

TIGHT BEAM
PRESENTS

IN PHOENIXFLY FIRELIGHT

ROBERT A. NEWSOM



To the left of this page, if you haven't already removed them, are two pull-out center sections. One is the long-overdue roster, and the other is a special all-fiction issue of Tightbeam for December. I'd like to tell you a little bit about how this special issue came to be.

The oldest of these stories is "When It's Springtime", by Shin'chi Hoshi. Richard first sent me this story two years ago along with his article on Japanese SF which appeared in the June, 1982 issue of Tightbeam. In that article, he mentions Hoshi several times, including this reference:

"...Shin'chi Hoshi...became known world-wide as an SF writer in the seventies.

Shin'chi Hoshi, like many great writers, produced a long series of good, witty short stories about the adventures of the absent-minded 'Professor N.'--a Japanese Ijon Tichy."

Although Shin'chi is not a member of the N3F, the translator of this story, Richard Jasinski, is, and I'd like to extend a warm thank-you to him for contributing this story.

The other major story in the current Tightbeam is the winner of the 1982 N3F Short Story Contest, "In Phoenixfly Firelight", a fantasy mood-piece. The N3F doesn't usually print these contest winners, because we feel that if a story is good enough to win the contest, it should be good enough to find professional publication, and since neither our circulation nor pay-rate (0.00¢/word) can compete with the prozines, we would be taking unfair advantage to request publication rights. But this story just doesn't fit the formula of any of the prozines, and so, since Robert has been unable to find a publisher for it elsewhere, he has graciously allowed us to present it to you all here.

The filler story is a chance for your not-so-humble editor to exercise my own ego, by giving you a story that has garnered a collection of reject notices from the prozines. I still think it's a good story (doesn't every author), and hope you'll forgive me. The original plot that Wendy King (now Wendy Kostoria)

outlined to me for it was novel-length and involved the Mafia, the KGB, the CIA, British Intelligence, and the ghost of King Arthur. As you can tell, I cut it down some.

But if a picture is worth a kilobyte, this Tightbeam is overflowing with the finest that fandom can produce. To match the two fine stories showcased in this issue, I asked the three best artists I know of in fandom, Joan Hanke-Woods, Linda Leach, and Jeff Remmer, to each do an illo for each story. Rather than limit the imaginations of such brilliant people, I didn't ask for any particular scene from any one of them, but simply sent the scripts along for them to see. The three worked independently, so what you are getting is not three views *from* each story, but rather three views *of* each story, by the three most visually creative people in fandom today.

Joan is an N3F member, and although Linda has dropped out of the N3F, her letter promised that she will be rejoining again in the near future. Jeff is not a member, but his art has appeared on the cover of TNFF before, both July 1979 and again on July 1980. While all three are busy with professional careers and professional art, they are also willing to contribute to fanzines if asked politely enough. Send them a sample of your zine and a SASE, and be *very* patient. Since only Joan is listed in the current roster, their addresses are:

Joan Hanke-Woods
1537 Fargo, #3-D
Chicago, IL 60626

Linda Leach
42622 Postiff #58
Plymouth, MI 48170

Jeffrey Remmer
3333 Montclair Dr. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110

And just for good measure, since the cover artist for this issue of TNFF is also not a Neffer, her address is:

Vicki Brinkmeier
975 W. 2000 N.
Provo, UT 84604

IN PHOENIXFLY FIRELIGHT

ROBERT A. NEWSOM

The phoenixflies caught the draft of the first autumn evening. They rode the currents heavenward until they kissed the clouds good-bye. The static electricity within the storm clouds caused the phoenixflies to burst into flames, and they fluttered back down to the earth from which they had taken flight, ending as sparks upon the ground.

As I watched from my living room window, I had trouble comprehending that I would never be allowed the pleasure of the light symphony again during my brief lifetime. It was the end of summer, and a hundred years would wash the planet with wonders before the lovely flames and sparks would ride the evening winds again. No eyes before that point in time would behold the spectacle I was allowed to witness from my darkened room.

My wife, who had passed this morning from her simple life, would have held the spectacular display of beauty to her as a mother would hold her new born infant. She had been like that with nature. She would have dwarfed the beauty of the phoenixflies with her inner warmth; just as she had outshone the brightest of wonders. Strange having to think of her now in the past tense.

