's very good--first and last scenes will nail people in their seats. I imagine very few people remember the details of Harvey's life but, story wise, it was damned dramatic. The last of the storefront politicians who ran for public office with no money and was elected, whose lover (not Scott) was a suicide, and who was executed along with the mayor by a disaffected fellow supervisor.



Harvey's camera shop.

The film does not cover the riots that followed when the supervisor was tried for murder and the jury of old ladies from his district decided it was involuntary manslaughter and Dan White (the assassin) was given seven years (five, with time off for good behavior) for "involuntary manslaughter." The gay part of the city blew up. Five thousand marched on City Hall, tore up the pavement, and broke the windows on the ground floor. and fought the tac squad when it showed up. Eleven police cars torched, a hundred gays sent to the ER, some 70 cops as well. Later that night, cops took off their badges and invaded the Castro to beat up pedestrians on the street, wreck the Elephant Bar, etc. There were reports of gays with rifles on surrounding rooftops and I believe them. The Castro was our "turf" and I think we came within an inch of Watts and the National Guard....

The film doesn't cover that, restricting itself to Harvey and his life. Some years later, when the AIDS crisis hit, neither the state (Reagan was governor) nor the Feds were of any help. What help there was came from the city and those gay organizations that had grown up during Harvey's campaigns and his time as supervisor.

God, it's hard to believe. It all happened 30 years ago and to most people it is ancient history. For me, I will never forget it and will always be proud of the small part I played.

I thought I'd be camera shy--I wasn't. I thought I'd be tongue-tied trading lines--made up ones at that--with Penn, Franco, and the others. I just pretended I was talking to the real Scott and Harvey and everything went just fine.

There's a whole helluva lot more to tell but I can't give away the movie; I have to leave that

to the publicity guys. The caterers were the best in town, it was an extremely friendly cast and crew, and frankly I think I was treated like fine porcelain. Well, that is except for the time when we were told it was a night shoot and would run from 6 to 3 A.M. My doctor assured me I wouldn't have a heart attack on the set but I pissed and moaned once I got there and they locked me in an actors' trailer until it was time for my part in the shoot. I had no lines but I had to appear for fear the audience would wonder what had happened to me. Ah, the villains--but I'm so grateful they did. The most moving scene of all....

I don't know how it will do. I'm told the first edit is great. The cast is terrific: Sean Penn (Oscar for *Mystic River*), Josh Brolin (one of the stars in this year's Oscar winner, *No Country for Old Men*), James Franco (Spiderman's murderous friend in the Spiderman movies), Diego Luna (a star in *Y Tu Mama Tambien*), Joseph Cross (star of *Running With Scissors*), Emile Hirsch (star of *Into the wild*), Brandon Boyce (actor and the screenwriter for *Apt Pupil*), Lucas Garbeel (star of HBO's *High School Musical*) and, of course--*moi*.



Sean Penn with the bullhorn, addressing extras in front of the Castro theatre.

How can it lose? Well, easy, I suppose.... I suspect the major actors went for it for Screen Guild minimum but a piece of the action. The acting talent is really deep.... There's sex, humor, drama, and above all--hey, this really happened!!!!

In one scene I had, I channeled not thirty years ago but close to sixty. For me, it wasn't acting, it was reality. Oddly, I think it was too emotional for the scene. (Penn suspected I was coming apart on set and gave me a huge hug. Don't know if he knew how much it meant to me.)

Probably I'll have more to say once the film comes out and I'm in no danger of revealing anything beforehand.

It was a great experience. I suspect my magazine experience helped me. A lot of similarity between the written and the spoken word. But movies are vastly more complex and require vastly more people (extras alone went as high as 4,000 for some of the crowd scenes in *Milk*) and equipment. Utterly fascinating watching the mechanical part of things.... The actors are like fingers on a hand--the crew, cameras, soundmen, lighting guys, and truckloads of equipment make up the rest of the body. The director holds all of this in his hands and how van Sant did it, I'll never understand.

How did it feel once it was all finished, no more getting up at 6 a.m. to be on the set at 9, no more sitting in wardrobe shooting the shit with the other 200 extras, etc.?

The wrap party was the end of it and the next morning it felt like there was a huge void in my life. Everybody had left and there I was standing alone with the last of the confetti drifting down. I never felt so lonely in all my life.

