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COVER

LINT



STEVE AYLETT'S
NEWEST NOVEL

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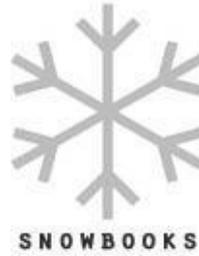
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The incredible career of cult author Jeff Lint

Steve Aylett



for Alan Moore

SNOWBOOKS

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'When the abyss gazes into you, bill it.'

Jeff Lint

Pulp science fiction author Jeff Lint has loomed large as an influence on my own work since I found a scarred copy of *I Blame Ferns* in a Charing Cross basement, an apparently baffled chef staring from the cover. After that I hunted down all the Lint stuff I could find and became a connoisseur of the subtly varying blank stares of booksellers throughout the world.

Born in Chicago in 1928, Jeff (or Jack) Lint submitted his first story to the pulps during a childhood spent in Santa Fe. His first published effort appeared in a wartime edition of *Amazing Stories* because he submitted it under the name 'Isaac Asimov'. 'And Your Point Is?' tells the story of an unpopular calm tramp who is pelted every day with rocks, from which he slowly builds a fine house. The story already reflected the notion of 'effortless incitement' that Lint would practice as an adult. 'Jack was fantastic,' says friend Tony Fleece. 'Went around blessing people—knew it was the most annoying thing he could do. A dozen times, strangers just beat the hell out of him.' Lint perfected the technique when he stumbled upon the notion of telling people he would pray for them.

Lint's first novel was published by Dean Rodence's Never Never company in New York. The relationship between Rodence and Lint was one of complete mistrust, rage and bloody violence. When submitting work in person, Lint insisted on appearing dressed as some kind of majorette. 'He was a large man and clearly wasn't happy at having to do this,' explains Fleece. 'He blamed Rodence, was resentful. I still don't know where he got the idea he had to dress that way when handing his stuff in.'

The first novel with Never Never was *One Less Person Lying*, in which Billy Stem must tell the truth or be transformed into the average man. Rodence persuaded Lint to change the title word 'Person' to 'Bastard'. On a night of pre-press jitters, Rodence then partially re-wrote the final section of the book so that Stem puts on a space suit and goes berserk, killing an innocent stranger with a rock. The book was published as simply *One Less Bastard*. In the several years of their association Lint never forgave Rodence for the incident, and often alluded to it by repeated use of the word 'bastard' when speaking to him.

Around the time of his second published novel *Jelly Result*, Lint met his first wife Madeline, who was attracted to him by a knife scar that led from below his left eye to his mouth. This was in fact a sleep crease and Lint managed to maintain the mistake by napping through most of the marriage. But after five months a bout of insomnia put paid to the relationship and left Lint with nothing to occupy his time but his writing—luckily for the world of literature, as he produced some of his best work at this time, including *Nose Furnace* and *I Eat Fog*, which both appeared on Rodence's new Furtive Labors imprint, and *Slogan Love* with Ace. *Turn Me Into a Parrot* took issue with the fundamentalist notion that the world was only a few thousand years old and that dinosaur bones had been planted by god to test man's faith. Lint asserted that the world was only fifty years old and that the mischievous god had buried sewers, unexploded bombs and billions of people. In my own book *Shamanspace* I make it clear that humanity arrived eons ago but, like a man standing in front of an open fridge, has forgotten why.

By the sixties Lint's reputation was established firmly enough for several feuds to develop with other equally unknown authors, the main one being Cameo Herzog, creator of the *Empty Trumpet* books, who once conspired with Rodence to kill Lint with a truck. (The story is unclear, but it seems that after an unsuccessful try at Lint, they killed or injured the wrong man and had to make reparations to the mob.) The levels to which this feud imploded were difficult for outsiders to understand. Lint and Herzog were once seen glaring silently at each other for seven hours in a freezing lot, each holding a differently coloured swatch of velvet.

In 1966 Lint published a series of essays under the ominous collective title *Prepare to Learn*. They included ‘~~Running Bent Double~~—The Poor Man’s Protest’, ‘~~Debate This, You Mother~~’ and ‘~~My Beauty Will Blind You~~’, in which he stated: ‘Some animals have a life span of only a few days. I suspect they eat food only through habit. Why has nature never bred a creature which eats nothing for its few days of life? Such hordes would have a distinct advantage over other species.’ He then suggested that humanity was meant to be such a species but wrecked everything by stuffing its face the moment it entered the world.