Sleep would not come. It had passed with my wakening this morning to the sight of my dear Yvonna in her restless sleep beside me. She had been so alive the evening before, talking of nothing but the phoenixflies, and their dance to end all dancing for a hundred years.

Yvonna had stood beside me for fifty years; now, no more. Never had she beheld the wonders of the phoenixflies last flight at the end of the cycle. The lovely multicolored creatures, who were as diverse in colors at their springtime birth as they were in colors of flames during their autumn pilgrimage heavenward. Then they returned to the ground from which they arose, after but one short summer of life.

Dear sweet Yvonna had coveted summer. It was her season. Though other pieces of nature's art melted, she bloomed, like the phoenixflies. I was always the one who saw with all too human eyes. I had not the power of sight in my soul as Yvonna did. She could see the very essence, and often described the beauty

which lay buried in the commonest of creatures, but she had never seen the phoenixflies.

I had awakened to the laughter and thrill of life my Yvonna had possessed every morning, and been washed to sleep by her sweet singing words at night. How could I think to sleep now? She had seemed to challenge the world with her very existence; now there wasn't much left of the world for me, and the phoenixflies still fell. I felt somewhere deep inside that they fell for my sweet departed mate as I watched the fiery rain.

The world had always greeted Yvonna. Flowers had seemed to bloom just for her, the stars at dusk called her name across the timeless sky, and the moon when it rose seemed to kiss her good-night. Now with her passing there was no wonder in this world, except for the phoenixflies last serenade on the night air. The longer I watched their lavish sky display, the more I became aware of their intent.

We had buried Yvonna in the early morning breeze below the mountains. They had been the real love of her life, rising majestically towards the clouds. She had walked to the base of those same mountains every day she had been able to since I had known her. There was a path worn through the grasses, where she had travelled each morning. It could be seen now from the window of my darkened living room as a wave of flaming phoenixflies alit nearby.

Then I noticed. There were more phoenixflies landing on the sides of the path than elsewhere. They hadn't been in such abundance there but seconds before.

I arose from my comfortable window seat, and went outside. I trod along the same path that we had carried Yvonna down that morning to the foot of her mountains. At my approach the phoenixflies made room for my passage. I took several steps down the path and looked back. Behind me the phoenixflies had again returned to the edge of the pathway as if drawn by an unseen hand.

I thought of the disease that had claimed Yvonna as I walked down the path. It had taken her away so quickly, I had not been able to say good-bye, I had not been able to shed the tears that the loss deserved, and the emptiness was overwhelming. It's a strange feeling when you have passed so many years, passed them like pages turned in a book,



only to have that special person gone before the final chapter may be read.

As I neared the grave itself I found myself running. I stopped short of the grave itself and looked heavenward for an answer which did not come. The phoenixflies fell like petals of flame on the wind, drawing figures and diagrams across the sky. The very air seemed their home. Then there was a touch ever so gentle, soft upon my cheek.

As I turned my heart gave a sudden surge within my bosom. There are no words known to mortals which could approximate the feeling of elation I felt when my eyes focused on the miracle before them. Yvonna, dressed in her funeral gown with her arms wide open for me, was waiting. The sleeves fluttered ever so softly in the breeze.

I touched her, but there was no spark of warmth in that touch which spoke of life, only cold. I backed away from her then for the first time in our lives, ever so slightly. The phoenixflies lit around us, bathing us in their afterglow.

She spoke then with lips which had aged during their hours without life under the mountain peaks. "Why do you move away? This is our time. The phoenixflies have given us these few hours before I, like them, must pass into dust. Their ashes have given me life, but it must pass into memory."

I looked then into the face of the most beautiful creature which had ever passed across the face of the earth, but she was surrounded by an alien aura as well. A thin shimmer of light drifted about her, seemingly emitted by the skin itself. After soaking her splendor into my soul, I embraced her.

I spoke to her then, my voice quiet upon the night air. "I am sorry, Yvonna, but this is wrong. You died this morning, but now I have the chance to tell you how much you have meant to me these many years."

Yvonna placed a finger over my lips before they could speak their piece. "Do not say it Sherl. You were always the weaker of us in your way with words. Do not take the beauty of this moment given us by the phoenixflies. I know the meaning of the words you would convey, and I love you the more for them."

