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First Editorial

by Jeff Georgeson

It is expected that editors of a new magazine, upon the launch of the first issue, welcome the readers and potential readers to the pithy and entertaining work therein--and with good reason. How is a reader going to know of said pithy work without some indication that it's there? Or, at least, without knowing the magazine is there? (We'll let the paradox that most readers wouldn't find this piece without knowing the magazine exists sleep by the side of the editorial road for the moment.)

So welcome to the first issue of Penumbric Speculative Fiction Magazine, or psfm, if you prefer. Our aim? To not only lurk near but pounce on the twilight of the ever-moving edge of new fiction, art, and graphic narrative, to tread heavily between light and dark, consciousness and un-, today and tomorrow. Penumbric is an online magazine dedicated to riding that ever-changing edge of new and original fiction and art into tomorrow. And although it is free now, it will be entirely subscription based in the future, so you'll never see any pop-up ads (we really hate pop-up ads!)

(By the way, to submit works to PSFM, please see our submission guidelines.)

In our inaugural issue, you will find an interview with the excellent artist James Cukr, who has done work for Paramount and other studios. You can find more of his art at www.cukr7.com; read about how he got to this point in our interview with him in these pages.

We are also printing the first of our fiction contest winners in this issue. "Rita," by Leslie Aguillard, is a creepy little piece wherein perception meets--or fails to meet--reality.

(By the way again, for those paying attention (and I'd tip my hat, were I wearing one, to you), you'll be wondering where the art and graphic narrative contest winners are. Short answer: There aren't any! While we received sufficient fiction submissions to award

prices, we received no art and no graphic narrative submissions. Go figure. I'll step aside until you're through kicking yourselves for not entering.)

Finally, I merely hope you enjoy the art and narrative contained within these virtual pages, and hope you will feel free to contact us with any suggestions, comments, or what-have-you. You can reach us via our discussion boards, e-mail, or even through snail mail (po box 40569, Denver, CO 80204).

Live on the edge!

Jeff Georgeson
Managing Editor, psfm
June 2k2

From the depths of art college
to the heights of science fiction dreams,
never underestimate the power of

friends, family, and Godzilla

An interview with James Cukr

James Cukr is a Colorado artist who, despite being nearly chased away from art by his high school football-coach-turned-art-teacher and a nasty experience at college, has become one of the best science fiction artists this side of the Orion Nebula. (And no, he didn't pay us to say that.) He has done extensive work for Paramount and other studios, and his work has featured the casts and creatures of Star Trek, Star Wars, Babylon 5, Lost in Space, Godzilla and many more. We caught up with him (well, he allowed us to catch up with him) at his studio in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and this is what came of it:

On your website (www.cukr7.com) you give a bit of background, but we still want to know ... how did you get started? Was it with that football coach?

Well it's not exactly how I got started. I had always loved to draw as a kid, and I was taking art pretty seriously when I got into high school.

Cukr continued next page

PICTURED: Detail from *Godzilla* by James Cukr.
[Click to see full piece.](#)



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Unfortunately, I ended up going to about three different high schools. In my senior year I had the football coach, when I was getting ready to figure out what college to go to, [trying to figure what] my options were in art ... in your senior year, that's when you start thinking, "What am I going to do with my life?" And here I had a football coach who basically put out a still life and said, do the still life, and that was it for the whole year; or, actually, half a year. I got so frustrated I graduated early. I had enough credits so ... I went to CSU, I was going to study fine arts there, and in Drawing 1 I got a D, in Drawing 2 I got an A, in Printmaking got a D, in Figure Drawing got an A ... so after two years I essentially had a C average in what was supposed to be my major. At the time I really didn't understand what was going on, but a little bit later I figured out that these professors were grading to what they like.

It was very unfair. For instance, my Drawing 1 teacher, he was an abstract artist, and Drawing 1 is all about a still life. They put a still life in front of you for a full year and they say, draw the still life. I'm a realist, and so you put something in front of me and say, draw the still life, I draw the still life. I have tried to loosen up and do abstract, but I can't, it's just not me. And that's why I can really appreciate



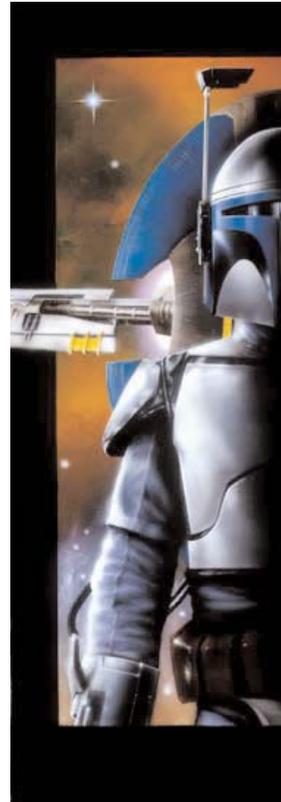
PICTURED (CLOCKWISE FROM LOWER LEFT):
Geisha Miyu; Lost in Space: Classic; the
artist; Lost in Space: Movie; Medusa

people who can draw that sort of thing. It's just in my nature to get in there with a magnifying glass ...

So after two years of college I dropped out, because I was sorely disappointed; this was supposed to be my big dream, you know, being an art major, and I had a C average. I didn't even get to Color!

So did you just decide to go a completely different direction?

Actually I did. I was lucky enough to get into US West Direct, they do the Yellow Pages—of course, they've changed names three times since—I started out being a graphic designer/production artist for them. After two years of that I became a trainer, and this was right about the time when desktop publishing started making its way. I





PICTURED (CENTER): The Legend of Fett.
Click any of the art for larger images. Visit cukr7.com for more.

designed all their courses for things like Photoshop 1, Illustrator '88, and it was my job to go around the company and train 300 plus artists how to use the Mac and how to use the graphics software. Over ten years of time, it escalated, and I kept up with and started doing all the hardware recommendations, making the software recommendations, and purchasing ... Ultimately I wasn't a trainer anymore but I was doing third tier support. If the technical support guys couldn't figure out a problem, that's when they'd call me.

Did you go through any special training yourself?

It was so new that there were no training classes, there weren't Photoshop seminars, there wasn't any of that. It was our job not only to come up with course material, the processes, and all that but to

learn it ourselves. Essentially, it was my job to teach myself how to use all the tools before I could teach everybody else. And that got me rekindled into the graphic stuff again. Since I got to design course materials, and I could do all of my own graphics on the computer, it was my way of learning how to use the tools, too. If you don't have a project to learn how to use the computer with, you're just kind of playing with the mouse the whole time.