Several of Lint’s early books were also being re-published by Doubleday and New English Library and the startled Lint rushed to exploit his raised profile, pulling on a skirt and bursting into the office of Random House with a proposal he dreamed up on the spot. *Banish m’Colleagues* would tell the story of a bull elephant on its way to the elephant’s graveyard, only to find it full of ambulances. The ivory-white confusion of the landscape is a classic Lint image, as is that of Lint being ejected from Random House by twelve security guards. In 1973 Lint instead batted out the trash novel *Sad Disappointed* about a child who is not possessed by the devil. Published under his Asimov pen name, it is a minor work redeemed only by the parents’ laughable attempts at activism. These seem mainly to involve the placing of ignorable gonks on people’s driveways—the baffled press is then alerted when the toy is backed over by a car. Lint was at a low, beaten down by a stint in Hollywood that saw his screenplays repeatedly diluted by studio hacks. He felt justly proud of his scripts for *Kiss Me Mister Patton* (eventually filmed as *Patton*) and *Despair and the Human Condition* (eventually filmed as *Funny Girl*).

The mid-seventies also saw Lint’s incredible foray into the world of action comics with his creation of *The Caterer*. This unfathomable title lasted nine issues, during which the hero was never seen cook or prepare food in any way. The Caterer’s wordless shooting spree in Disneyland in the final issue was as ill-judged as it was relentless, and its blithe use of certain copyrighted characters sank the publishers in legal defense costs.

Lint was by now a Hemingwayesque figure and had developed the ability to speak out of a different part of his beard each time. ‘Keep ‘em guessing,’ he rumbled. A few observers began to shakily attribute to him some occult transactionary power and a Mrs Paterson-like ability to project mental images into visual form, if only briefly.

After a second marriage, the Felix Arkwitch trilogy, and short stints in London, Paris and Mexico, Lint returned to the New Mexico of his childhood and produced the first book of his Easy Prophecy series, *Die Miami*, which many say was a decoy for more interesting work as yet unearthed. He lived there until his death in 1994, since when Lint scholars have hunted for the gold-dust of lost stories, endlessly analysing the last novel *Clowns and Locusts*, his thankfully incomplete attempt at autobiography, *The Man Who Gave Birth to His Arse*, and his whispered final words, which seem to have been ‘There’s no marrying a cat.’

Jeff Lint is buried in a Taos graveyard, his headstone bearing the epitaph: ‘Don’t think of it as a problem, but as a challenge which has defeated you.’

This book follows Lint from cradle to grave like an undying mother. I examine his major works in depth, plus many of those that are more obscure, discuss his little-known scrapes with the worlds of movies and comics, and describe my own meeting with the man in 1992. It is a story of disregard, failure, strangely vacant staring and vindication. And it ends in florid dissension as only a truly creative endeavor can.

'From the instant he was born,' said his mother, 'that moron was unprofitable.'

Lint supposedly rocketed from the womb just as the attending doctor turned aside to share a joke with a nurse. 'It was something about penguins,' Carol Lint later remarked. 'I wasn't too upset when Jeffrey flew out and broke the silly man's jaw. And much too exhausted to laugh, of course.' Jeff Lint himself claimed to recall the incident, though he remembered the doctor as a huge white bear and the joke as 'an absolute load of garbage'. It was July 6, 1928.

Lint's father, Howard, was a middle-of-the-range stockbroker whose motto 'All men are created equal' seems to have been designed to be equally useless to all. Lint's only memory of him was a brandy-coloured lampshade, a cigar case like a chrome sandwich and a man whose face had grown into no coherent plan. Jeff and his mother were about to move from Chicago to join Howard in New York when peer pressure and the Wall Street Crash propelled Howard through a twelfth floor window. Howard Lint became a major player in one of the all-time great suicide dives when another man leapt from the eighth floor directly below him, and beneath the pair a third man rocketed from the fifth. The three dealers stacked up screaming in mid-air and when this despair sandwich hit the sidewalk on Pu... Friday, Lint's childhood was set. He and his mother moved in with her parents in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She kept the Lint name.

Grandpa Ashe was an admirer of George Washington who made a yearly pilgrimage to the Mount Vernon site of the great man's whiskey still. The Ashes were described as 'good traitor stock.' Lint recalls his grandpa saying 'If we didn't have marked men, people would rise or fall by mere ability.' Grandma Ashe carved dolls from pegs and allowed them to crowd the Devant Street house. She said that 'carved dolls stick to the rules'. There was also a dog with no spark of life in him at all.