We kissed then before the mountains, the phoenixflies, and the Creator Himself. Shamelessly we laughed and

danced there before the mountains with the dying phoenixflies falling on our bodies. Then just before the dawn, Yvonna spoke to me again, but it was not of dying. It was of a life in the future.

"The phoenixfly ashes have given me life, will give me life again, but I do not wish to face that life without you there beside me, Sherl. Come, lay beside me here under the mountains in the phoenixfly firelight, and we may touch again each others lives a hundred years from now. That is the promise of the phoenixflies."

I could not give reason why I lay with her then, but I do know that my life without her would have been meaningless. We lay there under the clouds, and there was the feeling of a wave washing over me as the sky brightened, giving way to morning. As the last embers of the phoenixflies' firelight died in the morning light, I passed from this world in my Yvonna's arms.

Now a hundred years have crossed the world, and the spring air has returned life to a couple who had walked the world a century before. I feel myself drawn to the sky. I know Yvonna has already risen into the morning breeze.

I know that feet and hands are but appendages of my distant past, and that these wings I now use are of my future. I raise my multicolored wings towards the sky, and feel the wind as it rushes by, playing a melody on my antenna. I reach heavenward with the spreading of my wings.

Then I see Yvonna on the mountain top. She is different from any other phoenixfly on the wind, but she is the love of my life. I know we have but the summer, but for us that is enough, forever. Summer and Yvonna.

((This story was the winner of the N3Fs 1982 Short Story Contest.))

"THAT WAS NO LADY"

OWEN K. LAURION & WENDY KING

"Here we are in England, just a few kilometers from Tintagel Castle, and all you want to do is fish?" The recrimination still, if ineffectually, burning in their ears, James and Charles stood on the bank of a small lake, while Charles' wife Gwen, who had uttered the words as they left, sat brooding back at their hotel.

"This does look like a fine place to catch something," said Charles.

"Well, if we don't catch it here, we certainly will when we get back," said James, who well knew his sister's temper.

With a hearty laugh, Charles cast his line into the sparkling water. As he started to reel it back in, it immediately stretched taut, as though snagged on something.

"Hey, from the looks of that line, you've hooked old Nessie herself!"

"Very funny. Loch Ness is hundreds of miles north of here. I must have caught it on something on the bottom. Here, hold my rod while I try and wade out there." Handing his brother-in-law his rod, Charles started walking into the shallow water. Reaching the area where his line met the water, he was still only knee deep. Bending over, he began feeling the muddy bottom, to find where his hook was grounded. Suddenly, James heard a wet "smack", like an open hand slapping a face, and saw Charles stumble backwards. Catching his balance, Charles stood still for just a brief moment, put his hand to his cheek, then turned and ran for the shore as fast as the water would let him.

"What happened?" James asked him with a combination of puzzlement and excitement. "Your face is red...no, it's a hand-print, in red. Boy, is that going to look like a bruise for days! What hit you?"

"I don't know. I was feeling along the bottom, and felt something sort of solid. Almost like flesh, but underwater. It was warm, too, not cold like some sort of fish. Anyway, I tried to pinch it, and, and it slapped me!"

"Are you trying to tell me there's some sort of a mermaid out there?"

"I don't know what it is, but I know it sure packs a punch. I'm not going out

there again."

"Well then, you hold the rod. I'm going to take a look for myself." Pulling his boots up, James then followed the same watery path out that Charles had just returned by. In a few moments, he was feeling the lake bed in approximately the same place as his companion had.

"All I feel is mud...hey, here it is, feels round...smooth...hey, it's got hair OOF!" An unmistakably human leg, or at least the knee, had suddenly emerged from the water, connected with James just above and between the tops of his hip boots, and disappeared back into the water. James doubled over, and began slowly hobbling back to shore.

In a little while, after James had recuperated a bit, the two men held a battle conference. "Something's out there," observed Charles needlessly.

"Yes, but what do we do about it? I'm willing to leave it alone."

"Well, I want to take one last stab at it. Besides, it still has my line. Say, that's an idea. Maybe, if we stab at it with our poles, we can get it to surface without coming in range of it!"

"You stab at it. I'm staying on shore."

