

village view

by Andrea Leonard

You've watched, on a crisp November evening, the moon come up, full and orange and romantic. Like a pumpkin at Hallowe'en, like the golden orb of evening, like the eye of autumn ogling earth, it brightens the path for children scurrying home in the early dark, it shines for adolescents practicing at growing up, it glows for older sentimentalists still stirred by a full moon climbing the eastern sky.

Imagine, if you can, the sky lit by artificial moons called "lunettas" multiplying by fifty times the brightness one full moon produces on a winter's night.

What mad science-fiction am I bringing you now?

Ah, would that's all it were.

Not only are lunettas in the works; at this very moment "solettas" too are planned to brighten your days.

Scientists of the National Aeronautics and Space

Administration and (through government contracts, no doubt) Rockwell International Corporation have conceived artificial moons to light up the night and artificial suns to enhance the noonday sun.

We'll have lights in our skies all through the night; brighter lights in our skies shining all through the days. Darkness is to be banished. The night is obsolete.

Anyone silly enough to seek the stillness of a starry night must get himself lowered to the bottom of a deep well. From there he can look up and see the brilliance of the stars at high noon.

High noon is what we're promised twenty-four hours a day if all that's dreamed of comes to pass. What's the purpose?

Artificial moons and suns could have great and good results, we're told, on the production of world food supplies.

Grasses and grains will grow faster and bigger and better. Animals will graze longer and gain more quickly and come to market sooner. Gardens will flourish earlier, seasons will be longer.

Food will be more plentiful.

If you read Gilbert Newton's column in this paper a few weeks ago, you're aware the burgeoning population of the

world is increasing demands for food supplies.

Before 1990, if populations continue to increase at present rates, we'll need food enough for an additional billion human beings.

If extra moons and suns will do it, it could - for a short while, a few extra years - delay the day the human race will turn to cannibalism to save itself from Gil's prediction of breeding itself to extinction.

Those who anticipate with pleasure the coming turn-of-the-century, may be shockingly disappointed. I, like Gil, feel apprehensive. If you're among those still living then (and I'm certain I won't be among those who are) it probably won't be an easy world in which to live.

Interesting, yes; easy, no.

Unless, in the coming fifteen years, epidemics of disease - yes, diseases like swine flu - wipe out millions, it's safe to predict diseases like plague will help do the job instead.

It's also safe to say starvation will eliminate millions more; already an estimated million people starve each year in such over-populated areas of the globe as India and Bangladesh.

Furthermore, it's safe to say we'll wipe out millions more people with wars. Big wars. Nuclear wars.

Adequate food production, once we get population under control in traditional ways (wars, disease and starvation are traditional ways of controlling population) won't be any great challenge - but there could be a challenge that might not be easily met.

Should wars become nuclear wars mankind could so seriously damage the productive capacity of the earth's surface that food cannot be grown.

If grasses won't grow on land wasted by nuclear fall-out - and grasses won't - then animals dependent on grazing can't be raised. What sources of protein may be available to surviving homo sapiens is an unknown.

Fresh and salt water fishes will be radioactive. Radioactive rain will contaminate exposed fresh water supplies and make it unsafe for drinking.

If we can survive somehow while enough rain falls to cleanse the atmosphere of radiation, while the sun evaporates enough water to produce rain that's not radioactive, some life may endure long enough to reproduce itself before radiation-induced cancers destroy it.

Some people may survive long enough. There's no guarantee. The same is true of every other form of life on earth.

If no life survives, it will be a direct result of the development of nuclear power that will have overwhelmed all living things and wiped life from the earth as completely as we wiped the prairie chicken into oblivion.

The difference - the only difference - will be: we did it to us. The prairie chickens didn't do it to themselves. They had better sense.

Twenty-five years ago I spent three years helping to write a Plan for Survival in the Event of Nuclear Attack on the United States of America.

The plan consisted of twenty-five or thirty chapters dealing with the effects of nuclear warfare on the population of a large city, its surrounding suburbia and rural areas beyond.

The assumption was the central city would be totally destroyed, three million people in a single city would die instantly, and there would be an edge. On the edge would be people who could still function at some level for a short time although they would soon die of radiation sickness.

While they lived it would be their responsibility to care for themselves and other survivors grievously sickened and burned, and to help those further from Ground Zero make through the first few weeks after the attack.

There is no reason to spare you these details of this grisly forecast. You've a right to know them since you're the ones who may well be among those on the edge.

You should be prepared to help dispose of huge quantities of lifeless bodies of people and other animals. If these are not soon buried, any survivors will die of diseases arising from decaying flesh.

This is not a dirty story, a bad joke, a sorry tale; this is the way it will be if nuclear war ever occurs.

The arrival of the next billion people will so crowd the earth before the year 2,000 that the promises of lunetta and soletta may come too late.

There's to be a race down to the line, a race to determine whether the earth can be persuaded to produce enough food - through solettas and lunettas - to feed the billion mouths due to arrive during the next fifteen years, or whether mankind will use the weapons of last resort to "win" a war with fate.

It won't be an easy world, but it will be a fascinating one for those experiencing the turn of the century.