You stand outside a society and a culture and realize that it is an invention and that you can improve it. Well, I like the American culture, such as it is, but let's get rid of the fucking guns.

--Kurt Vonnegut

*Whatever Lola Wants....**

By Victor J. Banis

Dropped into a gold rush mining camp, young Terry Murphy sticks out like the proverbial sore thumb—little, effeminate, a sissy, he has all his life been the victim of abuse, target of bullies, the butt of jokes.

Until the day he puts on a dress...

"Listen, you," Willis said, but she didn't wait to hear him out.

"No, you listen. It's good-bye, and right now." And with that, she threw open the back door and went out, slamming it after herself. From outside, they heard a man's voice say, "About time, I was fixin' to go without you."

"You ain't going nowhere without me, you old sugar," she said, and her laugh quickly faded.



Jerry Murray, Earl Kemp, and Victor Banis. Photo by Suzann Murray, LAPB, Mission Hills, CA, March 2008.

"Damnation," Willis said, staring at the door through which she had disappeared. "I ought to have thrown the ungrateful bitch out on the street a long time ago." He turned, and saw Terry standing in the doorway. "What the hell are you looking at?" he demanded, "Who are you?"

"I'm Terry Murphy. Brian's brother."

"The mean sonofabitch? I didn't even know he had a brother, unless it was Old Nick. Well,

what do you want?"

"I came by," Terry stammered, "I'm looking for work. I thought, well, maybe I could get a job here, at The Dollar. Maybe you needed somebody."

Willis laughed mirthlessly. "You want a job? Why don't you put on one of those dresses and go out there and dance for those damn fool miners. That's what I need, sonny." He stormed out, muttering angrily to himself.

Alone in the dressing room, Terry glanced about, and his eyes fell on the dressing table. Lizette had left most of her stage make-up. There was a Spanish fan there, too, He picked it up and snapped it open.

Back in the Bowery, in the dressing room at the theater, Rosaria had entertained her fellow dancers often with her fan. "In Spain, a señorita doesn't need words to tell a man what she wants to say, she can say it all with her fan," she told them.

Clicking the fan open and shut, Terry strolled to the rack of dresses that stood along one wall, the costumes Lizette had left behind.

Why don't you put on one of those dresses... Willis's words seemed to echo inside his head. He took one of the dresses from the rack and held it up before himself and looked speculatively into the standing mirror. The dress was black, vaguely Spanish in style, and lavishly trimmed in ruffles.

Even at a glance, he could see it would fit perfectly.

#

Willis was back a bit later. "You still here?" he said, "I thought I told you...."

He stopped inside the dressing room door and gaped in astonishment at the beautiful woman seated at the dressing table, scarcely able to believe what he saw. "Jesus H. Christ," he swore aloud. "It can't be, but...but it is, isn't it? It's...is it really you, Murphy?"

"Not any more," Terry said. "Not tonight. Tonight, I'm Lola Valdez. And I'm going to dance on your stage."

"You must be plumb loco. Do you have any idea what kind of men those are out there?"

"A pretty good idea."

"They'd kill you for fooling 'em like this."

"They won't know, if you don't tell them," Terry said. "Look at me, Mister Willis. If you didn't know, would you ever suspect?"

\
"Someone will."

"You go out there and tell them there's a new entertainer just arrived in town tonight. Lola Valdez, you tell them, just back from a triumphant tour of the continent, where she danced for the crowned heads of Europe. And tonight, Lola dances for The Lucky Dollar Saloon."

"They'll string me up with you," Willis said, but after another long, hard look at the face in the mirror, he gulped and shook his head, and hurriedly disappeared out the door.

Terry followed him more slowly. He paused at the edge of the stage curtain, peering past it at the crowded saloon. For just a moment, his legs felt like they would fail him.

"He's right," he told himself. "You must be crazy, Terry Murphy, to think you could get away with this."

There was a mirror tacked up just off stage. He paused to look at himself carefully in it. His hair hadn't been cut since he had come here, and by this time it naturally hung all the way down to his shoulders. He'd used Lizette's pins and a couple of Spanish combs to pin it up, and let the dark curls tumble down either side of his face.

