

The Criterion

December 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

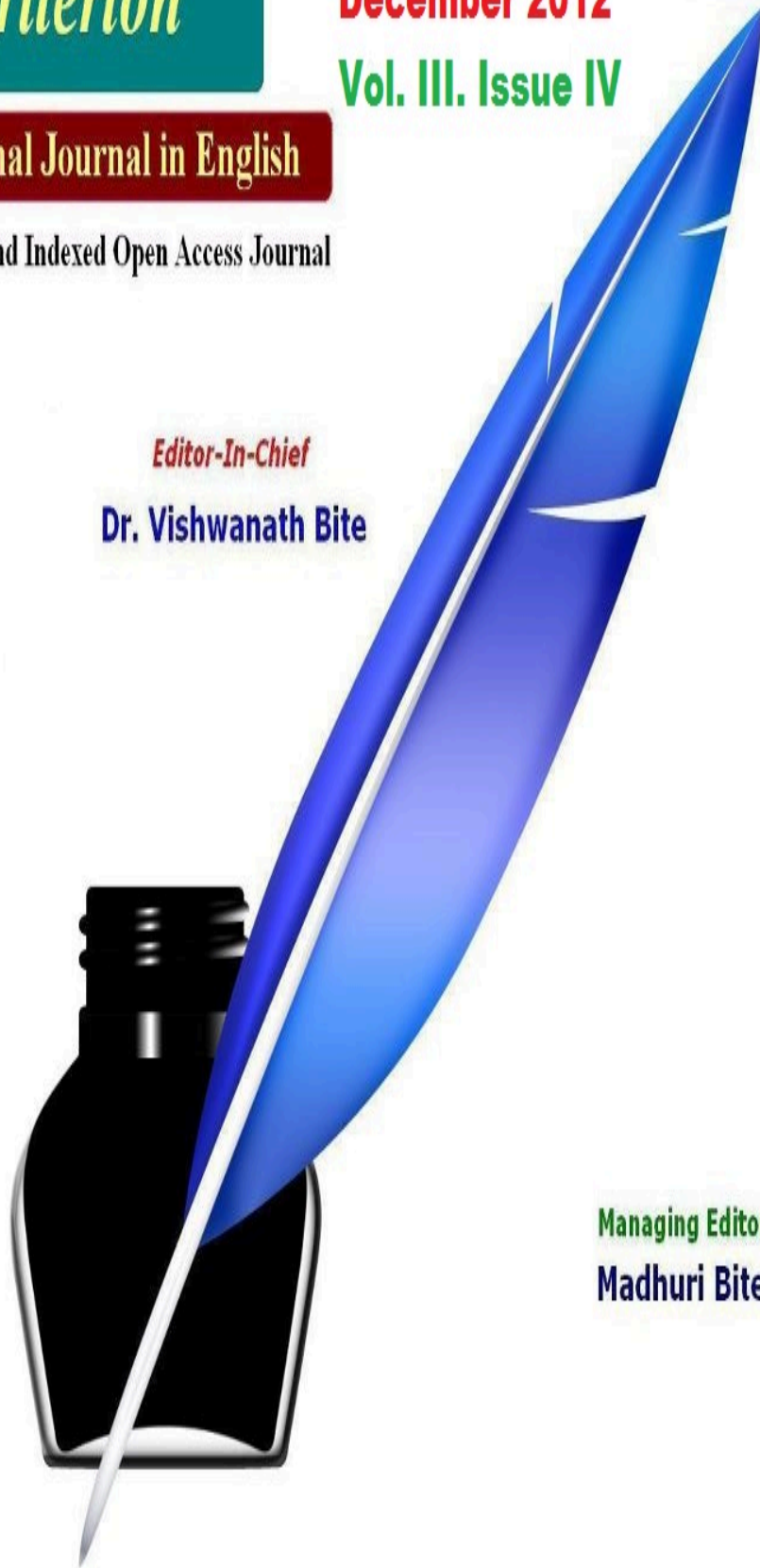
Vol. III. Issue IV

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

Editor-In-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite



Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

The Unfortunate Recorder

Robert A. Vella
San Francisco

To save his family, an enigmatic father must sacrifice his future by disobeying galactic orders.