Childhood was meant to be gold dust that collects on the window sill; summer electrons caught in a jar. 'But how did I feel when I was a child?' Lint later wrote. 'Like I'd been hit by a planet.' Lint would dig for hours trying to find a new colour, but Carol could always name the colours he found. Jeff became frustrated that there were no gaps between the labels—apparently everything had been filled in before he arrived. 'All the fates are spoken for,' he thought. 'What new thing shall I do with my time?'

Sent to the College of St Seere, Lint kept seeing gaps in answers. He decided early that exasperation with professors weren't worth the trouble. They were a bunch of feeble frauds who couldn't keep the abstracts from flapping in the wind. 'I was never class clown in school,' said Lint in 1971. 'But I do have one of those "downward mouths".' He escaped through a window, ran across a yard and collided with a standpipe. 'I also burned my leg on an iron bar. I was very spry back then.'

In his autobiography Lint scoffed at what is formally registered as the simplicity and innocence of childhood. He believed that the relentless horror of youth, when looked back upon from the fiercer and terminal hell of adulthood, merely seems carefree and simple. 'In fact, my dignity went under the lawnmower and that was the last I saw of that.'

Lint's mother decided she should educate him at home and Lint began to read voraciously. He was fascinated by Pierre Menard's *Looting of Heaven* and its notion of a 'sea-deep book of stirring life'. Most men pursue a profession because they stumbled upon it so clumsily it ran away. In Lint's case he was scared shitless in 1937 by an issue of *Weird Tales* which had come with them from Chicago in packing material. The story was about furniture coming to life—tables waken everywhere, their spindly nature swelling, and humanity finds itself surrounded. A year later all is utterly silent, screamface

immobile in the grain of cupboard wood. The cover of that issue showed an oriental magician beckoning some sort of horned kangaroo from a sewage outlet. Jeff also obtained old copies of *Astounding*, *Amazing* and the Vimana-crazy *Air Wonder Stories*, and after he had shared the magazines with his friend Tony Fleece, the craze spread like an infection. The science fiction pulp magazines concerned themselves with sour-faced gillmen, fossilized Martian railroads and the gee-whiz injuries of alien attack. Jeff enjoyed scaring the timid Amy Beleth with renditions of the stories, which he would elaborate with vague allusions to ‘the chickens of hell’ and ‘snot bandits’. The tomboyish Gabby Janus would not be fazed, however, and told him about a few ‘gutty goblins’ that lived at the bottom of a well. Lint started acting goofy around her and then gave her a poem he had written:

*I will give you everything
Without regret
Pants and underpants*

Janus has since called him a ‘tar-eyed romantic’.

Amid the frenzy of pulp consumption among the town kids, Lint dreamed one night in 1938 that Martians had landed, red-eyed and in no mood to talk. Then Carol shook him awake and told him that the radio report he had heard through half-sleep was real and that Earth was under attack. Lint did not respond as he should. ‘He was eagerness incarnate, really,’ Tony Fleece laughed years later. ‘We all were. I for one had been boning up on mutants for months and couldn’t wait to see an alien, with a head that implied in the way of antennae and so forth.’ But the next day it was revealed as a Halloween prank by Orson Welles. Lint would admire chubby magicians for the rest of his life.

Lint sat down, picked sap from his nose and started a story for *Weird Tales*. ‘For ages I was fooling around with words that were clearly bewildered at what I was trying to do with them—there was no cooperation at all.’ Lint wrote ‘Wall Swordfish Still Alive’ and other creepy concepts like ‘The Ghosts of a Zillion Slaughtered Cows’, but *Weird* didn’t bite. In 1940 he sent them ‘The Glory Key’. In this story, gods try to seem mighty though sardined together, packed away by history. They boast at each other like the corpses in Dostoevsky’s ‘Bobok’. ‘Avoid notice and be free’ seems to be the message—one that scandalized this small corner of a nation in which it was already becoming suspicious of an act to mind one’s own business. ‘When I showed people the story, several competed with one another in acting shocked, or disapproving, self-effacing, or something like that,’ Lint explained later, still unsure of motivation. ‘Being stunned seemed to be the only game in town.’ Throughout his life Lint experienced phases that he himself barely noticed but that seemed designed to cause anger and regret in those around him. He experimented with addressing people as ‘my liege’ and growling ‘aye’ instead of ‘yes’. During 1970 he addressed everyone as ‘Petal’. In 1983 he began quick-drawing the peace sign like a six-shooter, an act so startling that people would flinch and forget what they were saying. Caul Pin has described Lint’s blank expression upon seeing people’s reactions to his behaviour, and opines that far from being a studied indifference, it was the look of a man so unworldly that he didn’t recognise disgrace when it was heaped upon him from a truck. In fact accusations of disapproval was one of the methods listed in ‘The Glory Key’ of avoiding notice—by hiding in plain sight. This was not a method Lint ever practiced. His face was exactly the sort favoured by the onrushing fist.