He'd had to leave his glasses behind so he saw things through a faint myopic haze that, he did not realize until later, gave his glances a peculiar intensity. He had outlined his eyes to make them look even bigger and darkened his lashes. His mouth was painted a little fuller than it really was, and he'd made his complexion a bit lighter with powder, carefully not too much, and painted roses of rouge on his cheeks.

Other than his face and neck, here wasn't much skin to be seen. He'd put on a trio of red petticoats under the black dress, and cinched it all at the waist with a gold chain. The skirt came down far enough to cover his stockinged legs but managed nevertheless to offer glimpses of the crimson ruffles when he walked. There were more ruffles, too, on top, that hid most of his bodice as well, and he had pinned a flowery lace shawl around his shoulders, that screened the rest of it while the glimpses of flesh to be seen through it created the illusion that they were seeing more than they really were.



If someone who knew him, and especially someone who had any reason to suspect, looked closely enough, they might recognize him. But, who knew him here? Hardly anyone. He had almost never come into town, and then only briefly. They wouldn't be seeing him up close, either, but from a distance, and as they had said more than once in their dance classes back in the states, distance lends enchantment. Besides, there was no reason for anyone to suspect, to think he was anyone but who Willis was announcing to them at this

very moment: Lola Valdez.

Willis came offstage, looked at Terry and, with a nervous grin, shook his head in wonder. "Go on, get our fucking neck wrung for us, if you're going to do it," he said.

Still, Terry hesitated, until someone in the saloon yelled, "Well, where the hell is she?" and someone else echoed, "Let's get her out here, then, and see what those crowned heads were so het up about."

No, Terry told himself. I'm not crazy. I can do this. And I'm not Terry Murphy, either. I'm Lola Valdez.

And the moment he stepped out past the curtain, strolled to center stage, sashaying and making the ruffled skirt and the petticoats swish and sway with each step he took, that was who he became, and Terry Murphy was left behind in the wings.

Lola held the Spanish fan before her face and gazed out at the men over the top of it, smiling with her eyes as Rosaria had demonstrated for them, her gaze sweeping the room. It was a gesture that said, "I find you very attractive," and her huge, dark eyes, just slightly out of focus, conveyed that message to every man in the packed room.

Something happened that had never before happened at The Lucky Dollar. The room went silent, a thunderous silence. No one spoke. Even the slap, slap slap of the cards at the poker tables went still. A hundred mouths hung open, a hundred pair of eyes were suddenly riveted on the little figure standing before them.

"Like a rose, suddenly appearing in the filth of that dirty room," one of them would put it later, a description that would be long remembered by many.

It lasted half a minute, that eerie silence—a full minute, longer yet. You could almost hear the seconds tick by until Lola took the satin skirt between her fingers and lifted it ever so slowly, ever so slightly, revealing more flashes of red petticoat and one slender ankle—even an inch or two, no more, of net clad calf.

She gave the fan a quick, sudden snap, revealing her face in full for the first time, and smiled, brightly—and there was not a man in the room who wouldn't have sworn afterward that the smile was aimed directly and personally at him.

Pandemonium erupted. Male voices bawled like cattle in lightning, boots stomped, fists pounded on tables—so much noise that the very rafters shook and you half feared the roof might collapse, the building fall in on itself from all the noise and commotion.

Lola took a single step, rolled her shoulders. The silence fell again, as completely as before, as quickly as the noise had exploded.

She hardly knew afterward what she did. She was aware of the pianist banging out

something on the piano, trying to follow the rhythm of Lola's dancing feet, the notes nothing more than a discordant jangle.

No one cared. No one heard them. There was attention for nothing but that slim-waisted figure twirling about on the stage, tossing her fan, flashing her ankles, laughing and winking and weaving in hellish abandon. When she spun about, they saw more womanly leg than it was possible for a man to see anywhere outside of Belle Blessing's whorehouse, and these legs were shapelier by far than any to be seen there.

At first, they watched in a stunned, almost disbelieving silence, but then men began to cheer and clap, and now they were throwing money onto the stage, vying with one another to see who could throw the most: coins, paper money, little bags of gold dust.

Lola rewarded them by dancing still faster, with ever-greater abandon, until the stage was littered with tributes to her spell and she could hardly step without bringing her slippered foot down on piles of money or bags of gold.