Renna Mercelli sat motionless as he absorbed the telepathic message from his distant relations. When the meaning became clear, his worst fears had been realized. He lowered his head into trembling palms, but shook off the impulse to weep. He was Reticulan, after all, and grief was not part of their nature. Picking himself up with deliberate intent, he considered his plans for the time remaining. Four hours, four short hours to reconcile a lifetime.

The clock in the den chimed six times indicating the earliness of the day. Renna thought it was a peculiar instrument of regimen, and so unique to this planet. But from his fifty-five years of living here, he had come to understand its necessary role for these ephemeral beings. Suddenly, a rush of mammalian empathy tingled down his spine as he silently exclaimed, “My family, my friends, my son!”

The phone rang persistently at the house of Mathew “Matty” Mercelli. Snuggled tightly with his wife Jennifer upon a solid oak bed, he arose slowly and answered the call.

“Hello,” he said in a tired voice.

“Hi Matty,” the caller replied.

“Oh, it’s you, dad. What time is it? Six o’clock! What the…”

“Now listen, Matty, I need to see you right now,” Renna demanded.

“Now?” asked the twenty-seven year old. “You know I have to be at work by eight.”

“It’s important,” stressed his father. “Call and tell them you’re not going in today.”

“Alright, but what’s this about anyway? Is something wrong?”

“Just get over here as soon as you can, and tell Jenny and Jill to pack some clothes.”

“What?” Matty remarked with obvious surprise, but the line had disconnected.

What Renna had in mind was not allowed. Once a planetary judgment of this type was declared by the Galactic Council, no indigenous life-forms could be removed from that world. Any Reticulan committing such an act would be in violation of the *Second Law of Interstellar Conduct*, and subsequently stripped of all extra-corporeal rights – essentially a permanent death sentence. For a moment, he pondered the seriousness of his intentions. But as he gazed into a mirror, the image which returned was that of a human.

*

Matty jumped out of bed and roused up his bewildered wife and daughter. This was so unlike his father, a shy and reserved man who was not inclined to act rashly or assertively for any reason. Something was very wrong. He remembered how embarrassed he felt when, as a child, the neighbors had taunted his father with insults and wild accusations. Renna never responded to the frequent attacks, retreating instead to the sanctuary of his study. When Matty would angrily prod his father to fight back, the calm, peaceful man simply forgave them. After one such episode, he lectured his son:

“They feel compelled to destroy that which they do not understand. Your mother, rest her soul, wanted you to be better than that. Tolerance and compassion are strengths, young Matty. They are the keys to learning and growth. Aggression should not be revered, for it is the refuge of ignorance and hate.”

Those who knew Renna thought highly of him, his son most of all. His wisdom was considered extraordinary, to the point where it seemed precognitive of future events. His benevolent persona conveyed genuine caring for his fellow man, although displays of affection and feelings of romantic love were peculiarly absent. Years earlier, when he began his career as a researcher for the Department of Earth Scientific Studies (DESS), Richard Belliard – the Director of Theoretical Strategies – once wrote in a personal evaluation:

“Mr. Mercelli is the brightest and most effective young scientist I have seen in my lifetime. His instincts are uncanny, and his determination to resolve problems is unparalleled. The depth of concentration he displays warrants a psychological study of its own. He is committed to our stated mission, and apparently has no desire for higher office or personal gain. However, Mr. Mercelli’s thoroughly unemotional nature has generated some wariness in his coworkers. Only a few have developed close relations with him, and the rest exhibit some resentment and even jealousy. It is my opinion that the source of these strained relations rests not with Mr. Mercelli’s aloofness, but with the misperceptions of his colleagues.”

*

As the rhythmical den clock began its announcement of the seventh hour, a knock at the front door stirred Renna from his meditation.

“Matty, come in son,” Renna said in a welcoming voice.