Around the time of these rejections Lint read a story called ‘The Plank’ in *Amazing Stories*—the story was about John Derasha, who judged people by how wide they could stare. Those who submitted themselves for his approval were automatically dismissed as insecure wastes of space. The other

must be startled into a spontaneous display of eye-stretching. After an entire story following this idi around as he jumps out at people and gauges their reactions, he gets pounded to the floor by a th who doesn't like him, and as Derasha lays bleeding in a dark alley we are told he has failed to dete the widest eyes of all—his own during the brutal attack. It was undoubtedly the crappiest story Li had ever read.

‘I knew I could do better than that,’ he said in his autobiography. ‘For Christ’s sake, an eel could But Lint’s hypothetical eel would be sorely tested in the coming years.’

THE INCREDIBLE FENDER

'The Silver Radio' · 'And Your Point Is?' · Rouch and Herzog · food for the moon · bending words the wrong way

On October 7, 1940, Navy intelligence analyst Art McCollum wrote an eight-point memo on how to force Japan into war with the United States. Beginning the next day FDR began to put them into effect but upon the day of the Pearl Harbor attack Lint was still too young to enter the service—in fact Lint reminisced that his main concern that day was a fascination with the way his reflection stretched along a car fender as though decanting fluidly. 'I saw my features being transformed and then shot through what I imagined as a silver Flash Gordon cannon barrel.' Lint's story 'The Silver Radio' was about such a gun, and a battle in which people fired ideas at one another in an exchange of information rather than a war in which informational stance is static and battles are a parallel, unconnected activity. Lint himself later described the tale as a 'Coblentz imitation' and its most interesting feature today is a chance reference to Bush-Harriman-Thyssen, which Lint had picked randomly from an *Oberlin Herald-Tribune* because he had been told by Grandpa Ashe that 'names and specifics make for realism'. The Emperor Ming-style villain is called Bank-voor-Handel and craves gold. It is indeed imitative of the pulpists and seems like a backward step for Lint since 'The Glory Key'.

Lint wasn't in love with his chances when he sent it to *Amazing*, and the editor Hugo Gernsback wrote back commenting that the story seemed to have been written in the Berserker tradition. Lint waited a further year before realising that the letter had been one of rejection. The next story he sent to *Amazing* was 'And Your Point Is?', the tale of an oblivious pariah, which Lint submitted under the pen-name Isaac Asimov. It was published in early 1943 and was a rare occasion of the magazine having a cover created to fit the story rather than the other way around. But after the fact, Gernsback decided the cover looked like a heap of stinking garbage and resumed the practice of ordering up a octopus, a spaceman and a screaming woman for the front of every issue.

By the time the story appeared Lint had had several more stories accepted by *Daring Adventure Stories*, *Troubling Developments* and *Tales to Appall*, which appeared throughout 1943. Among these were 'Digestion and the World', in which the few remaining humans live in sun-blasted Greenland for half the year while vampires overrun the rest of the globe, switching places for the remainder; 'The Trunk Show of Everything' in which an alien plant growing from a large purple bole begins to manifest every possible form on its branches; and 'Watch the Endless Shipwreck', in which salt-stained sea zombies converge on a town in search of an affordable tailor. As a result that year Lint received fan mail from a New York pulp fan called Alan Rouch, who turned out to be only a year older than Lint. Also that year Lint first caught the attention of his nemesis Cameo Herzog, a man whose impoverished imagination spawned the statement 'Moderation in moderation' and who said of the sky 'I've found countless defects in its grain.' Herzog regularly described his own heroines as 'tasty and pathetic, enticingly vanquished' and his conservative views ('A government is due for removal when dust is deep on its mask') meant that whenever he tried to portray an alien it inevitably showed up in the form of an ostrich in a fez. According to Herzog's review column in the back pages of *Stunning Liberties*, Lint 'vexed' him 'in a hundred-and-twenty-seven ways' with his characters' constant mumbling.