During that time, though, I still liked to draw, and it was a hobby. I bought some paints one day, and the reason why was my mom, when I was like seven or eight, I didn't want to take piano lessons, so she made me take painting lessons, and I remembered the paints that I had to buy and the materials that I needed, so I one day went out and bought some of those paints and just started teaching myself how to do it. And I slowly built up on that. At first it was only just, like, a couple projects a year.

So you started off with projects that would last six months at a time?
Oh yeah. I always had this thing about working big. Again it goes back to, if I can't get my brush to fit in there, it really irritates me because I like to do the small detailed stuff. If I can't get in there and

Cukr continued next page



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paint the details I see, it's hard for me to fuzz up the details. I have always done it big.

How did you decide to do this full-time?

That was a real tough one. When it came to that decision, I had enough projects where what was happening, it was kind of hurting my home life. I would wake up in the morning, do my office job 8-5, come home, spend two to three hours with Val and our son, and then I'd brew a pot of coffee, go out into the studio or wherever I was painting at around 9:00, and pretty much paint from nine until 2 am. So I was basically working two shifts, getting four or five hours of sleep a night, and of course you start getting irritable. So it was too hard to balance. They just gave me Godzilla, and Godzilla was the project where I made that decision, because I had been doing some other stuff.

Val had been kind of urging me to do this full-time. I wasn't ... you know, the money isn't ... being an artist is a lifestyle change, it's not ... it's kind of funny, my fans think because I do some of these big-

name projects that I must be a millionaire. I just kind of grit my teeth and grin. I don't have the heart to say no, I'm not. But Val was all behind it. And I knew Godzilla was going to be a tough project.

Any regrets?

Not really. Sometimes I regret not having some friends ... it's kind of nice sometimes to have somebody in the cubicle where you work, to be able to say, "Let's go to lunch." It's more or less for the social content. But you know, I still really enjoy being out in my little clubhouse here and working on my projects, coming up with ideas, and stuff like that. Ninety percent of the time my days go by really quick. I keep myself busy ... especially when I'm painting. The time just flies by. It doesn't bug me.

Do you keep a regular schedule?

You know, believe it or not, I actually do. One of the ground rules when I'm working on a project, when Val gets home, when Garrett gets home from school, that's when I put the paint brush down. Because when I start painting, time just flies by, and there are lots of times when I say, I just want to finish this one little thing, and all of a sudden it's 9:00 and I get into so much trouble. [laughs] So I pretty much stick to that.

Misclassified Romance

by Stan Yan



Do you sell your work directly?

I used to, but I don't any longer. It's almost too many hats for me to wear, and then you start getting into warehousing, mailing, shipping, and it becomes kind of a headache. When I go to a convention, that's when I'll be happy to sell stuff. For the CoastCon, we made some postcards. Just something that you could pass out, the fans don't have to buy anything. That's what I mean by wearing different hats. I have to be thinking marketing, do marketing, whenever I do something, think marketing, I have so many people telling me that. So, OK, I did this painting but ... what are you going to do with it?

Do you make a lot of sales?

That's the disappointing part. I know that a lot of sales are being made as far as all of my media oriented stuff; now how much I get out of all that is not a whole lot. Royalties are like five percent of wholesale, so we're talking like two or three dollars a print when something like this one behind me retails for like almost \$200, just for the print, not framed. Some of my murals sell for \$10,000. Of that \$10,000 I get about \$200. That's kind of disappointing.

When did you start doing these big projects?

I think it was 1995 when I started doing professional projects. It was the classic, sort of, being discovered. I started off painting science fiction because I taught myself how to paint, so my excuse was, well, I'll just paint science fiction, because that's what it is, science fiction, just paint anything, and well, it's science fiction. As a science fiction fan it was a perfect way for me, instead of starting on a portrait of my mother or something like that and the audience going, who the hell is that? You know, and having my heart ripped out ... But, you see, by doing a creature or character from a movie, that was a lot easier. So that kind of got me going, and then I had a small collection of these paintings, and friends and family were telling me to show these somewhere. And I said, where? And then they said there's a convention in town [*StarCon*]. I didn't know about it at the time, I'd never been to one. I was kind of like the closet science fiction fan. And then that was it. I did one show, I was the best of show, and after the second one a publisher [*LightSpeed Fine Arts*] came up and said, hey, you should do stuff for me. The first assignment he gave me was some-

Cukr continued next page



Cukr on Godzilla

Godzilla, the film

Godzilla was supposed to be huge. It made like \$400 million, but at the same time every single critic trashed it. You see, I am an easy sci-fi fan. I'll give anything a break, and it was a good "popcorn flick." If I come out saying, "cool," then, it's good ... versus *Battlefield Earth*—there was nothing you can do to give that one a break. But I didn't have a problem with *Godzilla*. I liked the monster design ... that's how I would have brought *Godzilla* to life. They used a lizard from the part of the world where they were doing atomic testing and pretty much made it gigantic.

Godzilla, the painting

I got into a big fight with the studio. I had to sign all these confidentiality agreements, because it was before the movie came out, and I had all these privy pictures of the *Godzilla* monster. They had an eight-foot master sculpture that they used for computer animation and based their models on. They do that a lot ... they don't just go and build it in the computer, they actually build a physical model first that they can turn and look at and work with. That's what they did with *Godzilla*. And I have this perfect shot of *Godzilla*'s hands, and he has essentially five digits—a thumb, three very long, lizard-like fingers, and a pinkie nub. So of course, I painted the pinkie nub. The studio keeps coming back saying he doesn't have five fingers, he only has four. I'm saying no, I'm looking at the photo right here, he does have five, and he has a little stub right here. And we went back and forth, I'm sending references to them, but they only want four fingers. They sent me the toys, and, sure, the toys only have four. However, I'm going off of the master photography they took of this creature; and, finally, it happens, the pinkie nub is still there [in the final painting].

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thing for Paramount, it was a DS9 poster.

And then I got to do the Star Trek 30th anniversary poster, Lost in Space, Xena, Babylon 5, and then Godzilla there. [*see sidebar, previous page, for more on Godzilla!*]

So then, after that it started coming fast and furious?

Yeah, it did, for awhile it was, especially Babylon 5 stuff, and the new Lost in Space movie. In some of these paintings, the level of detail in them was just so intense, even if I'd work as fast and as furious as I could, it would still take three to four weeks to do one. So, it was quite a bit to do. LightSpeed was selling my originals for a time, which supplemented the royalties pretty well.

