

clearerther!

is the all-purpose personalzine of Samuel Edward Konkin III. It is published irregularly (semi-monthly, approximately) for exchange with other Science Fiction fanzines and for the following Amateur Press Associations: *APA-nu*, *Alarums & Excursions*, *Frefanzine*, and any others the editor is invited to join. clearerther! is available only for trade, letter-of-comment, or in APA. clearerther! welcomes fanart!, locs and filk songs; the faned will also consider other faanish material and even sercon for inclusion if he can think on an excuse. All correspondence should be sent to New Libertarian Enterprises, P.O. Box 1748, Long Beach, CA 90801, Attention: SEK3. □

This issue is Number 11 (of Volume II) and is intended primarily for APA-v 16 (June 1976?). Next ish: back to *Alarums & Excursions* for *Catchup Commentary*, possibly reviews of *D&D* movies, beginning of *Tales of Terra Supra*.

FANFIC FOLLIES

About the time I left New York I started on a short story which began to expand into a novelette—and then abruptly stopped as I packed up and got into the new swing of things. It was inspired by one of our last NYUSFS raps in the Deli, and so I think it appropriate to run here. After a year, I've lost the train of thought, but if I get overwhelming accolades for this unpolished fragment, I'll consider finishing work on it.

"AND THEN THERE WERE"

CHAPTER I

Groupmind cleaned the atmosphere and the oceans. Now it looked upon the spanking clean planet and distributed pleasurable feelings. The effort so far had been minor, and most of its components had continued in their problems, cross-communication, integration and storage.

One by one the cells, so to speak, of Groupmind applied themselves to the tasks of winding DNA in the oceanic soup. Virus. Bacteria. Protozoa. Ah, Paramecium. Colonies.

With the creation of a trilobite, Groupmind sent another wave of satisfaction throughout its gigantic, electromagnetic being.

For a millenium Groupmind had not been in contact with organic life. The boies that the billions of brains which had become Groupmind were not forgotten, but now just so much stored information.

Groupmind was resting. It had not needed to for a millenium. It felt good. Perhaps years went by, perhaps a century or two.

Again Groupmind reengaged itself with the task. Insects evolved. The vertebrate problem was licked after a few failures. A fish swam in the ocean. A school of fish. And the oceans were teeming.

One (or more?) of the components of Groupmind was observing. Back and forth radiation washed the solar system. The field was touched and it focused narrowly on the spot.

Groupmind completed the amphibians and disengaged. It "felt" out the approaching entity.

A spaceship.

Groupmind felt fear thrilling through it. It repressed it. Then it broadcast a challenge on all frequencies in all manner of symbol permutations.

The ship did not reply but took an orbit around Groupmind and the planet.

A year or more passed without response. Groupmind, growing impatient for the first time in centuries, attempted to enter it.

A screen repelled it.

Again Groupmind hailed it.

Finally, Groupmind left a sentinel section to observe the ship, reactivated its sensor field in the solar system, and returned to the planet.

Reptiles raised themselves on two legs, and leathery wings flapped. Feathers sprouted.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Identify yourself," hailed Sentinel-part-of-Groupmind.

"You know me as... Huntress," came the voice from the ship. Cold, aloof, austere, feminine, reclusive Huntress. Groupmind knew her as Unassimilable Mind-Female. Groupmind resumed its attempts to alter Huntress psychologically to accept assimilation. Huntress withdrew.

Groupmind invited her to watch. "You revere life, if not our own, Huntress. We are recreating, restoring."

Warm, furry mammals were born and suckled. Some stood erect. Apes and monkeys chattered.

"You need more minds to replace those you lost. You are getting old and dull, Groupmind."

"But I am adding life to the Universe, Huntress. Can I not harvest some of which I sow? Is it not just?"

Huntress withdrew.

A man was born, then a tribe.

Another space ship entered the sensory field. Groupmind overrode all further action, withdrawing and preparing to meet the challenge.

Now it knew. Thwo points determine a straight line.

The second ship was only an astronomical unit away and not slowing down.

"Halt, Holdout," called Groupmind.

Missiles attached to the outside of the ship began firing one after the other.

The ship spoke, but not to Groupmind. "Now, Huntress, let the bastard have it!"

Groupmind diverted its attention between two ships, and simultaneously attempted to take control over each missile. It failed.

A missile, deflected from its course, struck a moon of the planet. A mushroom cloud sprouted.

In the few remaining nanoseconds before general impact of the missiles, Groupmind dropped its observation of the enigmatic Huntress and the zig-zagging Holdout and turned its attention to the fixed-course missiles.