Lint was experimenting with what happens when you bend a word the wrong way or when the integuments of the sentence are left visible, a ghost sentence behind the inked one. In time this would allow him to describe political setups many would have thought too lopsided for language. But he was still young enough to envision a life verdant with fees. So he stumbled into the literary world like a bliss-blasted saint, haplessly imaginative and for a good long while unaware of the resentments he was

setting to bud.

~~Lint knew better than to escape while nobody was watching. He asked Rouch to send him a fall~~
letter offering a job in New York. Lint's mother gave him some mittens, and a glare.

ANGEL OR SARDINE

Hiding in Columbia · Campbell · Kerouac · Benzedrine · trying too hard · appearances · Gramajo · spinal pheasants · first shot out the box · typography cracked the voices of silence · Roswell

Upon arriving in New York, Lint threw his mittens immediately into the trash and went to the halls of Columbia University. It seems that Lint passed a required exam for Rouch and in return stayed anonymously in Rouch's Warren Hall dorm room for several months while Rouch continued to live with his parents. Lint was a happy phantom—he never went to lectures but sucked the library dry and hung out with fellow pulp writer Marshall Hurk, author of 'Frontier Bugs and Coffin Lumber' for *Weird*. Lint had set his sights on New York because it was the home of such magazines as *Startling*, *Astounding*, *Baffling*, *Useless* and *Terrible*. He swanned into the office of *Astounding* editor John V. Campbell with a story about a conjuror in a hurry and Campbell laughed in his face, walking even forward so that Lint had to back away until he was stepping backward onto the sidewalk again. Campbell then stopped laughing and told him to come back when he had something better. Lint returned to the gutter and searched desperately for his mittens, sobbing like an infant. He considered sending the story in again under his Asimov name—Campbell was taking the most appalling trash from the real Asimov at the time—but finally sold it to *Terrible* and was on his way.¹

Lint was being influenced by his mixing with the nascent Beat scene. Toward the end of 1944 he met Jack Kerouac, who had rented a room at Warren and was devouring books at a similar rate to Lint. On several later occasions he would visit Kerouac's 115th Street apartment, where fellow paleo-cyberpunk William Burroughs was also staying. Seeing the number of Benzedrine inhalers the group were getting through, Lint asked an eminent flu specialist to call at the apartment. When the doctor showed up, the door opened onto a scene combining shock-haired mania with virtuoso lethargy. Lint wrote about the incident in his poem 'Middle-distance Hate Decision':

*smoke hotel
coin eyes
pocket name
and hung answer long gone*

'Perfect grammar eschews screaming,' he wrote in a letter to Ernest Hemingway, who was in France observing the 22nd Infantry Regiment's push toward Germany. Hemingway didn't know Lint and knew immediately he didn't want to. Lint continued: 'In fact its existence depends on denying that people can make legitimately communicative noise without words.'

In February 1945 Lint visited Allen Ginsberg's Hamilton Hall dorm room in the middle of the night and showed him a papier-mache replica of a New York ambulance with the words MILK ME stencilled upon it. Saying nothing, Lint quickly ran away with the object, leaving Ginsberg—at the time wrestling with the issue of his homosexuality—disturbed by the possible meaning of the incident.

Lint wrote to his mother about 'Times Square, a sort of crossroad processing upward of a million idiots a day.' But he soon caught Kerouac and Ginsberg's notion of the Square as a big room hanging in space, nothing but smog between it and the universe. Lint told them his vision of the Flatiron Building as 'one giant inconvenience'. On one occasion Lint fired forty pounds of chilli from a turn-of-the-century baseball gun mounted on the roof of a 23rd Street apartment block, and eagerly told

baffled Kerouac about it. The young pulpeteer was clearly fumbling his way in the city, but to his credit this seems to be the last recorded instance of Lint trying to impress anyone. From here on Lint became more real, and a self-amusing trickster. When a shrunken head was hurled into the Angler Bar, it was not confirmed that Lint was responsible.

At 17, Lint was shaping up to be a striking figure. 'Though he was a big guy,' says Hurk, 'Lint's face was aquiline and sensitive-looking, with a duckish mouth. I think he looked like a conga eel with a couple of legs.'

'He looked like a duck,' said Rouch. 'And seemed to wear whatever he landed in when he stepped out of bed.'

When challenged about his appearance, Lint said 'Appearance runs like clockwork. I always have one.' Lint had apparently honed the ability to stand framed in the doorway 'like a medieval paintsailer with a halo like a watermelon'. Lint had a temperament which was at best parallel to the rest of humanity.