But there were unresolvable issues with LightSpeed regarding payment for the originals and royalties and after you left them came an odd lawsuit by Paramount, settled out of court ...

They [*Paramount*] were trying to get me for three things: selling my originals, printing up illegal posters, and 50 mouse pads. So it essentially came down to who had the deepest pockets. I was able to show them that, look, I didn't publish these posters; yeah, I was trying to sell some of my originals... and, typically, it's a gray area—there are enough cases where, with original pieces of work, the artist can sell their originals [just not make prints, etc.]. Just to make it go away, I agreed I wouldn't sell my originals, that I would not sell them on my website. Here's kind of the ironic thing: Paramount is now, through their official website, selling my originals!

I'm trying to turn things back around. That whole ordeal left a bad taste in my mouth. I still love science fiction, but ... I'm still willing to do a lot of science fiction projects, but I'm not popping them out like I used to. Used to be that when I didn't have a project that was officially sanctioned, I'd go ahead and paint, and then I would just go to the publishers and ask, you want it? Do you? Yeah? OK, it's yours. And that was pretty much how I earned my living at that point. I just painted at will and then shopped them around. "OK, here's my latest, anybody want it?" It was going really well until that whole lawsuit thing. And what it came down to, essentially, was 50 mouse pads.

Unfortunately, even though principles and pride were involved and I really did want to fight it, I had no choice.

And now? What are your plans for the near future?

I just finished that one over there ... the Boba Jonga Fett. I did that one just because there will be a lot of fans this summer, and it was just something that I ... in a couple weeks here I'll make the rounds, see who wants to do something with it.

So that's how you still do it?

Well, yeah, like I said, I'm still leery about going back to the strictly media oriented science fiction. Doing Star Trek, Star Wars, I'll still do it but I'm hoping that I can use the little fame I've gotten from doing stuff like that to start new projects, come up with my own projects, for instance the Cat Goddess, Medusa, you know I want to start a collection like that. Experiment with it and see where that goes.

James Cukr's work can be found at www.cukr7.com and www.startrek.com.

Strange Forces

by Rebecca Norman

I live as a soliton
We take advantage of the small things
eating shifting moving changing continuously
We take advantage
Today I felt for the first time
as if there were time to do everything
and there was
and there is
and tonight I feel again
as if time if running out
Too many things to do
and not enough time to do them
and there is no time at all
With him
I felt for the first time
feminine and silly and soft
and secure in it
and enjoying it
Safe for once to be
less than strong
just in passing with him ~
We eat move breathe change
continuously
particles passing through
various states of existence
The sky in my eyes
my hand passing through the sun
watching the wind
Black hole throat
singing synapses
This sheath
is casing chaos
This anomaly
is carrying wave patterns

This neuron is blinking
This pupil is contracting
This quark is bursting
into existence
defining instantaneously
this state of being
We eat sing shift change
held in a bubble of is
butterfly wings boojums feelings
I live as a soliton
was and is gone

Damsel's Last Date

by Colleen Donnelly

The homing pigeon settled herself on the windowsill of Edward's thatched hut and gently pecked at the small bronze bell set there to summon him. A smallish man approached her dressed in a monk's robe made of brown burlap. The only thing that distinguished his appearance was the D.R.S. embroidered in golden thread upon the left breast of his cowl. "What's this," Edward cooed at her, as he stroked her wings while untying the message from her leg. He uncurled the small piece of parchment which read:

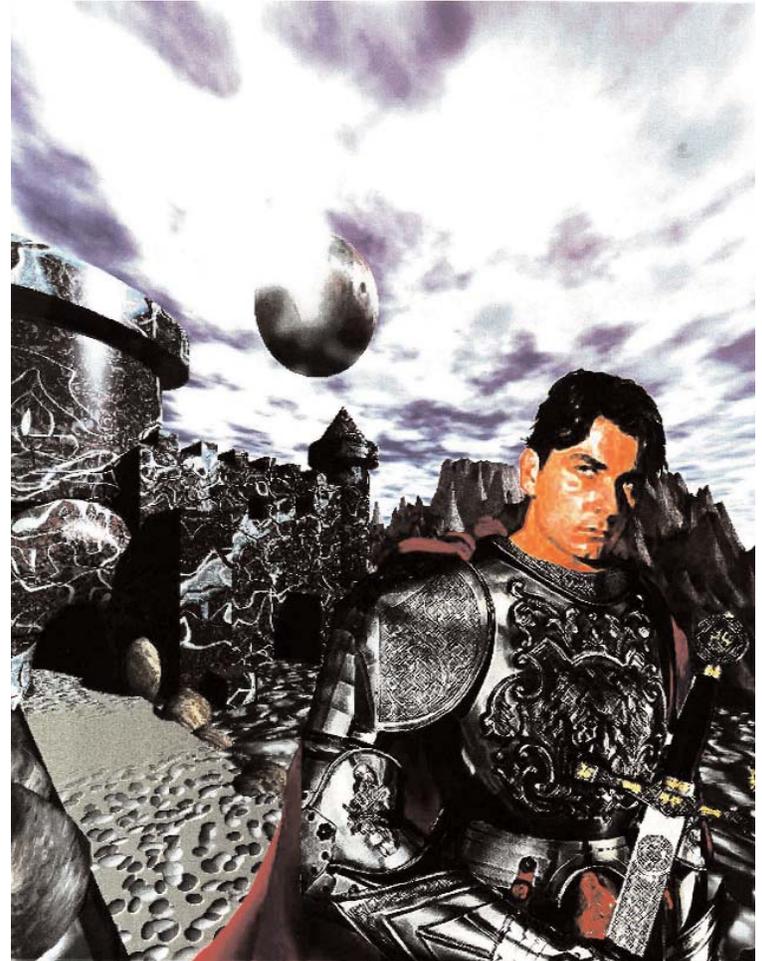
Dragon, Cave 178, is about to be challenged. Come A.S.A.P.
--Maid Elaine

Maid Elaine was the daughter of King Renault and she had just reached a marriageable age. Perceval the dragon, as was required of each and every dragon according to the Covenant of Dragons, had abducted her a fortnight ago, the night the court had celebrated her sixteenth birthday.

"Poor dragon," mused Edward, "so misunderstood. People just don't seem to understand that dragons simply do what is expected of them." Just as knights must follow the Order of the Round Table, and maidens must follow the Ladies Book of Etiquette, so dragons are required to capture maidens, fight knights, and hoard gold. Edward understood, Perceval understood, even Elaine understood, but Sir Stewart and all the other knights of the Round Table certainly did not. According to the Order, dragons had to be slain and damsels had to be rescued.

