

### 1: Something Wild is Loose by Robert Silverberg - FictionDB

*Something Wild is Loose [Robert Silverberg] on www.enganchecubano.com \*FREE\* shipping on qualifying offers. The world that these stories sprang from was the troubled, bewildering, dangerous, and very exciting world of those weird years when the barriers were down and the future was rushing into the present with the force of a river unleashed.*

Science fiction is supposed to be about the future, but in fact it has always been deeply rooted in the present, and its nature changes as our perception of the present-day world changes. It dealt with such matters as what it was like to be the hostess at a cocktail party for aliens, and how to program your household robot to serve low-calorie meals. During that crazy time—which began, I think, with the bullet that took John F. That should not be very surprising. When the world turns incomprehensible, it makes sense to look for answers from some other world. In former times it was sufficient to look no farther than the Church: God was there, emanating love and security, offering the hope of passing onward from this vale of tears to the true life beyond. One of the difficulties of modern life is that most of us have lost the option of using religious faith as a consolation. It may be that science fiction has evolved into a sort of substitute: But, as I have already observed, the science fiction of the moment is always rooted in the moment. New writers, armed with dazzling new techniques, took up the materials of s-f and did strange new things with it. Older writers, formerly content to produce the safe and simple stuff of previous decades, were reborn with sudden experimental zeal. It was a wild and adventurous time, when we were all improvising our way of life from day to day or even from hour to hour, and the science fiction of that period certainly shows it. The stories in this volume were written in those troubled times when there was no longer any safe zone in the world—the years from to People wore strange clothes and strange hair, doped themselves with strange drugs, read and wrote strange things. I have pegged the onset of that time of troubles to the moment of the Kennedy assassination not because Kennedy himself was a peerless leader—he had his personal flaws, as we now know all too well, and at the time of his death he was finding it almost impossible to win support in Washington for his political agenda—but because he was a perfect symbol of energy and youth and the promise of the future. When he was stuck down, it seemed to me and a great many others that this shining promise had been forfeited and that the commonwealth itself had been ripped apart. And so it was. I think we would probably have had the troubles that followed even if Kennedy had lived, just as we would have had World War One eventually even if the Archduke Franz Ferdinand had not been assassinated at Sarajevo; but in each case the murder proved to be an historical catalyst. Two consecutive presidents were overthrown and driven from office, the result of popular outcry against their philosophies and methods. On all levels of society, desperate new styles of behavior reflected the desperation within. We slid into a widespread and catastrophic societal breakdown and it was years before the necessary repairs were made. Things are a little quieter now, though no less perilous. Instead of the Soviet Union to worry about, we have radical Islam. Inflation seems to have subsided, but global temperatures are rising and the long-term environmental prognosis looks strikingly ungood. The fear of a worldwide population explosion that obsessed us back then has been replaced by something more complex, the fear of a Third World population explosion while First World countries shrink from generation to generation. The plague of AIDS has entered the world. Interesting computer viruses propagate among us daily, sowing chaos. Et cetera, et cetera. Curiously, we no longer turn to science fiction for answers to these problems. The disturbing, fragmented s-f of the Sixties is all but forgotten, supplanted by the bland, comforting, predictable fantasy novels of recent times, in which benevolent wizards hold out the hope that the Staff of Power will ultimately return to the hands of the High King and all will be made right in the world. The stories in this book are, by and large, not like that. The world that they sprang from was the troubled, bewildering, dangerous, and very exciting world of those weird years when the barriers were down and the future was rushing into the present with the force of a river unleashed. But of course I think these stories speak to our times, too, and that most of them will remain valid as we go staggering onward through the brave new world of the twenty-first century. I am not one of those who believes that all is lost and the end is nigh. Like William Faulkner, I do think we will somehow endure and prevail against increasingly stiff odds. A great many strange and dizzying things happen