Lint consulted Osman Spare and struggled with the realities of what could be achieved with the manipulation of symbols. Watching workers in passing night trains, he wondered: Were their flashing silverine flanks those of angels or sardines? Which were crammed upon a pinhead? He tried to accept that we are here to escort the blue photograph of the sky. 'All the time eternity plays its angle.' He liked Hurk's quip that 'Every time I look up from my disastrous life I see rubbernecking deities.'

These and other issues were thrashed out in the West End Bar, where one of the regulars was Hector Gramajo, a terrible painter more famous for his statement that 'Writing is a hostile political act, a way of keeping ideas in a book and out of the way.' Cameo Herzog had described him as 'a brush with stupidity' but Lint was startled into defending Gramajo when the artist remarked that 'Not all colors are in the dictionary.' Observing a Gramajo painting which portrayed bats, a man under a glass, and a few dried dates, Lint said the painting was 'better than it looks'.

'You're not lulling anyone, Lint,' said Marshall Hurk. Lint admired Hurk, who once tried to wriggle out of a deadline by claiming to have submitted the manuscript 'in the non-visible spectrum'.

Gramajo would later create a pizza carved from redwood.

Lint first met Cameo Herzog in the West End. He complimented Herzog on his story about a giant grasshopper wearing a hat, and Herzog threw a punch. Lint, not yet acquainted with the deceits of the world, watched the onrushing fist with interest. As he later put it, 'The sky cohered, birds interlocking.' Lint enjoyed the experience, and had nothing to envy in Herzog's work, which read like something pecked out by a dying hen. As Tennessee Williams once said, 'Why should I read Herzog? It's easier to leave him helpless.' Lint's only written account of the incident seems to have been in a letter to his mother: 'Last week I was jeered by a lemon. I consider that an achievement.' To Kerouac he said: 'I have a private infinity in my pants to take care of.' This 'trouserverse' was to feature again in 'The Saint of Ozone Park', a Lint story appearing in a 1961 issue of *Floating Bear*.

After the fight Lint had a nightmare about 'spinal pheasants', strange bone-helix birds that seemed abjectly real amid a thousand cold complications. In daylight death meshed with life in corners and on the ceiling an insect body's crouch was like a sigilized frown. Lint called Campbell and said he had a story that was 'plump as a gorilla's finger' for which he'd accept any offer. Lint was then left with the task of writing the thing, pulling a dress on and going around there. The tale that finally got Lint into *Astounding* was 'Ben Carnosaur's Harmless', in which a sauroid businessman's bloody appetites are strenuously ignored by his workmates—a yarn which the cover-lines trumpeted with the words 'Beautiful woman by day—spindly, boring ant by night!' Herzog's only response to the story was to glare accusingly and wrathfully at Lint when they crossed paths on Third Street, though Lint circled back and met him again, praising his philosophy of being 'suspended from a speck' in the hope of receiving another inspiring wound from the desiccated moron.

Lint had been giving Alan Rouch the skinny on pulp writing and Rouch tried his hand, sending *Startling* a story called 'The Tripe Chandelier'. Re-titled 'Dragon of the Starry Deeps' and re-written to include a dragon and exclude any mention of 'tripe chandeliers', it appeared two months later, to Rouch and Lint's happy surprise. Rouch was thus set upon the slippery slope to point-blank sobbing and raw yells of bearded despair. 'Doubts on either side propel me forward,' said Rouch, and Burroughs observed that he 'merely looks decisive, an aimless word dropped in ice'.

Never Never Publications, which published *Awkward and Inconvenient Stories* (later simplified to *Awkward*), had recently begun putting out entire novels. Lint had sold a story ('Galactic Exasperation') to the magazine and thought the book venture might be ideal for a longer work he was getting together. The book *One Less Person Lying* begins with a Professor Forneus building an energy device to gauge how long it would take for the world to fall apart if everyone was honest. Hours, minutes, seconds? Forneus starts with a two-second burst and millions of people die of massive heart failure. The experience of being honest merely with themselves is like the ground abysing suddenly beneath them. Only one man, Billy Stem, manages to cling to both honesty and life beyond the burst. He faces his own abyss—that if he ceases to be honest he will join the false morass of the masses. He winds up going to the moon to escape humanity, but another astronaut shows up. This was all to the good for Lint, as the pulps thrived on stories of limited spacemen slugging it out on a barren planet.