Enthused by his own idea, Charles didn't bother to argue. He walked over to where his rod lay on the shore, and reeling in the line as he went, he waded out. As he neared the spot where the line ended, he began poking the tip of the rod into the water, and the mud below it. On the fifth poke, the rod vibrated. Pulling it out, Charles saw, with wide eyes, that the pole had been sliced off just below the tip as cleanly as if by a laser. Even the nylon string had been sliced. Then, before he had time to draw back the rod, a silvery sword blade broke out of the water, sliced--the top third of the rod started to fall--sliced--the next third--slice--the third cut was just above the reel--and vanished back into the water just as the first section sliced hit the surface.

If Charles had set a record getting back to shore the first time, he beat it the second time.

"Home so early, boys? Charles, your face! And James, why are you walking so funny? Did you two have a fight? Well, serves you right. While you were off beating each other up, I was finding out about this area. Did you know that that very lake where you've been fishing is

supposed to be the same lake where King Arthur's sword Excalibur lies? Supposedly, it's kept by the Lady of the Lake."

James looked at Charles. Charles looked at James. they both sighed, and said as one "We know, but she's no lady."



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SHINCHI HOSHI
TRANSLATED BY RICHARD JASINSKI



WHEN IT'S SPRINGTIME...

SHIN'CHI HOSHI
Translated from Japanese by
RICHARD P. JASINSKI

A spaceship like a needle comes across the spacenight. Starship...what a shape! Fish in the stream...Tiger before a jump...Huge side of a sharp knife...What a shape!

But the body and tail are filled with ads. In the upper part one can see a bottle with a colored label - "Have Soft Drinks!" Just to its side you can see a beauty with purple lips and purple eyelids - "M a k e - u p F o r Y o u !" On the tail, like an aristocratic coat-of-arms, is the huge trade-mark of an electronic trust. And again, there are other ads - "Ready-made Suits!" "Instant Foods!"

Well, the ads are pretty nice. Pretty nice (if you take each one seperately), but all of them together...well, the spaceship looked like a huge newsstand shining with colored lights, brightening the darkness of the universe. Letters faded and reappeared again...

"How well does it work?" asked Professor N., the commander. His pilot and assistant quickly replied, "All right. I couldn't guess they would put it everywhere. I could not guess."

"What could I do?"

Professor N. smiled bitterly. He was the author of the original theory of high speeds. Unfortunately his scientific researches cost him a fortune. Imagine how upset he was when he discovered that, while he might sell his invention, of course, and earn some money, but if he sold it he would have to give up everything he had dreamed about. It would be too little money to build a private spaceship. Just enough for one who would like to spend a quiet and comfortable time till the end of his life.

That is why he decided not to sell it. To give up after so many years of hard work! At last an extraordinary idea came to his mind.

"Haven't you forgotten my project?"

I have constructed a spaceship based on my own theory of high speeds... Yes? You've colonized enough planets to live on? But my ship is not a toy! It will fly farther! And I might advertize your products...NO, no... Don't think I depend on your finances

only...Yes, many companies are interested in my project...well...in this case...

To his own surprise he succeeded. Money poured and poured. The project turned into reality. Shortly after the spaceship took off into space. But the holds were filled with goods. Only a little space was left, so Professor N. could take only his assistant. There was no place for any others there.

"Planet! Planet! I see a planet! There! Near the red star," cried the excited assistant. The professor commanded, "Describe the planet's conditions, please."

"I'll turn the videoscope on...Atmosphere the same as on the Earth, landscape as well. And people..."

"Level of civilization?"

"Wait a second...Inferior to ours."

"Thank the Lord! It could be awful if it was like ours, with our surplus goods! The natives would die of laughter. And what would we have flown so far for? Direction - the Planet!"