Finally, she leapt into the air, gave a final spin, and sank in a weary heap to the floor of the stage, panting from exertion.

"She's fainted," someone shouted from the audience and there was a shifting of many feet and a scraping of chairs being pushed back.

At once, Terry sat up and scrambled to his feet, knowing that he dared not let them rush to the stage to help him.

He smiled out at the audience and curtsied, and again there was that roar of approval, and finally, for the first time in his life, Terry knew love, felt it sweep over him in great waves from those cheering, shouting, clapping men—all their loneliness, all the grubbiness of their lives in this dismal place, their affection and desire, their excitement, coalesced into a great bubble of happiness that enveloped Terry and that it almost seemed he could float away in.

There was movement about the room, and no doubt some of them would have charged right up onto the stage, but Willis, at least, had the good sense to quickly whisk the curtain closed, and the last glimpse the miners had of Lola Valdez was the kiss she blew to them.

Terry quickly scooped up the money strewn across the stage, making a pouch out of his skirt to hold it, and ran for the dressing room. He had barely gotten there when Willis followed him in. The saloon owner was grinning from ear to ear, showing his blackened teeth, his face flushed with excitement.

"By God, you did it," he cried, practically dancing a jig himself. "You did it. I can't believe it. The toughest, orneriest men this side of creation, and you had them eating out of your hand."

"Yes," Terry said, sinking into a chair and looking at himself in the mirror. But it was not himself he saw, not the sissy boy whom others taunted or used for their pleasure, not the unwanted orphan, the butt of a lifetime of jokes. He saw someone beautiful, someone very much wanted, someone who brought happiness and pleasure to all who beheld.

He saw Lola Valdez.

He was still out of breath. *I'll have to get back in practice*, he told himself, and realized in that instant what he had not even contemplated before. He had not thought beyond this single night, beyond the challenge of walking on to that stage and winning over these hardened miners; but now, he realized in a burst of insight that what he had done was not some one-time thing, a mere lark. He had found his role in life. From this night on, he was Lola Valdez. The beautiful Lola Valdez.

"Listen to them," Willis was saying, "They're screaming for you. You've got to go back out there."

"No," Terry said. "We want them screaming for more, eaten alive with wanting to see Lola. You go out there and tell them if they want to see more, they'll have to come back tomorrow night. And they will. I guarantee it. Every man in this camp will be here tomorrow night, Mister Willis, to see Lola dance."

Willis shook his head admiringly. "Jesus, you're right," he said. "They'll be fighting one another to get through the door tomorrow night, to see Lola dance. Christ Almighty! My fortune is made."

"And you'd better put a couple of the boys outside the door to this room. Those men are feeling pretty rambunctious right now. We wouldn't want anybody to get back here. They might get a big surprise."

Willis chortled. "They might at that. I'll see to it." He made to go.

"And, Willis," Terry said. "Aren't you forgetting something?" Willis paused, one hand on the door, and gave him a puzzled look. "My pay," Terry said.

"Your pay? Why, there must be five, six hundred dollars there," Willis said, looking at the piles of coins and paper dollars and the bags of gold dust that Terry had dumped on the dressing table, "Maybe a thousand. You expect me to pay you in addition to all that."

"Gifts," Terry said, waving a dismissive hand at the money, "From my enthusiastic admirers. That's got nothing to do with my employment. You paid Lizette, didn't you? And she wasn't anywhere near as good as I was. I want to be fair, though. I'll settle for what you paid her."

"Not a penny,"

"Or," Terry said, "you can go out there and announce to all those excited miners that Lola Valdez will not be dancing for them again." He shrugged.

Willis glowered angrily at him for a moment. Terry only smiled back sweetly. Finally, with a snort of anger, Willis took a handful of coins out of his trousers' pocket.

"Gold dust," Terry said.

"Gold dust?" Willis echoed. Terry nodded. "You are crazy."

"Gold dust," Terry said again.

They regarded one another unflinchingly for a moment more, but it was Willis who blinked and looked away. He took a small bag from the jacket of his pocket, and threw it on the dressing table, and stormed out, swearing a string of profanities under his breath.