But some saw things differently, like Edward and the other members of the D.R.S. Their job was to rescue these poor, misunderstood creatures before a knight delivered the final blow. Then by night, the D.R.S. would transport the dragon to the nearest dragon preserve where it could live unchallenged and undisturbed. Timing was everything. Edward would have to rescue Perceval before Stewart severed

head from body, and whisk Perceval away to the impenetrable thickets of Snowden. He quickly packed his satchel with salves and lineaments that would staunch dragon wounds, as well as herbs and powders that could produce sleep and cloud memory, and then he was on his way.



PICTURED: Knight by Peri Charlifu. [Click for larger image.](#)

Lady Elaine sat fidgeting upon a throne which teetered upon the top of the dragon hoard. She had done all she could in contacting Edward; now, like Perceval, all she could do was wait for the arrival of both Edward and Sir Stewart. "Oh well," she sighed, "at least Stewart is comely to look at." He was quite attentive and did know how to read--a little. She would have preferred a man who had better connections, one who could make her laugh and who was not such a stay-at-home, but he would do. She was sure should could train him to be a tolerably good husband, and that he would be, after he rescued her from Perceval.

Elaine had enjoyed her fortnight away from her father's home. There she was expected to continually pose for visitors, and there were plenty who came to gaze upon her. Her life was dull: listening to the minstrels sing the same romances over and over again, embroidering handkerchiefs for knights to carry into battle, practicing how to flirt--at a distance. Perceval brought excitement into her humdrum life. He took her flying at night, taught her to play chess (an activity that only men were allowed to play in court), and debated with her such profound questions as how many angels can sit on the head of a pin. She was quite fond of Perceval, and he of her.

But each knew his or her place, and each knew the rules they had to follow: She had to be abducted, and Perceval had to be the abductor. Otherwise Stewart could never become a hero, and Elaine would never become a wife. But what was kept secret, passed down from mothers to their daughters, was that when a damsel felt she was ready to marry, she would summon a dragon to be her last suitor, finally delivering her into the hands of her future mate. You see, the women were all quite put out when the knights discovered that maidens could tame unicorns, since the knights tended to use the maidens as bait. So the women kept their arrangements with dragons a closely guarded secret.

Perceval stood tapping his right front claw against the cave entrance.

"That's awful annoying," Elaine complained.

"Sorry," replied Perceval, "but I just hate the waiting. You'd think he'd have been here by now. He's probably still boasting to all his fellows about how he plans to slash and gash me; then again, maybe he's hiding behind some tree just up the road, trying to pluck up his courage and stop his knees from rattling."

"Either way I can't imagine it will be too much longer," said

Elaine.

"Yes," agreed Perceval, "I can scent armor oil on the breeze ... Elaine," Perceval asked as he turned toward her, his eyes a little misty, "will you miss me?"

"Of course," she replied. "these last few weeks have been wonderful. This was by far the best holiday I've every had. But we both know that we must perform the duties expected of us."

"Of course, you're right," Perceval groaned, but he perked up almost immediately when he heard the approaching sound of hooves and the labored breath of a horse who was clearly carrying the cumbersome load of an armored knight. "I hope Edward arrives in time."

"Not to worry," replied Elaine, "he has impeccable timing." And Elaine was right; Edward was not more than half a mile away, working his way quietly through the underbrush along the roadside, so as not to be discovered.

Stewart clamored down from his horse and issued the appropriate challenge. "Sir Dragon, you have unlawfully apprehended the daughter of King Renault. I shall be her savior. I shall return her to her home and family, and you, sir dragon, must prepare to die. I shall whack you ..."

"Yes, yes, that's quite enough," interrupted Perceval. He knew how these knights could go on and on waxing about their prowess, real or imagined. But he was not one of Stewart's fellows and had no intention of listening to him drone on. "Let's get on with it then."

By this time Edward had settled down amid an outcropping of small bushes which hid him yet gave him a clear view of the fight that was about to ensue. Elaine came to the mouth of the cave to watch and spied Edward in the bushes. He gave her a wink.

It was the typical sort of knight and dragon escapade. Perceval breathed fire; Stewart defended himself with his shield. Then Stewart took the offensive and attacked Perceval with his sword in vain. As everyone knows a sword cannot penetrate a dragon's armor-like scales. Back and forth they went, Perceval scorching Stewart, and Stewart hacking at Perceval to no avail. Perceval was getting bored, so finally he took to the air. And then Stewart caught a glimpse of it, that soft patch of underbelly that was the dragon's weak point, known to all knights since Beowulf had slain the firebreathing Smaug four centuries earlier. Stewart pulled his dagger from his belt. Perceval

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was right above him. He flung the dagger, and it hit its mark. Perceval gave the required scream of anguish and then crashed to the ground not far from Stewart's feet. Stewart tentatively prodded the dragon's belly with the toe of his boot. Perceval did not move. He walked around to Perceval's head and began to raise his sword to sever head from body.

At the same time Edward snuck up behind him, clasping a blue powder in his hand. Stewart turned around as Edward deliberately snapped a twig with his sandal to gain Stewart's attention. As Stewart turned to face him, Edward blew blue slumber powder into Stewart's face. And Stewart sunk to the ground in a deep sleep.

Elaine raced up to Edward. "What can I do to help?" she inquired.

"Pull the dagger out and apply this salve to the wound. It will heal almost immediately," Edward instructed as he handed her a vial and a piece of clean linen. He then went to Stewart and administered a few drops of clouded memory potion. Then he returned to Perceval. He checked to see that no bones were broken. He patted the dragon's head and poured a few drops of an aromatic revival potion into Perceval's mouth. "There, there now," he said soothingly, "you'll be good as new in just a minute."

What Edward and Elaine knew, and what Stewart and all the knights of the Round Table did not know, was that the rumor that all you had to do to kill a dragon was to penetrate that patch of soft underbelly was a lie perpetrated by the D.R.S. to save dragons. In fact, such an injury would just cause the dragon to pass out for a few minutes. The biggest problem for the dragon was that he might injure himself as he fell from the sky. As long as a member of the D.R.S. intervened before the knight severed the dragon's head, the dragon could be whisked away to safety.

Perceval was soon awake, having suffered nothing more than a minor concussion. Night had fallen. "Perceval, if you can carry me upon your back, I will now guide you to your new home," said Edward.

"Certainly," replied Perceval. He and Elaine exchanged a short, tearful goodbye.

"Are you sure you know what to do when he awakens?" Edward inquired.

