Of Creatures and Cultures
A planet with a million-mile river where everyone who has ever lived is reincarnated, the heroic Earthman Kickaha fighting the deadly Lord Red Orc, people who are awake only one day of the week, an astronaut who crashes on a distant world, a machine that enables the living to communicate with the dead.

These worlds, characters, and situations have made Philip José Farmer ’50 a living legend among science fiction fans. An internationally-acclaimed author of 72 novels and 80 short stories, the 80-year-old Farmer is known for his Riverworld and World of Tiers series of books.

Farmer’s first published work was a short story sold to Adventure magazine in 1945. “I started with mainstream writing and veered over to science fiction. I started reading science fiction in 1928, and I loved that field so much and had so many ideas.”

He introduced the concept of sex between a human and an alien in his book, The Lovers, published in 1952. Farmer says, “I was turned down by two publishers, who said the story made them sick. It was accepted by the third and became very popular. That opened the gateway; before, science fiction was highly sanitized. I feel that science fiction deals with the whole universe and sex is part of it. The basic theme of the book was lack of communication.”

Farmer also introduced the concept of an artificial pocket universe, and in the 1950s, he proposed a protein computer made from organic material. “Now scientists are working on that,” he says. Noting that none of the science fiction authors envisioned the profound impact of television on our society, Farmer adds, “We are not prophets. Our main function is to speculate about all possible futures.”

Farmer comments, “The advances in science are never going to catch up with the imagination of human beings. Imagination can always leap way ahead of reality.”

He adds, “Writing science fiction is like being in an intellectual ocean where you’re a dolphin having fun with all these ideas.”

His work goes beyond science fiction, however. Farmer’s latest novel, Nothing Burns in Hell (see excerpts on page 13), is set in Peoria and Goofy Ridge, a small town south of Peoria. The narrator is a young detective, and his father is a retired Bradley professor. Farmer describes the book as both a mystery and a regional novel.

A three-time winner of the prestigious Hugo award for science fiction writing and a Playboy Award for best story of the year by a new writer, Farmer recently received the coveted “Tarzan and the Golden Lion” award from Burroughs Bibliophiles. He received permission from the grandson of Tarzan author Edgar Rice Burroughs to write an original Tarzan book, The Dark Heart of Time: A Tarzan Novel. The Burroughs family has given such
permission to only two others: one who wrote a novelization of a movie script and another who completed a book Burroughs had started.

Farmer’s book fits between two of Burroughs’ books. “In Tarzan the Untamed, Tarzan finds a skeleton clad in armor. There’s a copper cylinder that contains a map and a manuscript written in Portuguese or Spanish. Tarzan can’t read it and takes the container along with him. That was never mentioned again. I took that concept and embroidered it.”

He comments, “I’ve been a Tarzan fan since I was about nine or 10 years old. There’s an appeal, particularly to young boys, to the idea of being raised in a jungle free of responsibility with no schools and no civilized restraints.”

Farmer has known that he wanted to write since the sixth grade. He originally intended to pursue a degree in journalism, but a lack of finances during the Depression years, his marriage to Bette Andre Farmer ’44, a stint in the service, and ultimately the decision that he wasn’t aggressive enough to be a reporter led him down another path. He accepted a position at Keystone Steel and Wire Company, working 48 hours per week on the night shift and

“Writing science fiction is like being in an intellectual ocean where you’re a dolphin having fun with all these ideas.”
Humor, murder, and mystery, all based in the Peoria area, await readers of Nothing Burns in Hell, the latest release by Philip José Farmer ’50, an internationally-known science fiction writer who skipped over to the mystery genre for this book. Following are two excerpts from Nothing Burns in Hell.

Though it was still covered with shore dirt, it was undoubtedly hard and round.
By then, I’d turned and was up on my feet.
Deak had the knife, and he was grinning.
He said, “Now I’m gonna cut you up into little pieces, asshole.”
He was about twelve feet from me. He’d not tried to close with me. He was sure I would be an easy prey for him, and he was in no hurry. Besides, like me, he was breathing very hard. He’d get his wind back, then get close enough to me to carve me up with great deliberation and great pleasure.
I wound up as I’d done many times while pitching for my high school and college teams.
My dead and painful arm handicapped me. And my grip on the ball was not the best. I had no time to try to clean it off. Nevertheless, the object left with much velocity and a true aim.
Deak’s eyes opened wide. His mouth spread wide open.
He tried to duck, but he failed.
The pool ball caught him in the center of his forehead. He dropped, and did not thereafter move.
That ball had been waiting for me since 1866, ever since the explosion of the Minnehaha had hurled that particular ball onto the shore. It had been buried many times. The rains had eroded it somewhat and partly washed off the earth many times to expose it to the air and rain. But the ivory ball had been buried again and again.
It had been waiting to save my life for close to one hundred and thirty years.

...A Pekin Times reporter happened to be in the hospital when she died, and he talked to the attending physician. The doctor told the reporter her last words, and he was so struck by them that he recorded them."

Oh, no! I thought. Had Milly Jane made a dying confession and named me and described what I’d done? I was in a hell of a mess if she had.
“OK,” I said. “What were her words?”
“‘I saw the light in the swamp. She smiled. And all the bullfrogs sang green hosannas.’”
“I don’t know what they mean, yet they seem to make some sort of sense."
I saw more sense in them than Mimi could. Once upon a time, hard though it was to believe, the tremendously obese and morally degenerate Milly Jane had been a little girl. She may even have been pretty, slender, happy, and innocent. Maybe, just maybe, when she was a little girl, she’d been wandering in the swamps along the river. And, just for a moment, she’d had a mystic experience, a vision. Our Lady of the Swamp had appeared in glorious light and smiled at Milly Jane. And the frogs had indeed sung like a choir of angels.
These images made my skin cold and made the blood rush to my head.
And maybe I was too imaginative.
But I liked to think that my scenario had actually happened.
It was sad, though. The vision, the light, the smile, the divine singing of frogs had not led the child Milly Jane to a high plane of spirituality. Others seized with such images and sounds became saints. Milly Jane...what you might have been...what you did become...I mourn for you.

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