Terry picked up the bag and weighed it consideringly in his hand. He looked at himself in the mirror, half amused and half astonished. It was the first time in his entire life he had ever really stood up to anybody, ever stood his ground.

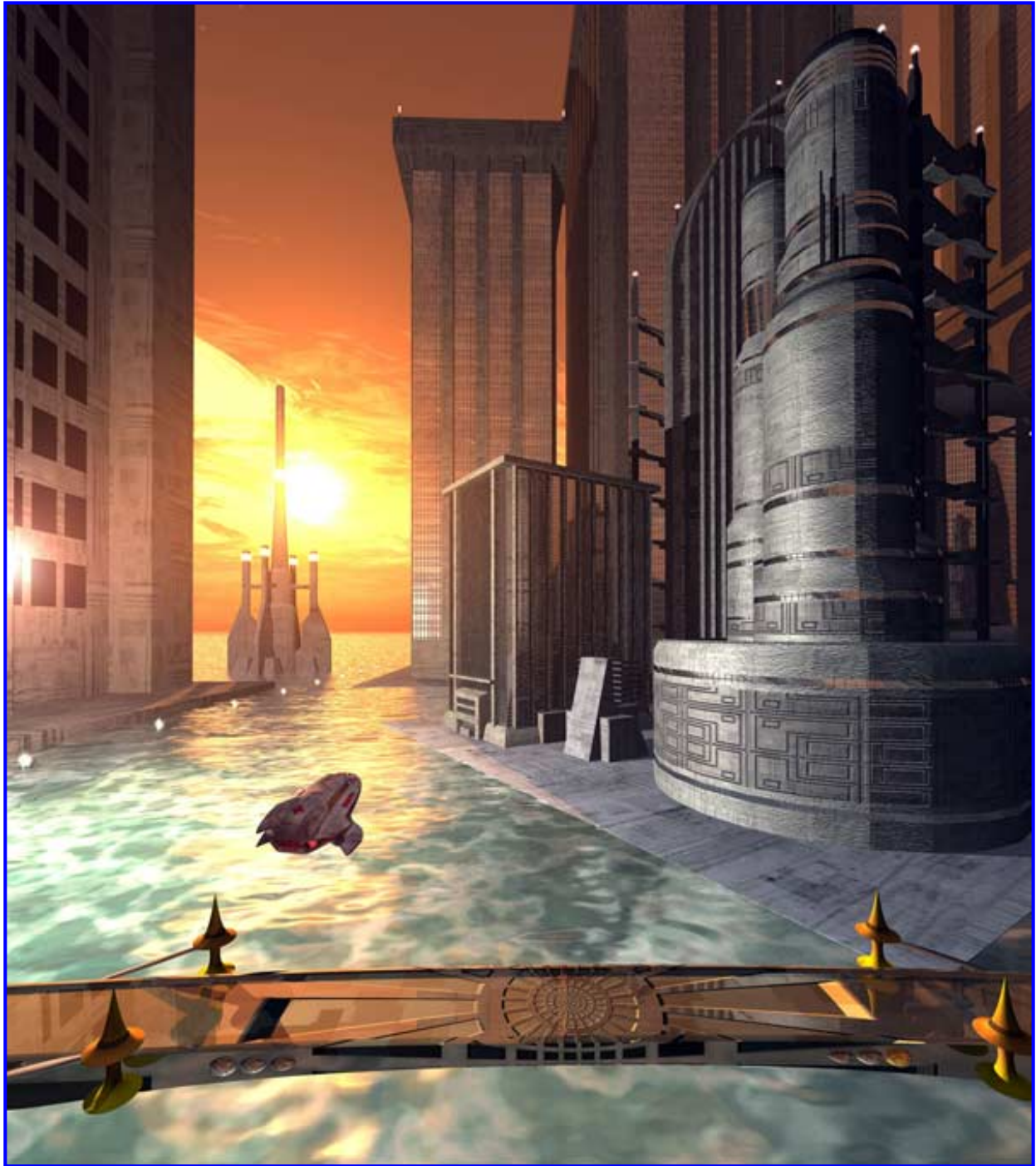
Already, he was a different person.

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The big trouble with print, of course, is that it is an elitist art form. Most people can't read very well.

--Kurt Vonnegut, preface to "Between Time and Timbuktu"



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