"Of course," Elaine replied a bit disdainfully at the suggestion

that she could not handle the situation. "Now you hurry on and watch that no one tries to shoot you down from the skies. I expect you to deliver my good friend Perceval to Snowden in perfect condition."

"Indeed, I will, my lady." Edward waved as they took to the sky.

Elaine sat down next to Stewart. She arranged her skirt and placed his head upon her lap and quietly sat there through the night. She was dozing over him, when he finally awoke.

"W-w-what happened?" he asked as he tried to shake off sleep. The potion Edward had administered had done its job, the events of the previous day were quite foggy.

Elaine awoke immediately with a ready response. "You were wonderful. So brave, so fierce, my hero, my soon-to-be-husband," she praised, as she bowed to give him a peck on the cheek.

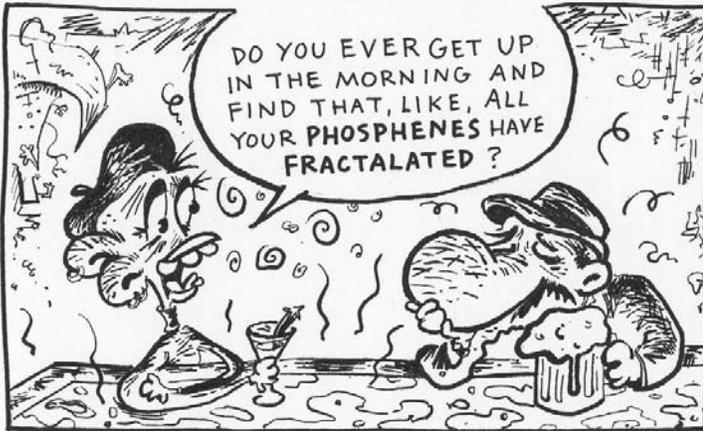
Stewart was so puffed up by the flattery that he didn't even think to inquire into the whereabouts of the dragon.

"Come now, my hero." Elaine gently pulled him to his feet, taking control of the situation. "You must be tired from your exploits, and I have had quite enough of the savage life. Take me home; all I want is a nice warm bath and a clean gown. There, there, that's my hero," she praised as she led him to his horse.

"B-b-but," he muttered, as he mounted his steed, "I don't remember . . ."

"Nothing to worry about my love," comforted Elaine as she took the hand he bent down to offer her. She swung into the saddle in front of him. "I'll tell you all about it on the way home. Then while I freshen up, you can boast of your mighty conquest to all the knights." Stewart smiled in satisfaction as he swung his steed toward home.

MODERN PROBLEMS



Rita

by Leslie Aguillard

What the heck is that?" Rita was looking passed Dotti's shoulder to someplace beyond their breakfast conversation. Her eyes were narrowed trying to see whatever it was more clearly. Dotti didn't want to bite, didn't want to turn around in her chair like some rubber-necking yahoo gawking at God knows what just because Rita made a comment. Rita had a way of pointing and laughing at people's eccentricities, and though people could certainly prove quite amusing at times, Dotti would rather finish her coffee and go.

"I'm not looking, Rita, you just go ahead and tell me what you see." Dotti had lifted her orange cappuccino almost to her lips when Rita reached across the table to touch Dotti's hand, lowering it slowly, not spilling the coffee.

"Dotti, turn around and look." She emphasized "look," her focus still fixed on something in the distance.

Dotti sighed, resigned, released the cappuccino and began adjusting herself around in her chair with exaggerated effort. "OK, what am I looking at?" She looked down the street but saw nothing that would be so intriguing to Rita, her old friend, a Hollywood gossip columnist wanna-be. The sidewalk was lined with marigolds and nondescript little bushes in full leaf around each of the trees. Few people walked in and out of the dramatic contrast of full hot sun and too little shade. The cars were parked bumper to bumper and the traffic was typically stop and go. She didn't even see a dog, much less someone funny or odd or flat out bizarre. The neighborhood apartment buildings weren't burning, the sky was blue, she was unimpressed. Dotti turned back to Rita who was still intently looking passed her. "What? I don't see a damn thing?"

Rita poked at Dotti's shoulder and pointed firmly, "Look at that!" She emphasized "that" in such a way that Dotti complied and turned again. Nothing. She turned back again looking at Rita.

"Rita, I'm not into playing stupid games this morning. As a matter of fact, I'm really not into playing stupid games any morning. Tell me what you are looking at because obviously I do not see whatever it is you see." She twisted again in her chair and scanned once again the innocuous street. Nothing, nada, zip.

Dotti turned back to the table and was surprised to see Rita standing this time. She frowned up at her friend. Rita was not paying the least bit of attention to her. It was as though Rita were watching the commission of a crime, a traffic accident in progress, in slow motion. She seemed to be completely absorbed by the something Dotti could not see. It was getting to be an issue.

"Rita, sit down, talk to me." Dotti raised her cup and took a small sip. The cappuccino was getting cool; she preferred it hot, and had a habit of drinking it as hot as she could stand even though she was told this was not good for her stomach or throat. "I like hot coffee, what can I say?" She looked up at Rita, standing and staring off in the distance, ignoring her. "Rita." No response. "Rita?" Nothing. "Rita! For crying out loud, what the hell are you looking at?" Again Dotti turned in her chair but could see nothing that might remotely hold Rita's attention. Dotti looked back at others seated around the café's sidewalk service area. Little metal tables with market umbrellas blooming from their centers and little plastic chairs around, not too many people, for a change. It was quiet. It had been pleasant until a few moments ago. No one else seemed to be paying any attention to Rita or looking in her direction. "Well," Dotti thought, "at least we're not creating a scene." But it was starting to annoy Dotti a great deal. She didn't like not knowing what was going on, and liked it even less that she couldn't get Rita to respond or explain and wasn't really all that reassured because no one else in the vicinity seemed to be noticing one way or the other.

"Rita, I'm beginning to feel like the twilight zone here, please sit down and talk to me." Dotti looked up at Rita still standing, her face blank, her eyes very far off. Dotti began to feel a little frightened for Rita, what if she was having some sort of stroke or seizure or something? What would she do? She didn't even have a cell phone. She was probably one of the few people in Denver who didn't. Dotti put her coffee down and stood up and slowly walked around the little table to stand next to Rita and put her arm gently around Rita's shoulder.