'Words are hatless, a geyser,' he told editor Dean Rodence, who pretended not to hear him. Rodence agreed to putting out *One Less* as a Never Never book, due for fall 1946, as part of a three book deal. Lint thought his luck had changed—first shot out of the box, his book had been taken on.

As publication approached, Rodence requested changes. He deleted the Huskanoy, a weird brand of photograph with a whiskery root behind it. He struck out 'runaway decipherment' and the description of modern culture as 'the triumph of complicity'. Some readers have compared Lint's books to one of those hazardous gourmet fish with only one non-fatal component. Rodence seemed intent on removing all but the most bland ingredients from *One Less*. He didn't like the sentence 'When he spoke, energy would fry his chin' in regard to Professor Forneus. All mention of the Cabaret of Apology were removed, as was Billy Stem's exposing of his 'Whitman compass' in the town square. 'Is a man's abdomen's arousal still controversial?' Lint asked wearily. But he made the mistake of conceding to Rodence in changing the title to *One Less Bastard Lying*. 'Bastards are always in fashion,' Rodence claimed.

When the book finally appeared, Rodence had left off the word *Lying* from the title and the ending had been mysteriously rewritten to feature a maniacal killing frenzy, with Billy Stem hurling a boulder onto his fellow man. Lint burst into Rodence's office with his arms already raised in a strangling pattern, connecting with Rodence's throat and twisting it like an industrial sinkpipe. Marshall Hurk was no more impressed than Lint. 'The first question I asked Lint about that book was how fast he was driving when he hit it.' Campbell did not even dimly suspect that it was any good. Herzog wrote: 'Instinct should look where it's going.' And veteran pulpist E.E. Smith said of Lint: 'Yes, I read one of his books: *One Less Bastard*, if the title on the cover were to be believed. When I finished the volume, I wept with relief.'

When Lint read about the Roswell incident in 1947 he was taken back to the cancelled Martian Invasion of 1938—the present incursion, too, was quickly written off. Maybe the Martians really have only half an arse, he reflected.

“MONSTROUS POET ALARMS SHOPPERS”

The joker · covers and headlines · escape artist · ‘The Day Maggots Sing’ · smashing the world · this bad reputation · ‘Rosebud Investment’

‘Distract one ear, scare the other, steal everything,’ said Edward Bernays of the strategies of government. Lint was adept at the first two stages of this game plan but neglected the third, and it is left to us to conclude what his goal was in screwing a snail into a light socket. Though Lint claimed that ‘nothing unites vampires like a sleeping vicar’, it won him few friends and had him pencilled as an enemy for at least eight of his acquaintances.

Lint would allude to this time in his story ‘Ghostly Hens Forever, Forever’, published as ‘The Man With the Stupid Arm’ in issue 87 of *Terrible Stories*. In those days the tales in such magazines were often commissioned to conform to cover artwork already created, and in this case editor Hugh ‘Banzer’ Dewhurst wanted Lint to write around a splash depicting a gardener being savaged by a sort of space-lobster. In ‘Ghostly Hens’, which was already written, Lint had talked about his days in late forties New York through a metaphor. A hale fellow sits contentedly on a rural porch; he reaches for his pipe and finds that a sort of ectoplasmic hen is bulging from his arm. He laughs, then screams, then becomes complacent, and then loves the creature—and then cycles through all these emotions repeatedly as time passes around him. ‘He looked at a kind of dark finality through windblown stirring nausea and proportion surrounding his sidewalk. He was as unconcerned and killable as a flower, from whose death as little can be gained as that of a flower. A lifetime passed in a minute.’ When suddenly his wife pops out of the house with a sandwich, the break from eternity ejects him from the porch and sends him wheeling through the neighbourhood, flinching as though dodging shrapnel. ‘And it wasn’t even fun,’ the tale concludes. For *Terrible Stories*, Lint changed the hen to a space-lobster and wrote in a covering note to Dewhurst: ‘Got yourself into quite a pickle haven’t you?’ Lint’s relationship with Dewhurst finally reached an end with Lint’s 1960 story ‘Feelgood’, in which the hero awakes *Day of the Triffids*-style to find the world empty of people and wanders blissfully free of harassment for the rest of his life. The character’s transition from cautious optimism to boundless joy is superbly handled, though Dewhurst removed several scenes where the protagonist spontaneously climaxes while walking down the deserted streets.

