

The Literary Corner



STEPSON

by Judy Whitehead

I sit, listening to the children
 playing in the barn on a Sunday afternoon.
 I can hear them all laughing
 and that gives me real pleasure,
 because today for the first time Matthew came
 to stay. to stay.

I like him. He's tall and gangling,
 arms and legs too long to cope with, trying
 so hard to be a man.
 So he swigs beer from a bottle, and spills it
 down his T-shirt,
 tries political jokes then fluffs the final time.

He resents me, I understand that.
 He is only fourteen, I am almost forty; he is
 the son, I am the new wife.
 I should try not to worry as I sit listening to
 the children
 but I want him to accept me, and I don't
 know what to say.



ANOTHER MAN'S POISON

by Paul Stewart

"Starting accelerator
 circuits. All personnel
 please leave the test
 area."

Under the command of
 a heavy metallic voice,
 dozens of figures, clad
 in shiny coveralls,
 darted and disappeared
 into various recesses in
 the walls of the circular
 room. A many-toned hum
 climbed up and up the
 scale. The air was rich
 with energy. Unseen eyes
 focused on an object
 raised on a pedestal in
 the middle of the floor;
 a simple black cube
 exactly one rand in weight
 and one and one-half
 sions in length on each
 side. The air about the
 cube began to glow and
 ionize. As the whine
 neared the ultrasonic
 threshold, the pedestal
 became lost to sight
 within a cloud of vapor.

Suddenly a hammer came
 down on the world. With
 a massive roar the tiny
 cloud collapsed upon
 itself and was gone. A
 much larger cloud
 simultaneously billowed
 into existence near the
 domed ceiling and
 unceremoniously released
 a shower of rocks and
 dirt upon the empty
 pedestal below.

Silver figures raced
 into the chamber and
 milled and fussed over
 the scattered debris,
 symbol of the very first
 interdimensional tele-
 portation in the recorded
 history of the planet
 Claro.

It had been known for
 some time that other
 dimensions existed. A
 clue to their access was
 afforded by certain
 anomalies in the hearts
 of stars which seemed to
 pass much more than they
 should. The result was
 that the stars either
 collapsed upon themselves
 or swelled and exploded
 leaving a massive gravity
 sink in their place.
 This collection of odd-
 ities, upon closer
 inspection, was finally
 explained by their being
 focal points of galactic

electromagnetic waves.
 So the theories went from
 there.

And it had worked! A
 ring of mighty electro-
 magnets could produce the
 necessary "hole" through
 which the interdimensional
 game of "put-and-take"
 could be played.

Plans were already in
 the works for a manned
 capsule which could with-
 stand the forces of
 magnetic stress.

However, it was to be
 proven again that greed
 and promise of rewarding
 adventure could corrupt
 even the sturdiest and
 most patient of scientific
 minds. These two
 particular examples of
 corruption, Aloc and
 Evid, knew too well the
 fates of those who
 developed such marvels.
 They would be relegated
 to a cozy spot on the
 Science Council and a
 fat pension. But this
 bordered on anonymity
 compared to the rewards
 of the relatively mindless
 clods whose sole function
 it would be to ride the
 capsule into the new
 dimension, collect a few
 things as could trained
 dogs, and return. Even
 the problem of return
 was no more a chore to
 them than that of
 assembling a nursery
 puzzle. The prefabricated
 units of the electromagnet
 would be sent with the
 ship. Zap! Instant
 heroes!

Well not this time.
 Aloc and Evid would be the
 first to build and the
 first to ride. Traitorous
 as it was, they knew
 themselves to be in no
 danger. After all, who
 would shoot world-wide
 heroes? And geniuses at
 that?

So it was that late into
 the night two silver
 figures passed through the
 guard stations into the
 circular chamber. Having
 pre-set the controls of
 the magnetic field
 generators, the two
 renegade scientists sealed
 themselves inside the tall
 rod-shaped craft perched
 atop the newly-built

pedestal in the centre of
 the floor.

The preliminaries were
 attended to. The two
 scientists took a last
 look about the room
 through their view holes,
 shot a wild glance at
 one another, grinned, and
 threw the final switches.

The hum rose fast. The
 room outside became lost
 behind a wall of bluish
 mist all about them. The
 cabin bristled with static
 charge despite the
 shields.

A thousand hammers came
 down on the world and all
 was dark.

Aloc and Evid awoke to
 a multitude of brightly
 flashing controls and the
 sounds of alarms. Their
 ship swam and tossed in
 what their sensors told
 them was a dark hot sea of
 hydrochloric acid....

Joe Bronowski looked
 around the construction
 site, sweating profusely
 He was searching for the
 nearest toilet trailer.
 He was feeling very, very
 ill. Racing for the
 distant white door,
 discarding his hard hat
 and grabbing at his belt,
 he belched and bloated
 with the worst attack of
 gas he had ever experienced
 Minutes later, feeling
 some relief and minus a
 stomach-full of trouble,
 Joe was approached by one
 of his co-workers.

"How's the tummy, boy?"

You looked mighty green
 for a while there."

"Can't understand it,"
 rasped Joe, working his
 throat with his hand.
 "Never been that sick
 before. Came on real fast.
 And it hurt like hell
 when it came up, too.
 Felt like I was tossin'
 up steel!"

"Wadda ya think brought
 it on?" prompted the
 other.

"Dunno. I felt fine all
 day. Strange thing."

"Not as strange as what
 I saw about a week and a
 half ago," added a third
 worker coming up to the
 pair and leaning on his
 shovel. "I was sittin'
 near the foundation there
 eating lunch when a little
 mess of dirt disappeared
 not an inch away from my
 foot. Damnedest thing I
 ever saw."

Somewhere in the sewer
 system of Metro Toronto
 float the minute corpses

of two brilliant
 scientists, driven to
 disaster by their over-
 powering greed.

Somewhere in another
 dimension, on a planet
 called Claro, frantic
 rescue workers struggle
 to free survivors from
 the wreckage of the
 Science and Technology
 Station #37, completely
 buried under a monolithic
 mass of semi-digested
 tuna fish sandwiches,
 donuts, apple, and coffee.