Groupmind destroyed one of its own cells, an anonymous mind held in a matrix of electromagnetic-gravitic fields and hurled bolt after bolt of the transformed energy at the onrushing missiles as they hit the atmosphere.

Some of the savages looked up into the night sky, seeing daylight emerge. Then as sun after sun appeared, they threw themselves into shadows.

"Stop, Holdout, or I'll be forced to... to strike you!"

Again a panel slid open as Holdout's ship hit the edge of the planet's atmosphere. Laser banks seared a continent, turning lush garden into arid desert.

The bolt struck Holdout's ship, flaring on his screen.

"Ha!" laughed Holdout. "Ain't got the punch, eh?"

There was no longer any planning in Groupmind. Pondering and systems analysis alike ceased. A scream began at the center of Groupmind and flared out to nine billion other components. One "died" again and all his energy was hurled into a multi-inverted gamma laser bolt.

The first wave flared Holdout's screens. The hard-on-the-heels second wave overloaded the screen. The third hit and irradiated the ship, turning Holdout's body into bubbling putrescence.

Groupmind held his fire to observe the results. He "saw" a burned-out hulk, "hot" metal, "cold" drive, and fused-out circuitry—with nothing biologically alive. But the laser banks were swiveling and firing again.

And another continent was wasted.

Groupmind evaluated in growing anxiety. It concluded that Holdout had interfaced his mental field with the laser-bank

controls and circuitry. To destroy one would require destroying both. Groupmind had not killed sentience for over ten millenia.

In seconds the planet would be barren. Length of restoration time would exceed the length of time for Holdout to reconstruct an attack.

Groupmind clamped down on the hesitancy and panic waves washing up and down its cells.

Choice.

It would kill. One ex-brain was converted to energy again and hurled into a single pulse to force Holdout to defend himself with all his resources. The second converted-cell would overwhelm and penetrate. The third would take care of any more surprises Holdout may have.

"Hey, you big hunk of arrested epilepsy," mindcast Holdout. "No more Idiot Stew!"

The two blasts cut off the scorning laugh. The third was met by a bolt from the side.

Choices made. Acts committed. A tight little ball of mental energy-matter fell into the atmosphere from a cloud of vapour and ionic plasma.

Nine billion cells which were once independent brains freaked out in unison. What could Holdout do now? Unknown! Would Huntress act again? Unknown! Could the Universe be brought back into control? Unknown!

Matter spun off from the plummeting Holdout, carrying frictional energy. Soon a blazing tail of ions flared around the pseudometeor.

On the surface of the planet, savages cowered as the sky lit up for the third time. A tidal wave of broadcast insanity broke on their unprotected minds and all but a few flew into foaming raves.

One savage stood forth and hurled an inarticulate challenge to the gods. The meteor gave up its last matter in a final flare and flashed down to the native.

Like a drunk, like a doper, like a madman, Groupmind killed cell after cell of its polybrain. Bolt after bolt seared planets, pulverized asteroids, excited solar flares, and demolished a space ship. The mind-cell next to the center of Groupmind exerted a long-repressed will. Then it was the center and the former center flipped through layer after layer until it was radiance.

The will exerted itself. A surge of exhilaration at being the center powered it. Calm and control flowed outward. Disintegration slowed. Then, a rational thought. The hemisphere to which Holdout had fallen, over which the battle had been fought, had been reduced to fine dust. ut, as a quick check confirmed, the other half was alive and well.

The surgery was successful! Groupmind slowly collected itself. Then it repaired the scarred surface so that life on the other half could grow out and occupy it.

Content, Groupmind rested.

Below, a dying man crawled out from shade and stumbled to a renewed oasis.

CHAPTER II

I cannot submit," screamed Camron.

"Bring him out," ordered the priest resignedly.

Camron looked up and around him, and realized what he had said.

"I am sorry, Your Togetherness. The Rebellious One still grips my soul, I fear."

The work of the One-Who-Will-Never-Submit, perhaps. But he does not possess you. Only your rebellious soul, Little Brother. Relinquish *that* possession and you will join."

Camron was shaking less now. He looked appropriately chastened. "What now, Big Brother? Is there treatment I must submit myself to...?"

"You have willed yourself into the Brotherhood. You have willed your studies, and acquitted yourself exceptionally. You have willed your Groupwork as an acolyte, and acquitted yourself adequately. But you cannot Join the Priesthood until you will yourself to the Group.

"No, no treatment. Only the negation of your will is needed. Nothing more is necessary. Nothing less will do."

"Then I am...through, Your Togetherness?"