Mathew took a seat on the sofa wearing an expression of puzzlement.

“I know what you must be thinking,” his father began, “so let me explain.”

“Something tragic is about to occur, son. It will happen in about three hours. There’s little time left for us to...”

“Father,” the handsome young engineer interrupted, “what are you trying to say?”

Renna searched for the right words, but was perplexed at the thought of laboriously communicating it in English.

“Relax Matty, and do not be afraid,” he reassured him. “I’ve never done this before with you, but if there ever was an appropriate moment it is now.”

Renna stared intently into the clear hazel eyes of his only offspring, and his informative thoughts began to coalesce into the receptive mind of Matthew Mercelli.

The mental intrusion of telepathy startled Matty, but he found it to be a calming and satisfying experience similar to riding a bicycle for the first time. His initial apprehension was unwarranted. But as he began to comprehend the content, the message was as terrifying as it was difficult to believe.

Renna was born to an extraterrestrial species native to the binary star system of Zeta Reticuli. After undergoing chromosomal metamorphosis for assimilation into the human population, he was sent to Earth as a *recorder* – an individual who mentally documents the very essence of an evolving species by prolonged and direct interaction. The purpose of this surveillance, for which remote observation is inadequate, is to gather the data necessary to render a planetary judgment that would decide the specie’s future course and ultimate fate.

The verdict issued for the Earth’s *Homo sapiens* (the species existed elsewhere), *beotelladenzee*, translated to: “biological project termination due to uncorrectable inherent failure.”

Shock suddenly gripped Matthew which broke off the telepathic link. He stood up and looked at the alien being in utter dismay.

“You!” he exclaimed, “You will kill us? You monster! You are not my...”

“I am your father,” Renna interjected firmly, “and I am not going to kill anyone. What will happen is beyond my control. When I learned of this, I was as stunned as you are,”

“Why?” pleaded Matty. “What possible reason could they have?”

Renna stood up while rubbing his wrinkled forehead. “You see son, mankind was a work-in-progress. My people have been nurturing them for eons. They took a primate stock and slowly began modifying it. The process was complex, and mistakes were made. Several thousand years ago, they had to start over because the errors produced undesirable results. You’re familiar with ancient legends such as the Biblical Flood and the demise of Atlantis?”

“Of course,” replied Matthew.

“Well, they are based on fact. There was no written language at the time, so the accuracy of the story degraded over time and then diverged as separate cultures grew and spread across the globe.”

“So, now it is happening again?” his son asked.

“Yes, but this time there will be no rebirth.”

Matty sat back down on the sofa and uttered softly, “My God, are we that bad of a species?”

“No son. There are other planets with successful populations of Homo sapiens, but here on Earth it proved impossible to control the impulse for destructive behavior.”

Renna wandered over to the bookcase and picked up a glistening crystal dodecahedron. He held up the object and rotated it deliberately in the early morning sunlight streaming through a large window. “Which brings me to the reason why I called you here,” he continued just as the relentless timepiece chimed once to mark the bottom of the hour.

*

Thirty nine light years away, it too was morning at the capital city of the Zeta Reticuli Federation (or *Zanzualelee*, as the inhabitants called it). The sky was emerald green with the golden glow of Z-2 (closest star) rising majestically above the eastern horizon. Slightly north of the zenith was the shimmering spiked image of Z-1, the companion star of this heavily populated system. Huddled around a suspended dark sphere, housed within one of the numerous black obsidian buildings, were five high ranking officials. Their frail reptilian-like bodies were draped in long purple robes. Their large colorless teardrop eyes intensely studied the moving images displayed within the sphere; first an average sized yellow star, then a series of planets, and finally a brilliant blue world.

*

Matthew arrived back home at eight-fifteen. Jennifer had already packed a couple of travel bags and was making her daughter’s bed. Four year old Jill was nervously playing on the floor with her colorful building blocks.

“Well, what’s this all about Matty?” the statuesque brunette demanded.

He gently hugged her and paused for a moment.

“We’re going on a little trip, Jen, and it’s really urgent,” he said while gesturing towards their lovely but preoccupied daughter.