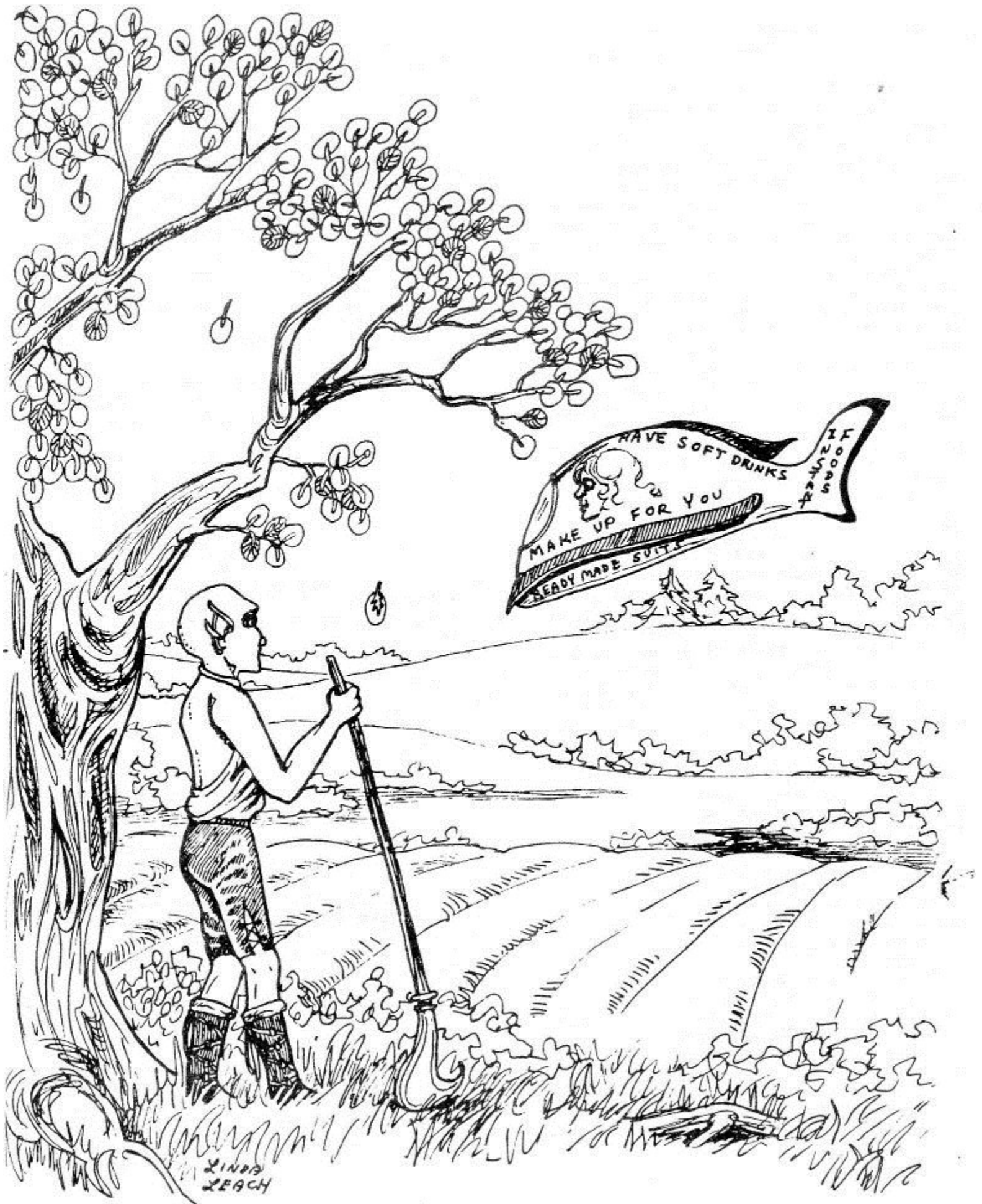
The professor gave the command and pressed the button on the commander's panel. All the ads brightened. Oh yes, the professor was an honest man! He was as good as his words. The spaceship approached the planet, slowly going down. They landed on a wide field near a little town. Advertisements and music began to come from the loudspeakers. Jolly, light music wandered across the unknown country in all directions.

The season resembled fall. Yellow leaves were falling silently on the grass. Observing this alien yet familiar landscape, Professor N. murmured, "How shall I pull their legs?"

"Don't worry, professor. Here they are coming. Look," the assistant directed with his hand, "look how friendly they seem to be."

And really, they looked very friendly. They had no weapons and did not look like savages. Smiling, the professor decided they were not in danger, so they left their spaceship. The professor and his assistant gave a speech to the natives. It was not a speech such as you are used to, but a series of gestures and mime. And believe me, it is not the easiest thing to explain with gestures alone that you come from a planet called the Earth.

"And that's why," ended Professor N., "we want to become your friends forever."



LINDA
LEACH

Do you understand? Forever!"

The natives nodded and then they started to talk.