"Rita," she whispered in Rita's right ear, "honey, sit down, I

think maybe you aren't well." Dotti tried to apply a little sitting down pressure to Rita's shoulder, but she neither moved nor spoke. Dotti became more assertive and took hold of Rita's shoulders, trying to turn her toward herself, and shook her, but Rita's head did not change positions; just her body rotated toward the steadily distraught growing Dotti. It was too strange and now unnerving. Dotti stepped away looking perplexed and concerned, then looked around the café for a restaurant employee, or at the other customers, still ignoring the two of them, perhaps she'd spot someone with a cell, time to call 911. The scene was strangely quiet and even more oddly, people were minding their own business and not watching her or Rita. Dotti looked again at Rita standing there and staring.

"Rita, you just stand right here, I'll be right back. I'm going to get some help." Dotti walked quickly into the restaurant, looking back once to see Rita still unmoved. Dotti went up to the bar, "Can I use your phone? I'm afraid my friend is not well, and I think I better call 911."

This alarmed the bartender, "911?" He leaned over the bar to peer outside but they could not see Rita from this particular angle. "Please," Dotti asked again, "I think I better call 911." The bartender lifted a phone from behind the bar and set it there for her to use and called to a waitress. He wasn't sure there was a problem, no one seemed the least bit excited outside, but while Dotti dialed he asked the waitress to go to this lady's table and see what was going on. The waitress walked outside.

"Hello, 911? My name is Dottie Reynolds and I'm at the Fancy Licks on fourteenth and York and I think my companion is having some sort of stroke...she's not responding to me, just staring off, it happened very suddenly and I don't know what else to do." Dotti tried to pay attention to the voice on the phone but was distracted by the waitress coming back in to the dark restaurant from the much lighter patio, her silhouette shrugging her message to the bartender that she didn't know what the matter was. There would be an ambulance there shortly, she was told and she hung up the phone. The waitress came to the bar, "I don't see anything. I didn't see your friend, either."

"What?!" Dotti rushed to the patio entrance and looked at the table where she and Rita had been sitting, no Rita. She saw her own little leaned up against the leg of her chair and she saw two cups sitting on the metal mesh of the table top, but no Rita. She ran to the

table and looked down the street. She anxiously asked a few people sitting near by, "didn't you see my friend standing here? Did you see her leave?" The other patrons looked disturbed to be interrupted and sorry they couldn't be of some help but no, they really didn't pay any attention to her or her friend.

There was a low hedge growing in planters around the perimeter of the outdoor area of the café, it would be easy to step over it or walk between them, but Rita was no where in sight. A sickening wave of panic spread over Dotti's mind and she had to grab hold of the chair with one hand and rest her other hand on the table top to steady herself. "This is too strange. What is going on? Where is Rita?"

She was about to head back into the restaurant to call the police when she heard a siren; help would soon arrive. She hurried back into the restaurant and to the front door as the police car pulled up and an ambulance behind it. The waitress also came to the door; she would prefer the bill to be taken care of.

"Oh for God's sake," Dotti said in exasperation, snatching the bill, then digging around in her briefcase, pulling out a ten and telling the waitress to keep it, then rushing to meet the emergency people in front.

"My friend, the one I called about, disappeared. She was standing at our table right here," she pointed to the table at the near end of the patio, "but in the time it took for me to call you and return to the table, she was gone!" The police officer gave a look to the ambulance techs. The police officer reached into his pocket to remove a small notepad as the techs began to return to their ambulance. Dotti was more panicked now, she didn't want them to leave. "She could be wandering down the street, we have to look for her!"

The techs paused, looked back at her, and waited. The police officer asked her please to step into the squad car where he would get all the information from her, reassuring her that they would look around if she could give them a description. Dotti stammered, trying to think though her head was burning, "Rita Meyers, 30 years old, about 5'4" and 160 pounds, short dark hair, pretty, wearing a navy skirt and top, short sleeves, low shoes, you know, business dress. She was just here, standing and staring off in that direction ... she was staring for several minutes...she was having a stroke or something!" The officer took the information and called it in and asked Dotti to just

Rita continued next page

continued from Rita previous page

sit in the car while he spoke to the emergency personnel. Perhaps they should check around the neighborhood. Strokes, like cardiac arrests, need prompt attention. The ambulance pulled away quietly. The officer returned to Dotti who was crying now. He gave her a tissue and asked for her information and to reiterate what happened.

“We were just having coffee between meetings, we work in the same office, we’re friends. Rita just suddenly became distracted by something she saw in the distance but I looked and couldn’t see what she was looking at. I kept asking her what she was looking at but she didn’t answer, she just kept staring.”

The police officer spoke with the bartender and the waitress and questioned the few patrons on the patio but found nothing to corroborate Dotti’s story except they thought the two women had come in together. Dotti held her head in her hands, this was a nightmare. People don’t just disappear. How can these people not have seen anything? The police officer tried to reassure Dotti, he said he believed she was here with her friend and it could be that there was some medical problem happening and they’d look for Rita. He even offered to drive around with her through the nearby streets, which only took a few minutes, Dotti desperately looking in all directions as they drove around, then returned to the restaurant. There was really nothing more they could do, he said. If she didn’t return home in the next 24 hours he told Dotti to file a missing persons report but assured her again that they’d be on the look out for her, never know, could be a stroke like she had said.

Dotti sat on the wrought iron bench under the awning of the restaurant as the squad car pulled away. She felt weak, frightened, very confused and horribly concerned. If this was some sort of joke it was sick and she’d kill Rita for it, she told herself. But she did not believe it was a joke. She didn’t know what it was, but it wasn’t funny. Patrons came and went, barely glancing at her or her them. She looked down the street where Rita had been looking. There was a small flash of light, as if someone was taking a flash photo. It was bright even in the sun light, there for an instant then gone. Dotti looked again. There is was again. What was that? She didn’t see any flashes of light when she was trying to see what Rita was looking at. There is was again, as if a point of air down the street ignited, not attached to any vehicle or person or tree or building, just a flash in the

air. She shook her head and looked down into her briefcase.

“Better call the office. Maybe Rita showed up. Better tell them what happened. Better cancel my 2 o’clock.”

Dotti fished out her appointment book and looked at the page for today. It seemed meaningless, pointless, those pen marks, the underlining. All she wanted to do was to go home and try to sort this out. That and take some aspirin, God what a headache! She put the appointment book back in it’s special pocket and retrieved her car keys. “Guess it’s a good thing I drove.” She stood, clutched the keys in her fist and walked to her car parked just a few spaces beyond the café. The light flashing periodically glinting off her shiny hair, off the metal backs of her earrings, off the trim of the parked cars.