The priest looked a bit more kindly. "Not necessarily, Little Brother. Actually, you could Join at anytime. As a matter of fact, if we left you hooked up, your resistance would eventually break and you would Join. But that would be inefficient and only a very few are considered so valuable as to have the time bestowed upon them by the Most Powerful.

"Nonetheless, be of some good cheer. You have been rated worthy of an additional time. Still, you must prepare yourself fully to submit to shorten this Holy Time and ease your joining as much as possible."

Of course, Big Brother. When is my next treatment? Shall I resume my duties?"

The Priest's eyes went blank for a few seconds. Camron knew that he was speaking directly with his god, and envied him.

"Return in a fortnight. Spend a week in the world, to convince yourself experientially. Then a week in retreat to convince yourself through meditation and scourging. Then return."

The priest simply left. The technician had completely freed Camron and was replacing connectors for the next subject. Camron got off the operating table and stood up, still trying to sort things out.

"Perhaps I should be learning your job," smiled Camron.

The technician looked up at them, then back at his dials. "Why? Drop out of Tech?"

"No, but I note by my Brother's verbal instructions that you are not joined either. Did you also fail?"

The technician laughed, then pulled out a cigar. "By the Martyr. They tell you acolytes nothing! If I failed, do you think they'd trust me with this? Nah, I just work here. Strictly for fiats."

So what would they trust me with, wondered Camron. But he had recovered enough not to say it.

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The world shattered...for Kaumak Rylyf. He rolled over and tried to remove the anvil from his head and then hot pins sticking through his temples. Then he swallowed the inch or two of coating on his tongue and blinked.

The buzz jolted him awake this time. He grabbed the receiver and put it to his ear. "Rylyf," he mumbled.

"Camron."

"Great Sacrifice, Cam. I thought I'd never hear from you again. Oh, man, you must have blown it."

"Yes. But, I have another chance."

"Fantastic." His tone did not agree with his words. "So now what?"

"I have a week off...in the World."

Rylyf translated to himself. "Come and stay here. Got a new couch. I'll take a week off..."

"You need not. I'm not sure what kind of company I'll be."

Rylyf's mind was in gear again. "Tell you what, Cam. Get yourself over here and settle in while I work. Then we've got the weekend when I get back tonight, and we'll see what you want to do. Together?"

Briefly Camron's mind wandered on the reason for "together" being a synonym for "affirmative." Of course, he remembered, Rylyf had to get to work.

"Together, Kaumak. Don't worry about me." He hung up.

Naturally Kaumak Rylyf began to worry. He interrupted his musing to dial a number.

"Unity."

"Unity, Megla." A pause.

"Kaumak...?" she replied tentatively.

"Together, Megla."

"Oh, Kaumak, I'm so glad to hear from you."

"Really? Seems like just six months since we last spoke."

Megla laughed. Rylyf felt a twinge. It had been a lot longer than six months since he heard her laugh.

"It was six months since we last spoke. But, ah, why...?"

"...did I call now? Well, it's not about us..." he cut himself off. No trace of self-pity, now. He decided to be direct. "Camron's coming over here."

"What? Camron! But, he's gone..."

"He's out." Rylyf decided that maybe he had stopped loving her. He was beginning to like her. So he cut off her hopes quickly. "But only for a week. Still, I don't know exactly what's up so . . ."

"He's coming to Ladoville?" Ladoville was Rylyf's suburb.

"Together."

"I'll drop by for dinner." She reconsidered. "Unless you want him yourself for awhile . . .?"

"I'll have an hour. It's enough. Well, Old Times and all that, Megla. Tempsep."

He couldn't keep the irony quite out of his voice. Rylyf was well-read enough to know "Tempsep" came from "Temporary Separation."

Megla had done some reading herself. "Maybe, Kaumak. After all, Camron's back. So, tempsep."

She was still smiling when Rylyf hung up. He decided he did not want to think about all the complications, so he concentrated on remembering Megla's smile. He could tell by the nuances in her voice when she was smiling. He could tell a lot. A lot.

Kaumak Rylyf decided to think about his day's work, instead.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Megla Fylian kicked him out before she left to work. What's-his-name had been staying overnight with her for the last two weeks, but she had already dismissed his name from her mind as irrelevant.

She got on the sidebelt and rode downtown, hopping on to the express belt, then off again. Most of the men on the belt watched her pass, but she was preoccupied.

Megla Fylian was far less self-assured a year ago, she remembered. When Camron had broken up their adolescent grouping to Join, she had been shaken. She had clung to his best friend for support, and when he began to cling to her, she split.