"We are very happy of your arrival. We've just finished our harvest. We'd love to celebrate it, so we invite you warmly from the bottoms of our hearts."

The professor and his assistant smiled openly and looked at each other. They understood now why the natives were so friendly and happy - they they had finished their harvest! It was the right time for trade.

"Wonderful! Splendid!" Professor N. said to himself. "It's very fine. If we came half a month earlier we couldn't make a deal. Who would like to get busy with guests in the time of harvest?"

Then he began talking about business. "Gentlemen, don't think we came with nothing. We brought a lot of excellent goods. We had supposed earlier we would meet friendly people here, and we know how to be helpful to our friends. That's our motto. We hope you will like our goods. We also hope we may establish permanent exchange. Do you understand? I'll do it for you, but..."

Professor N. asked his assistant to open the loads and invited all the natives inside to examine the goods. The natives saw ready-made suits, food of high quality, kitchen tools. Of course there were more goods of lesser quality - suits and dresses that had become unfashionable on the Earth, for instance - but the natives were delighted. They kept on window-shopping and talked and talked and talked.

"Well, do you like it? It's all the best goods from the Earth."

They nodded with their heads and waved with their hands but still kept on saying they did not need anything. Professor N. and his assistant could not match those two things together. Why the hell could they not stop looking at things and touching them, while still insist they did not need anything.

It was obvious they must find the explanation.

"Don't you like it?" he asked.

But the natives began to wave their hands and shake their heads. "As a matter of fact we love these things, but winter is coming on our planet, and we fall asleep and sleep as long as it lasts. So during the winter we need none of these wonderful things you have brought for us."

"Aha. Strange. We have no such habits

on the Earth, though. But why don't you buy these things in advance? Imagine how wonderful it will be when you wake up and have all these things around you. And then you won't have to worry about getting these things next year."

"We might do it, but we we have already finished preparing for the winter, and put everything we harvested into storage deep under the ground. To pay you now we would have to open all of our stores and have our grains out. It is impossible right now. Too much work would have to be done."

The professor nodded that he understood them, and began to consult with his assistant on the natives final statement.

"What should I do? What can we do?"

"In my opinion they are honest folks. I think we should offer them credit," said his assistant.

"I think you're right. This planet has a future. It will be difficult to find another one, and otherwise we would have to take this stuff back to Earth. Such a waste of goods. And they can't take off with their whole planet.

"You are right, professor. And they are nice people who don't know wars, so it is impossible that they would begin a war and wipe themselves out before we collect."

The professor turned to the natives excited with his own generosity: "We trust you and that's why we have decided to give you these goods now. you will pay later. We will come back when it's springtime. Then you can give us all the basic products you have.

"Thank you." "Thanks." "When you come in the springtime we will pay you back, don't worry."

"How happy they are, like children," the professor observed. "Innocent souls don't lie. Civilization hasn't spoiled their innocency yet." He opened all the holds and gave the goods to the natives, saying, "It's all for you. Buy them! Take them! We'll meet next year, and I'll bring you more goods."

"That's a lot, Thanks!" "Bring more next time!" "We will wait for you!" "So long!"

Delighted natives waved with their hands. The noise of the engines overcame the noise of the crowd. The assistant closed the doors, pressed the buttons, and the emptied starship took off again. Professor N. walked toward the screen

to have a look at a friendly planet.

"What a strange nation. Well, we must surely meet in the springtime again. Be sure to plot the orbit that planet is revolving around the star, so we will know when to come in the spring. Just not too early. Or too late. I wouldn't like to come at the wrong time again."

"Yes, sir," said his assistant, and began counting. He kept on counting for a very long time.

"What's the matter? Why aren't you saying anything? Is it so difficult," asked Professor N.

"Well, how should I explain it. It is not difficult. But as a matter of fact," the assistant stammered, "it is not very simple, either, especially if we are to consider the exact date of our next landing time."

"Yes?"

"You see...the orbit of that planet is an ellipse with a very long axis, like a comet, so that when it leaves the neighborhood of its sun everything gets frozen. That's why everyone falls asleep on the whole planet. If they didn't, they couldn't survive."

"And are you saying that the winter here is very, very long?"

"Yes, exactly, sir."

"And just how much time will it take to come near its sun again, for springtime on the whole planet?"

"Hmmm...if you count it our way, it will pass again in five thousand years."