to the characters in these sixteen stories, and in the fourteen stories of the volume that will follow. The reader who makes the journey from beginning to end of all thirty stories will be taken on many a curious trip, that I promise—as was their author during the years when they were being written. My production of short stories diminished drastically as I concentrated on these demanding books. But I could be cajoled to do one occasionally. My friend Ben Bova had joined the swiftly growing roster of original-anthology editors with a book that was to be called *The Many Worlds of Science Fiction*, and he insisted that my presence on the contents page was obligatory. Well, so be it: It had absolutely no plans for taking a holiday on a wet, grimy planet like Earth. He simply went down the row, slapping a floater node on each crate, and sending it gliding up the gravity well toward the open hatch. The fifth crate to go inside was the one on which the *Vsiir* had decided to take its nap. The *Vsiir* did not happen to breathe those gases, but, because it was in its time of metamorphosis, it was able to adapt itself quickly and nicely to the sour, prickly vapors seeping into its metabolic cells. The next step was to fashion a set of full-spectrum scanners and learn something about its surroundings. It would find itself cut off painfully from the rhythm of its own civilization. It would miss the Festival of Changing. It would miss the Holy Eclipse. It would suffer in a thousand ways. There were six human beings aboard the ship. Extending its perceptors, the *Vsiir* tried to reach their minds. Though humans had been coming to its planet for many years, it had never bothered making contact with them before; but it had never been in this much trouble before, either. It sent a foggy tendril of thought roving the corridors, looking for traces of human intelligence. A glow of electrical activity within a sphere of bone: But surrounded by a wall, apparently; the *Vsiir* rammed up against it and was thrust back. That was startling and disturbing. What kind of beings were these, whose minds were closed to ordinary contact? The *Vsiir* went on, hunting through the ship. The *Vsiir* felt panic rising. Its mantle fluttered; its energy radiations dropped far down into the visible spectrum, then shot nervously toward much shorter waves. It did not get control of its body until it had passed from spherical to cubical to chaotic, and had become a gridwork of fibrous threads held together only by a pulsing strand of ego. Fiercely, it forced itself back to the spherical form and resumed its search of the ship, dismally realizing that by this time its native world was half a stellar unit away. It was without hope now, but it continued to probe the minds of the crew, if only for the sake of thoroughness. Even if it made contact, though, how could it communicate the nature of its plight, and even if it communicated, why would the humans be disposed to help it? Yet it went on through the ship. No wall at all. The *Vsiir* rushed into close contact, overcome with joy and surprise, pouring out its predicament. Unfortunate nonhuman organism accidentally transported into this vessel during loading of cargo. Metabolically and psychologically unsuited for prolonged life on Earth. Begs pardon for inconvenience; wishes prompt return to home planet left recently, regrets disturbance in shipping schedule, but hopes that this large favor will not prove impossible to grant. Do you comprehend my sending? Unfortunate nonhuman organism accidentally transported— Lieutenant Falkirk had drawn the first sleep shift after float-off. It was only fair; Falkirk had knocked himself out processing the cargo during the loading stage, slapping the floater nodes on every crate and feeding the transit manifests to the computer. Now that the ship was spaceborne, he could grab some rest while the other crew men were handling the float-off chores. So he settled down for six hours in the cradle as soon as they were on their way. He drifted into drowsiness. For half an hour he enjoyed sweet slumber, his mind disengaged, his body loose. Until a dark dream bubbled through his skull. Deep purple sunlight, hot and somber. Something slippery tickling the edges of his brain. He lies on a broad white slab in a scorched desert. Getting harder to breathe. The gravity—a terrible pull, bending and breaking him, ripping his bones apart. Hooded figures moving around him, pointing, laughing, exchanging blurred comments in an unknown language. His skin melting and taking on a new texture: Points of fire all over him. A thin scarlet hand, withered fingers like crab claws, hovering in front of his face. His blood running among the quills, thick and sluggish. He shivers, struggling to sit up—lifts a hand, leaving pieces of quivering flesh stuck to the slab—sits up.

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### 7: Something Wild is Loose by Robert Silverberg

Comments: A (mostly) non-corporeal life-form falls asleep on a crate on its home world and wakes up in the cargo hold of a spaceship bound for Earth.

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