“I see,” she acknowledged. “Will we be coming back any time soon?”

Matty just shook his head, kissed her softly on the cheek, and bent down to his knees.

“Hey there my gorgeous little engineer! How would you like to make some new friends in a faraway land full of magic?”

“Okay!” Jill beamed. “Can we go now?”

*

Mr. Cleve M. Daniels was hooking the boat trailer to his truck when he glanced up and saw a shimmering light coming from Renna's front window. It was an intensely sharp white beam dancing about in all directions as would a rotating nightclub ball light, but bright enough to hurt Cleve's eyes. His fishing buddy, Jasper Kilgenhoffer, walked out onto the porch with a large cup of coffee steaming between his hands.

"What are you looking at, Cleve?"

"That little pencil-necked neighbor of mine," Daniels retorted. "I tell you, there's something wrong with that guy. He's got some sort of strobe light going on over there. See it?"

"Yep," replied Jasper. "That's bright!"

"Ungodly he is," Cleve proffered while pulling up his pants over his prominent belly. "One of these days, I'm going to..."

"Hey, look up there Cleve," his friend interrupted. "What the hell is that?"

The large man turned his head upwards and saw a circular pink glow covering a full third of the otherwise pale blue western sky.

"Lord, almighty!" he shouted.

*

Just as the den clock announced the arrival of nine o'clock, Matty pulled up with his wife and daughter, and parked his recently purchased black sedan. They hurried into the house not noticing the two confused men next door or what had captured their attention. Renna was on the family room floor studying the radiant dodecahedron. There were several actively working electrical devices scattered about haphazardly which Matty couldn't identify. While Jill seemed peaceful, it was obvious to Renna that Jennifer was deeply unsettled.

"Come here, my dear," he beckoned.

Folding her legs underneath, she took his outstretched hands and stared worriedly into his warm, comforting eyes. While they sat motionless in a long silence, Matty lovingly played with his daughter's pony tail on the sofa. She giggled in delight as she watched the dodecahedron in amazement.

Jenny blinked several times when the telepathic connection ended and proclaimed, "Incredible, just incredible. Will it be alright? I mean, will we be accepted?"

"Oh yes," Renna answered. "They are enthusiastically waiting for you, Jenny. Never before have they met their Earthly cousins."

"What is that, dad?" inquired Matty as he pointed to the dodecahedron.

"Well," his father hesitated, "we call it a *loomarree*. It focuses gravity waves for the function of physical transportation through the temporal dimension."

"Are you speaking of time travel?" Matty suggested.

"Partially," replied Renna. "Time cannot exist without space, and space cannot exist without time. The two concepts are distinguishable only in the minds of biological beings as subjective observational references. We can say where we found an object, and we can say when we found an object; but, it is out of the realm of normal experience to say we found an object at specific space-time coordinates x, y, z, t ."

"Now you're talking quantum physics," added Matty.

"Exactly son, the *Heisenberg uncertainty principle* states that an object's position and momentum cannot be simultaneously known with precision. The more accurately you know the position of an object, the less you can know about its velocity, and the more accurately you know the velocity of an object, the less you can know about its instantaneous position."

Matty pondered for moment and asked, "What does that have to do with time?"

“Everything,” responded Renna. “Einstein’s *special relativity* states that energy has the same relation to time as momentum does to space. Niels Bohr, among others, referred to this as the *energy-time uncertainty principle*. For both of these relationships, they realized that the measurement of position (or time) disturbs an objects momentum (or energy), and vice versa. This makes the uncertainty principle a kind of observer effect.”

Matthew looked perplexed.

“It’s really quite simple, Matty. The space-time progression of the observer is different than the space-time progression of the observed. Increasing the progressive difference between the two relative points of reference we call movement through the temporal dimension.”

“I think I understand that. It follows then, that time cannot be an absolute constant.”

“Correct, and neither is space an absolute constant. The two are the same entity. We just see them differently as we would look at a coin – one side is heads, the other tails.”

