ETUDE NO. 1

Derelict hulks of rotting machinery lie in the steaming mud like forgotten mastadons that trumpet, only to sink into the wastes of the swamps. Rust crusts itself into a smothering parasite of scale. Acids reek, fuming into the atmosphere to burn. Here, here in the swamps emerge men, whose heads are helmeted, and whose mouths are blackened by the seals of respirators. Here, here in the acid-ridden bowels of the swamp emerge men, whose feet are cased in high-topped boots. Here, here in the swamps emerge men.

Voices grumble against the noise. Unthinking vulgarity clammers through the smoke unnoticed like the hunter lurking unseen by the hunted. Bells ring. Buzzers sound. Gears mesh for timeless eons washed in blue-brown oil. Pipes sigh as beams give way under the sparks of the cutter's torch. Things, and thoughts, and words, and people are there, and then are gone — swallowed in the oil — slick ooze of the swamp, and lost forever.

Fluids swirl in the valves, and with them comes hate. The "white-hat" orders. The "blue-hat" obeys. The "orange-hat" fixes "white-hat" words given to cause mistakes. And to the junk-pile go the pieces.

And so it is in the swamp: Life emerges, Life continues, Life finds its end.

Marlin Wasson