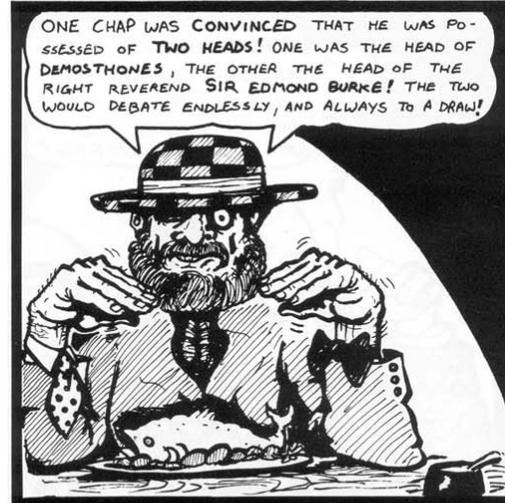
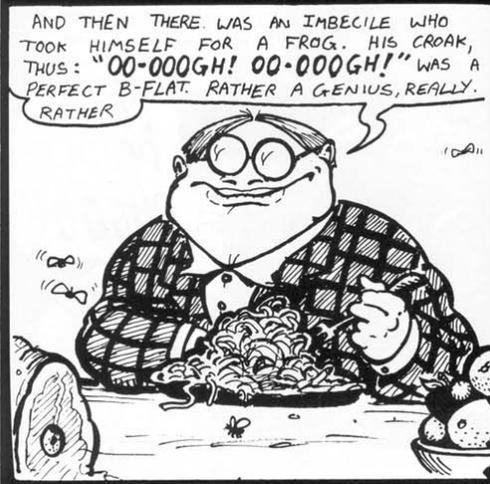
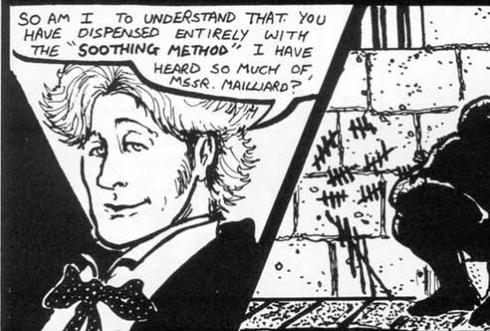
Fear Machine Funnies presents

Edgar Allen Poe's

THE SYSTEM OF DR. TARR AND PROFESSOR FETHER

ONCE, WHILE TRAVELING IN THE EXTREME SOUTH OF FRANCE, I STOPPED AT REMOTE PRIVATE MAD-HOUSE RUN BY ONE ETIENNE MAILLIARD. HE PRACTICED THE SO-CALLED SYSTEM OR METHOD OF SOOTHING: HUMORING THE LUNATIC TO CALM HIS MANIC NERVES. HE GREETED ME CORDIALLY AND INVITED ME TO DINE WITH HIS STAFF AND HOUSEHOLD. IT WAS TO BE AN EVENTFUL EVENING.





DO YOU REMEMBER PETIT PIERRE? WHO THOUGHT HE WAS A PINCH OF SNUFF AND TRIED TO THRUST HIMSELF UP HIS OWN NOSE...



... THE PATIENT'S HELD ABSOLUTE SWAY IN THAT PLACE FOR MANY MONTHS. ALTHOUGH THEY ONCE DID ALLOW A VISITOR TO ENTER THEIR DOMAIN. AN EXCEPTIONABLY STUPID YOUNG MAN...



PISH + TOSH! HE WAS MAD LIKE THE WOMAN WHO BEHAVED LIKE A CHICKEN...

COC-A-DOODLE-DOOOO!!



DO YOU REMEMBER THE MAN WHO HAD BEEN A BARRISTER? HE THOUGHT HE WAS A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE, AND SOMETIMES HE WOULD GO OFF WITHOUT WARNING. LIKE THIS:



GOOD HEAVENS, AND-UH- WHAT DID YOU SAY YOU CALLED THIS NEW METHOD YOU'VE DEVISED?



WELL, IT IS HARDLY ENTIRELY MINE. IT WAS, IN FACT, THE DISCOVERY OF TWO GENTLEMEN OF SINGULAR GENIUS. IT IS AN AMAZINGLY SIMPLE METHOD TO IMPLEMENT. IT HAS PROVEN MOST EFFECTIVE IN THE TREATMENT OF ALL MANNER OF MANIA...

WHY, MY DEAR BOY, WHATEVER IS WRONG? YOU LOOK POSITIVELY PALE. IS IT THE NOISE? 'TIS NOUGHT TO FEAR. IT'S THE INMATES...



... THEY SOMETIMES HOWL IN CONCERT, LIKE DOGS. STILL, SUCH A SHOCK IS HARD ON THE BRAIN. ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE YOU TO MY AFOREMENTIONED COLLEQUES!...

...DR. TARR AND PROFESSOR FETTER! THEY'LL HAVE THE OLD BRAIN SHIP SHAPE IN NO TIME!!





Path

by Rebecca Norman

There was a Princess...
I'm sure there was—
named

Atreus

With a face that was pretty enough,
stopped ships, swooned sailors,
crooned fools to sleep

But
I forget
this is not a story
this is a life

Sometimes that's hard for me to remember
I have always been a storyteller
and here I have all the characters

evil king
wicked stepmother
(because we're not allowed to admit
she might be a real mother...
Mothers, as a rule

aren't supposed to let these things happen)

I
must remind you that
she was not really wicked
misguided
self-spiralled
tar-pitted in miserable oblivion
not wicked
In pain

You can make her wicked if you want to,
in your chapter,
but
you should remember
she was not

And the evil king
You should remember
his crown was made of spinning-bobbins
with a dead canary
perched at a crazy angle on its tip,
beak open as if to sing.

You should remember
his fingers were made of stone.

Here there was an Alice
an Atreus
looking for truth and
finding it in every lie
and Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee
tiptoeing down their garden path
offered up interpretations
which made the whole thing
much more

whole.

But
this is not a story
I forget
this is a life

It was easier when I was
shaped in a land of strangers
where every stranger spent their time
trying to fit in
It made you feel less targeted

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even when you were
to know everyone had their sights set
at the same level
right on the heart
First, I was a swan
then an ugly duckling
when the fairy land disappeared
then I was a swan again
but sure they were lying
until the adoration sunk stinking in

I have never said I was a princess
I have always been told this
by someone in the story

which makes it an easier delusion to maintain.
My slippers are made like moccasins
though the story says
they are glass, with sharp blades inside
My feet dance of their own free will
though the story says
they must twirl and tap
until I fall down dead
so I suppose they will.