In 1949 Lint managed to convince the hapless Alan Rouch that he could win the Nobel Prize by disguising his head as a giant eyeball. The smartly-dressed Rouch looked striking with the huge orb atop his shoulders and attracted a crowd of gawkers in the New York Public Library, explaining the grand aim of his act when a journalist arrived. This encounter resulted in the headline STARING IDIOT PUNCHES REPORTER and, feeling bad over the stunt, Lint announced to the same reporter that he himself intended to marry a hen. Presented with the paper by a beaming Lint, Rouch pointed out to him that the headline ECCENTRIC AUTHOR MARRIES HEN topped a story about how ‘author Alan Rouch openly admits to his lust for poultry’. Lint was dogged by lazy journalism throughout his life and among his bannered outings are PULP WRITER’S PUMP-ACTION HEAD CLAIM (*San Francisco Chronicle*), SF AUTHOR ‘CHARMED WONDERBOY’ OUTBURST (*Los Angeles Times*) and WRITER IS MADE OF CHIMP MEAT (*Maine Catholic Record*), though each of these seems to have some obscure origin in truth.³

During his erstwhile Beat phase Lint was an enthusiast of close-up magic despite his never really mastering the crucial ‘magical’ phase of a single trick, a shortcoming he tackled by punching the observer’s lights out just before the moment of wonder. Thus any onlooker who chose the fist containing the palmed coin would instantly feel that fist slamming into his nose. When later challenged by the victim, Lint would feign bafflement and claim that the trick had been completely

successfully, without violence and to the victim's awe and delight. In San Francisco in 1955 Lint was cornered by Ginsberg and Kenneth Rexroth into doing a trick before an audience at the Six Gallery and felt it necessary to go berserk, spraying the cards at the volunteer's face and firing a starting pistol into the panicking crowd.

More apposite to his real vocation was Lint's regular appearances in public in a fright wig and sharpened wooden teeth. Taking up a place on some busy thoroughfare, he would throw his arms wide and volley his verse at nobody in particular. MONSTROUS POET ALARMS SHOPPERS, announced a headline in the *Washington Post* of March 18, 1954: 'Customers of Woolworths department store on Monday were frightened by a freakish man with unkempt hair and sharp teeth, who delivered a stream of rhyming gibberish. His theatrics attracted the attention of store police, who claim that Lint "disappeared" before they could detain him.' Lint's favorite recitations included 'I Can See You Eddie', 'Gripe Into This Horn', and a poem about his cogitations on whether to join the army, 'The Day Maggots Sing':

*The day maggots sing
I will join the army
I will join the army
The day maggots sing
When they do, call me
Maybe they swing
I will join the army
The day maggots sing*

Later appearances of the 'monstrous poet' were reported to involve the violent death of several onlookers, but these are thought to have been the work of an opportunist copycat.

The golden age of Lint's pranks happened to coincide with the rise of the McCarthyist commie scares and as early as 1949 he had infiltrated a crowd picketing the Waldorf in protest against Shostakovich—among those with banners yelling GO BACK TO RUSSIA WITH YOUR COMMIE PROPAGANDA. Lint paced about with a sign that stated I'M GROWING FINS. Lint was twitted the same year when three friends dressed as cops raided his apartment and found him forcing a bust of Lenin down the toilet.

One of Lint's many false-starts to a mainstream media career occurred as a result of the blacklisting of suspected communist sympathisers in showbiz. Up-and-coming CBS exec Douglas Norton came to Lint in 1951 and told him he could make good money filling in for the commie scriptwriter Ord Lissitsky. Lint took him at his word and banged out scripts in which shiny-faced families talked about how things were 'better in the Soviet Union' and Irish cops chided 'From each according to his ability to each according to his need', all delivered in the blandly mirthful style of the cookie-cutter sitcom. Norton burst into the script room and shook Lint by the shoulders, shouting that he'd 'smashed the world' with his craziness, then mistook Lint's blank incomprehension for poker-faced cool. Norton grabbed Lint and tripped over the carpet, pulling him to the floor and laughing despite himself. Lint stood up with dignity, brushed himself down and left the room in silence. He would have nothing more to do with television until the disastrous *Catty and the Major* more than a decade later.

In April 1952 Lint appeared before the House Committee un-American Activities pretending to be Elia Kazan, following it up with a parodic advertisement in the *New York Times*. 'Kazan himself didn't mind,' Lint later claimed, 'as it got him out of having to appear or be blamed for anything that was said.' Among the things Lint said in his stead were 'What's wrong with looking at the cupboard'

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