“How is the *loomarree* controlled?” asked Matty.

“Through a modulated telepathic interface,” replied Renna. “Here, see?”

There was a loud commotion outside the front of the house. Matty got up and opened the door. It was the two neighbor men.

“Where’s Mercelli?” yelled Cleve. “There you are! What on God’s Earth are you doing with that light? Does that have something to do with the sky?”

As Matthew physically kept Cleve from pushing his way into the house, he noticed the entire sky was luminously pink.

“It’s alright, let them in Matty,” Renna instructed.

Cleve and his slender companion forcefully walked in and immediately focused on the *loomarree*.

“What the hell is that?” Jasper asked as he looked quizzically at Cleve.

“I don’t know, but it sure is...” Cleve stopped suddenly as his face went blank.

“You okay?” Jasper said while nudging the large forty-three year old man. Then, he too became mentally vacant.

Standing behind the two men, Renna turned them around and ushered them towards the door. “It was nice of you to stop by for a visit, gentlemen. Good luck fishing now.”

Cleve and Jasper departed with a slow mechanical motion, and did not utter a word.

While Renna returned to the floor facing the now pulsating *loomarree*, Jenny and Jill joined their father at the window. They saw many people in the street quizzically staring up at the pink sky and observing an odd red dot that seemed to be moving closer. Cleve and Jasper casually began loading their fishing equipment in the boat, completely unaware of the gathering crowd or the ominous sky. And, for the last time it would be heard by human ears, Renna’s den clock struck a single reverberant chime.

“It’s ready now,” Renna said. “Come over here, please.”

With a noticeable expression of anxiety, Jenny tightly grabbed her husband’s hand and herded little Jill towards the middle of the room. Renna glanced up at his charming young family wearing a kind smile, and spoke with undeniable feeling.

“This is a new beginning for you and all that we share in common. It is the *Kalle-free*, the reawakening. Remember this moment and the loss from which it sprung. The lessons of history are yours. Protect them with utmost vigor, as you now possess the fertile seeds of the future.”

Suddenly, a bluish-white horizontal vortex grew out of the wall opposite the sofa. Spinning at incredible speed, it soon reached from floor to ceiling. Lightweight items were lifted

into the air with cyclonic frenzy, as a youthful shriek and adult groans struggled to be heard above the chaos.

“Quickly,” Renna yelled as a magazine slammed against his head.

“One by one, walk into it. You go first, Jenny!”

Matthew’s beautiful wife took two steps and appeared to shrink to nothingness.

“Mommy!” screamed Jill, as she leaped headfirst into the whirlpool.

“Now you, Matty!” urged Renna.

“You’re not coming, are you?” his son tearfully asked.

“I cannot. You will understand. Go!”

Renna forcefully pushed his respectful son into what would be Man’s future.

The vortex disappeared as papers floated gently down to the ground. Renna fell to his knees in relief. Outside, the sky had turned a dark reddish-brown. The air became cool as the intensity of the autumn sun faded. He could hear the moaning sounds of agony coming from outside. He lifted himself up and walked deliberately to the bookshelf. There, he saw a favorite novel of his late wife, Elizabeth. *The Hidden Side of Midnight* was a fictional drama of exploitation, despair, deceit, and vengeance. How ironic, Renna thought, that this one story encapsulated so many of the very failings which caused the demise of Man.

High above, the gamma rays rained down mercilessly. In three days, it was all over.

*

Many years later, on the peaceful planet *Humania*, a unique ceremony took place. A group of several dozen people sat patiently around an outdoor amphitheater. The chilly evening sky was alight with the nearby *Pleiades* star cluster. An elegant woman, dressed in a flowing black gown, strolled up to the altar and unveiled a large stone monument.

“In the adopted language of my grandfather,” Jill said proudly. “We dedicate this monument in remembrance of that brave Reticulan who defied his own orthodoxy for a chance to experience what was foreign to his being – the human act of compassion.”

Inscribed upon the monument was this simple statement:

“Rennahmaresaalee, the Unfortunate Recorder.”