My hands
are
my hands
although the story says
each finger has one blue light
and the five rings on the left
are made of gold,
the five on the right of silver

My mouth
keeps alternating
between dropping gold pieces
and dropping toads

But

It would be easier to remember
if my dreams were not tales
I remember some of them as well
as any true memory
the feeling of being frozen
the sting of acid rain
and blood rising through my skin
the smell of cinnamon
and some of the dreams
which are stories
come true
I am perplexed
by the way the words keep
coming round full circle

It would be easier if I had dreams
aspirations, goals,
but what is
and what will be
shift from day to day
and goals are water

The stepsister
is only a sister
She is the hungry one
She is so hungry that
after eating up everything else,
her body is devouring itself
all the gold and silver
is already stripped from her teeth
Her eyes get brighter
when a new cancer starts,
dull with time again
Her dress is made of rags
torn from expensive gowns
and she uses the long thin needles of her finger
to spin thread
not of gold

burlap instead.

But
this is not a
story
This is a life

I was for a short time
bruised daughter
beaten wife
when I was the hungry sister
and my body devoured itself
and my child
I walked away
from the lopsided king
telling tales
as I have always done

My hungry sister
cannot walk away
The king is chained
to her dinner table
gnawing at the flesh of her arms

The wicked
not wicked
step not mother
named Electra-for-today
is weaving.
This is not easy for a woman made of butterflies

We women always spin tales
gather wool
cotton-pickin' troublemakers that we are
She is weaving
but she keeps forgetting
what is the story
that needs to be shaped into the threads

The fates followed Atreus easily

and I remind her
to simply spin the truth

This weaving ought to have five sides
to be true;
The inside
the outside
the inside me
the outside you
and the inside of the teller
She keeps getting confused
and weaving
only from the inside
so she can't see the others very well
and the pattern doesn't make much sense

When you do that it can trap you
The weave itself is a spider
with shrinking strands
closing nets
warping woof
and lurking lines

It is easier
to trap
one's self
in a weaving

Her pattern is a city
is a mountain
made around her
checkerboards to the right
high scarps to the front
plain plaid to this side
houndstooth blades to that
whispers behind
and above
and blue and yellow light

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To the fore,
behind the checkerboard,
is a tunnel
that edges past the sharp cliffs

She thinks it may be the way out
It had better be
since it is the only way left open
but she is still too afraid
to step out of the man-skin moccasins
and down the corridor

But I

My pattern includes hers
beyond the corridor
I have placed
Truth
Perhaps a pointless bauble
like the dandelions I used to pick
to bring her...
but still Truth
and this time
it is gentle
I ply my trade
with simple words
I like them better
They suit a story teller

and this is not a life

this is a story

Contributors' Bios

Leslie Aguillard

Leslie sees the world a little differently and as an only child spent a great deal of time in creative pursuits for companionship and entertainment. Leslie wrote her first story at the age of six and since then has published poetry and articles and other short pieces of fiction. Her education and career has been primarily in the arts though for the last twelve years has worked as a registered nurse. A lifelong love of science fiction, fantasy and horror, especially with humor or insight that may give the reader or viewer options or broader understanding, is what Leslie prefers. In *Rita* there is an opportunity taken and an opportunity lost. How often during the day does that happen? "You never know when you're having good luck," so be attuned to the world around you and for doorways to perception which may not have been opened before—the ordinary and commonplace may not be what it seems.

James Cukr

Well, besides not getting along very well with cameras, James Cukr works and lives in the foothills of Colorado. Over the last few years he has been painting science fiction art exclusively for posters and lithographs. See the interview in this issue for more background!

Colleen Donnelly

Colleen Donnelly is a professor at the University of Colorado-Denver. Watch for her new children's book, "Terror on the Trail," out soon.

Eddy Von Mueller

Contrary to popular legend and the stubborn insistence of his parents' venal lawyers, Eddy Von Mueller was not raised by wolves on the Colorado steppes. They were coyotes. The youngest of six disturbingly talented children, Eddy's creative potential became apparent early on. He managed to blame his elder siblings for virtually everything. Eddy began making films with his brothers and a Brownie Super-8mm camera while still in short pants, and was working as a professional cartoonist and caricaturist while still in high school. In 1985, after a brief stint working as an animator for the Saturday Morning cartoon mill, Eddy began the ten-year undergraduate odyssey that would earn him the distinction of being one of the few college students ever to outlast five

deans, two chancellors, and a president. Allegations linking him to the high rate of administrative turnover at America's universities have never been substantiated.

When not doing odd jobs (really odd jobs, from air-brushing lowriders and snake-wrangling in Denver to tracking dinosaurs in Korea), Eddy supported himself with his pen, drawing editorial cartoons and technical illustrations; writing news, reviews, and criticism for a variety of publications including the respected *Bloomsbury Review of Books*; and occasionally threatening to stick it in the eye of unwary joggers slow to hand over their wallets. By the time he was finally Matriculated with Extreme Prejudice from the University of Colorado at Denver, he had earned a degree in English literature, a fistful of minors, and a number of regional and national awards for his journalistic endeavors. His 2- and 3-D paleontological reconstructions, including full-scale reproductions in fiberglass, have been seen in museums all over the world. Eddy has also illustrated several Academic and popular-press books on dinosaurs in the United States, Britain, and Japan.

He returned to film and filmmaking in the mid-90s, receiving a grant to produce the animated short film, *Recycling Roger*. Eddy received a Master's Degree in Film Studies at Emory University in 1996, where he remains to this day, vainly pursuing a Ph.D. and trying to convince his mother that he will be able to find work as a dentist when he gets it. His writings on film have appeared in both scholarly and popular periodicals and Eddy has participated in a number of film festivals as a commentator and panelist, including the Telluride Film Festival, the Atlanta Independent Film and Video Festival, and the Giornate Del Cinema Muto in Sacile, Italy. He worked as a production designer on the 1997 Spanish-language feature *The Nightingale* and the *Rose* and spent his meager life savings to write, produce, direct, and peer-counsel a 16mm feature film called *Old Glory*.

More recently, Eddy and his partner Evan Lieberman created the music video "Pink Lipstick" for the band *Impotent Sea Snakes*, featuring Metal legend Lemmy Killmeister and wrestling sensation Bill Goldberg. The duo is currently hard at work on several projects, including *Modern Bride*, an innovative DV feature chock full of violence, drugs, and pastry; and a remake of the horror classic *The Golem*. In addition to teaching film history and theory at Georgia State University, Eddy teaches screenwriting at the Image Film and Video Center in Atlanta, Georgia.