For the last six months she was independent, self-supporting, and growingly confident. On the other hand, she had lost interest in the previous three men she had been involved with the day after meeting them.

Still, she changed. And though she wanted to see Camron again, the old group was gone. She reminisced about the pranks and the parties at University. Sometimes they reached the heights of sublimity as when they had defended their Collective Shack from a group of rampaging, drunk loners, and fast-talking the Provost out of Anti-Social Charges for fighting at all. Other times they had sunk to juvenile stunts which she fervently hoped were forever forgotten.

Some of the names were no longer at the tip of her tongue. But if she tried, she would remember the whole "Mini-Unity." Pera and Hipo lasted the longest, she recalled. She and Kaumak had split the night of their wedding, in fact. But the "Inner Unity," as Camron had called it, were Camron, his girl, and his sidekick.

When the Church claimed Camron, she had almost gone Loner. Kaumak had remained steadfast in defending his friend's choice, although getting cynical and defensive about his choosing Megla over the priesthood.

Camron had said they should quit fooling around with "Mini-Unity" and grow up. He could have dragged the rest of them into the priesthood too, but . . . well, there was something almost Loner about the way Camron pulled away from his friends when they had to decide whether to go along with him. He wanted it unmistakably to be their choice.

When she, Kaumak, and the others held back, he had to follow through. The Mini-Unity fell apart immediately. Only she and Kaumak Rylyf. Then he wanted them to marry.

Megla Fylian entered her office. For the first time she felt dissatisfied with her work. She could do better for herself and she should be. That was a decidedly untogether thought. Or was it? Camron had had the most wonderful way of rethinking thoughts that were usually considered untogether and making them pillars of unity. She remembered his Counter-Principle: "Individual excellence now meant each would Join in:to the best Unity."

Megla Fylian became aware it was quitting time. She had spent the day doing routine office work and cleaning up old projects. What had she accomplished? Well, she had decided one thing.

Regardless of how she felt about him, she could always use another dose of Camron.

She told Tule that they would not be having dinner together, and left for Ladoville.



EN GARDE AT THE RIPOSTE OFFICE

Comments scrawled all over my bacover by capricious collators:

Thanks for "fessin' up," Art. See you in latter comments. — Somebody wrote a comment with a lower case "I." There's an anti-egoist among you! Scour the meeting. Put everyone to the Test! Don't let this agent of the Anti-Ego get away! Watch out for attacks on your being! You can protect yourself by repeating after me, "I swear by my life and my love of it that I will . . ." ¶ "Wishy Washy is beautiful!?" Glasser, I'll bet. Yech, ptui! (Rotten sense of life hit my tastebuds.) ¶ "High Sam! The Dark Horse" Gotta be Maria. ¶ Hebrew writing has to be Rich since Phil's gone. ¶ "Little cryptic message in the corner"—don't recognize the handwriting. ¶ "Never mind! F.M.M." Who dat? ¶ "We are going monthly again—Rich." Ha. Oh, ha ha. Snicker. Chortle. Guffaw. Ah, hah hah hah *hah hah hah* HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH (*choke, wipe tears from eyes* Huh! *regain control*). Well, you can see by when you got this how seriously I took that remark.

Cover Toadstool Dragon? How many hit dice, what's its breath weapon, how many dice of damage does it do, and what's its armor class? I'll run it in the next A&E, for D&D play.

Richard Friedman Thanks for not copping out in the story. I forget, what's a *mensch* (am I insulted or complimented)? I *gotta* see how *Canalworld* reads after a year! ¶ And speaking of in-joke references, have you read the *SFR* with David Gerrold's farewell to fandom? (Another Trekkie bites the dust! Glee!) ¶ Speaking of Trek drek, I boycotted Equicon even though all my friends were possessed by demons controlling their tongues and facial expressions telling me how great it was. Do I get the Medal of Adequate Performance of Duty? ¶ Absolutely important to me and other mailers-in, Rich: are you going to get a collation done *before* Worldcon for *sure*? If so, I'll send in. Otherwise, I'll

just wait for the KC disty. ¶ If anybody in NYUSFS has room space left, I have a bunch of friends without rooms to fill it. Seems like everybody assumed I would have a room and want to crash with me. First offers get the femfans . . .

Me That should be a "number sign #" instead of a box □ in the second column comment to Rich.

