

For John -  
with envy  
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Winner of this year's Theodore Sturgeon Award

"Jigohu No Mohushirohu"

By John G. McDaid

The winner of the 1996 Theodore Sturgeon award is John G. McDaid's story, "Jigohu No Mohushirohu"---which, as a courtesy to those among us whose command of Japanese may be a little rusty, I will in future refer to by its English translation, "The Symbolic Revelation of the Apocalypse."

I think Ted Sturgeon would have been pleased with this story. One of the qualities I most admired---and envied---in Ted's work was his ability to get inside the minds of his characters, however alien and bizarre they might. But I don't think even Theodore Sturgeon ever tried to see the world through the viewpoint of anyone like McDaid's narrating character, whose name is Hitoshi and who happens to be an elevator.

The story takes place early in the next century. Let me give you a taste of how it begins:

"I haven't always been an elevator.

"I know that a long time ago, a time before I can consciously recall, I was a vein of ore, a swirl of polymers, words scrolling past on screens full of ucomputed code. I know this

because I believe in the past. Sometimes, I can almost remember feeling the yearning of that inert matter. The hunger that bubbles up through rocks and molecules, the hunger to become. . . .

"For now, I am an elevator.

"I was built by Ranzatsu, Inc., for the New Alexandria Library Complex, a rambling campus some five by seven miles long (so say the tourist sub-routines) set in Northeast Utah just outside the town of Toffler. There are twelve public elevators in the complex, but I have the distinction of being the only one that travels down to the Archives, which are 2,748 feet below ground level, in an abandoned coal mine. These, however, are just details.

"It was the Archives, and two of the people who visited them, that I wanted to tell you about."

I won't tell you about the Archives, or about how much McDaid manages to tell us about the stressed and deadened world outside the Archives---though that is an amazing lot, in so short a story. I will tell you about how he met the first human character in the story, a researcher named Bob. The human Bob and the elevator Hitoshi met cute, as the old movie scriptwriters used to say. In a world where cigarette smoking was next to a capital crime, Bob was a closet smoker; and Hitoshi, recognizing this, stops a thousand feet down, turns his ventilators up to max and invites Bob to light up.

I have sometimes wished that I knew some elevators like

that.

There's something else I wish, and that is that there were more writers capable of producing as original and carefully crafted a story as this one---a feat made all the more impressive because this one happens to be his very first.