The relationship between human beings and other animals is complex and sometimes troubling, as science fiction writers have often tried to show. But where Cordwainer Smith and Clifford D. Simak explored these unclear boundaries for cats and dogs, respectively, Alexander Jablokov does it for dolphins in his "A Deeper Sea." Smith, in "The Game of Rat and Dragon", and Simak, in "Desertion", showed a kinship between human and pet, an intimacy and even a chance for close personal ties; but Jablokov shows us the irrefutable alienness of dolphins.

In Smith's story, cats are humans' allies, "partners" in an ongoing war with interstellar aliens. The humans are able to recognize the enemy, but only the cats have the speed and reflexes to attack the rats/dragons before the aliens destroy them. Humans and cats are necessary for one another's survival, and cannot imagine life without each other. The protagonist, Underhill, ultimately wonders how he could ever have an intimate relationship with anyone other than his heroic cat Lady May: "Where would he ever find a human woman to compare with her?" (Smith 323)
In Simak's story, the protagonist, Fowler, and his dog, Towser, undergo a risky transformation to make them similar to Jovian aliens with which humanity is trying to communicate. When they have completed the operation, they discover that their minds are expanded, that they can do things they never thought possible. They communicate with each other perfectly, and realize how much they have in common. When faced with the prospect of returning to their ship, they refuse:

"I can't go back," said Towser
"Nor I," said Fowler.
"They would turn me back into a dog," said Towser.
"And me," said Fowler, "back into a man."

(Simak 188)

Jablokov's story takes an entirely different tack. The protagonist, Colonel Ilya Stasov, learns to communicate with dolphins using a procedure that, it later turns out, tortures them until they are forced to speak. With this same procedure, he turns them into instruments of war, and they are killed off in large numbers. Once the world realizes that Stasov had been torturing the dolphins (something he did not understand at the time), it brands him war criminal and imprisons him. Based on Stasov's work, humans learn to communicate with orcas and whales. Orcas are brilliant mathematicians, whales are barely-intelligent idiots, but the dolphins themselves turn out to be "a contemptible, corrupt, sexually perverse bunch of braggarts,
cowards and fools" (Jablokov 336), who delight in murder and rape.

Wracked with guilt for his torture of the dolphins, Stasov works behind the scenes to negotiate a peace treaty between humans and cetaceans, which gives the dolphins access to considerable wealth. Stasov and the dolphins then aid the space scientist Erika Morgenstern in her project to travel to Jupiter, sending the dolphin's Messiah, Weissmuller, and his acolyte, the sperm whale Clarence, as space explorers too. In the end, Stasov commits suicide by diving into Jupiter's atmosphere, having ensured with Weissmuller and Morgenstern that dolphins will precede humanity into outer space.

Key to the entire story is the dolphin's religious concept of completeness, that one dies when one has completed all one's tasks, and not before. Stasov cannot die until he has done a great, irrevocable thing for the race of dolphins, to expiate the terrible wrong he did them.

In each of these three stories, the relationship between human and animal is explored through a single human, and (mostly) a single animal. In each case it is the main character's own thoughts and feelings that show us how "human" animals can be. Underhill, like all his fellow soldiers, is terrified of the enemy, and is grateful and adoring of Lady May for her own bravery and loyalty. The first thing he wants to
know when he recovers from his battle wounds: "'I just want to know about Lady May.'" (Smith 322) Fowler, frustrated and worried about his failure to achieve communication with the Jovians, and driven to the desperate step of trying the experimental procedure on himself after it has failed in his men, orders that Towser undergo the transformation procedure with him because "'Towser would be unhappy if I left him behind.'" (Simak 184) That is, Underhill and Fowler are characterized by their love of their pets/partners and their unwillingness to cause them unnecessary pain or sorrow, even as they expose them to the same risks the protagonists face themselves. We live together or we die together.

But Stasov is ashamed by his own transgression against cetaceans, frightened of their intelligence, suspicious of their ultimate motives, and certain that their agenda is not that of humans. Throughout the story he does not have a pleasant, friendly or even non-adversarial conversation with a dolphin, and the interactions he does have with them makes them appear to be pretty unattractive characters.

These differing attitudes towards "animals in space" is also demonstrated by the authors' use of language. In "The Game of Rat and Dragon," Smith does not tell us overtly that the partners are cats until we are seven pages into the story, except for one unexplained "Meow" uttered by an unnamed woman in
the opening scene. We are left to imagine them as super-intelligent aliens. By the time we realize that these are felines, we already think of them as peers, not pets.

In "Desertion", the dog Towser appears as a presence throughout the decision-making sequence -- an old dog thumping his tail on the floor -- but we think no more about him. Not until Fowler's actual decision to undergo the transformation process does Towser come up. Further, in both Smith's and Simak's stories, the narrative focuses on the internal feelings of the protagonist, and does not until later get into any interaction with the animals.

By contrast, the very first sentence of Jablokov's story concerns the animals themselves: "The whale screamed in fear, the complex harmonics of terror rumbling in the warm water around Ilya Stasov." (Jablokov 311) Immediately we know that we are dealing with cetaceans, and that there is something very wrong. Fear and terror of the whale are at the forefront of our thinking.

Jablokov's attitude towards the possible intelligence of animals is less sentimental, more pessimistic, and ultimately both more imaginative and more realistic than either Smith's or Simak's. Where Smith and Simak imagine that we will eventually find that our pets are really "like us," Jablokov envisions dolphins, always thought to be the most intelligent of non-
hominid species, to be repugnant, foreign, sly and obnoxious. And why should it not be so? If humans of mildly different cultures find one another uncivilized and brutal, why should we imagine that the members of another family of the animal kingdom would be simpatico with us?

It might be argued that the differing slant of "A Deeper Sea" stems from the fact that its protagonist interferes with the lives of creatures rather than coexisting or teaming up with them. But Fowler clearly interferes with Towser, and the partnership between humans and cats in Smith's story is hardly natural. Further, Stasov's relationship with cetaceans ultimately is symbiotic -- they enable his redemption and he enables their exploration of space.

Technology may ultimately bring us to the day differently imagined by Smith, Simak and Jablokov, when our minds and those of animals can see one another for what we are. I fear, with Jablokov, that we will not be pleased by the sight.
Works Cited