Marc Glasser We copied the lyrics of the Philosopher's Drinking Song and have a different version. Also, we always begin by "Rule 1: No pooftas!" up to "The is the wattle, the symbol of our land . . ." and then into the song. Whole routine. ¶ Comment to your comment: Oh, I can't take that away from you, eh? Give me that wishy-washy! *dominant stance* Hand it over! *slap, slap* We have ways . . . *narrow eyes* No, that washy is not enough, we must have the wishy, too. *arms gripped as cigarette is lit* Come on, make it easy on yourself. *watch while assistant goes to it* Just hand over the wishy, that's a good boy *pummel, bludgeon* I see we'll have to educate you in the ways of principle *cigar burning nearly in front of eyes, then lowered to genital area* You still have a chance to co-operate you know . . . no? *searing pain, blackout* I'll bet you don't feel nearly was wishy-washy now . . .

Cyndi Warren-Moslow And where is your lovely and talented spouse? A bit unstable, I hear, but I'm sure a good bod and all that. Slow you down much? ¶ Is a troll wedding one that regenerates every third turn? (A little D&D humour.) ¶ Interesting filk but who did the original?

Judith Goldstein Mongrel? But I thought you were the True Human Genotype. (Let's not tell Ferric about this . . .) ¶ I don't have to imagine APA L5. It was collated in LASFS several years ago. ¶ Yes, I would like to hear about Spinoza spitting on the glass while singing the Philosopher's Drinking Song. ¶ Speaking of "strange and weird," that is really strange and weird art. Worthy of "Thimble Theater" at least. (Somebody in NYUSFS throw her in water and see if she floats. She may be a . . . duck!)

Miriam of the North Moor Happy anniversary! ¶ Don't feel bad, I've been disappointed with New York cons ever since I started attending ones outside of the Rotten Apple. § What was Bilbo Baggins doing the ladies' room. (Watch that apostrophe—you never know when it will turn on you and become a comma!) ¶ Maybe *Illuminati* doesn't have as much to say as the Grey Moslow, but at least it's written down and making money for the flakes who penned it. (Give him aother kick in the rear for me when you see him to get him going.) ¶ Why, your story was brilliant, my dear, echoes of Joyce and Rand, perhaps a touch of James, but yet entirely original. Tour de force! OK, now, what do you think of *my* effort?

Edward Horn Jr. God (the omnipotent etc.) as fallible buffoon (contradiction, snigger) has become an old, worn-out joke. Yawn. If you really want to see a whacked-out, well-done fannish religious spoof, see Leah Zeldes on *Herbangelism* in *Scientifiction*.

David Carldon In APA-NYU? This is a hoax. I used to believe in h1M before I became a total atheist, but even if hE existed, hE'D never be in APA-NYU. That bit about getting a job really blew the gag. ¶ By the way, if the real Dave Carldon is reading this, there are people I've met in L.A. who still remember you *shudder*

Alina Chu Does a Winged Serpent have as many hit dice as a Feathered Serpent? ¶ Anyone who would sit in a science fiction course deserves what they get. The thousand-and-first reason to dismantle the statist education system.

Frederick M. Mazursky Where's your title? Gad, a *naked* fmz! And you've got a colophon in the middle of your second sheet. Hey, lookit da freak. *gibe, gibe* ¶ You blew it, kid. You either told me endings to stories I have already read, or to ones I have no wish to read. Can't you do *anything* wrong? ¶ There's no excuse for being a 17-year-old Neofan. You have one year to become 18; failing that, you will find your life terminated. ¶ Now what fan of worth ever came from New Jersey? ¶ And "No, Cyndi, I've been to Eugene, Oregon, and it's not really there. The only libertarian left town and it gave up." ¶ I know *Children of Dune* is out—I read it in serial many moons ago. You mentioned it—now say something about it. Good? Bad? Indifferent? You didn't understand it? "You've got to give comments to get comments"—APA-L 1, 2, . . . (infinity). (You got to take a firm hand with the neos or they'll slobber all over your mimeo ink.)

Art Tobias *Double spaced!* Have you no shame? (What kind of example are you setting for that neo I was just bawling out.) ¶ There are *two* big men in NYUSFS? Who's the other? (Interesting thought: Big Man on Campus [BMOC] is "out;" Big Man in Fandom [BMIF] is "in.")

Reminder I am looking for contributions to all my publishing endeavours. You can submit artwork, sercon, fannish (but not faanish) and libertarian-oriented material for *pro* consideration (1¢) a word to *New Libertarian Weekly*. Or all the above, plus fantasy, mythopeia, D&D stuff, and faanish allowed, to *Clear Ether!* (no pay). I'm planning special fat issues of both for Worldcon, but send your stuff NOW. All submissions to (where?) New Libertarian Enterprises, Box 1748, Long Beach, CA 90801.

See you in "—30."

—SEK3

