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Edited by

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Brian W. Aldiss

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INTRODUCTION

HARRY HARRISON

Though 1971 has been a good year for the science fiction reader, with more books, better books, more anthologies of original SF stories, it has also been a year marred by the death of the man who gave us modern science fiction. I should perhaps write first about the sunshine of the year before turning to the untimely death of John W. Campbell, but this singular and unwelcome event is still with me, now, many months after John's death.

For thirty-three years he edited *ASF*, the *Astound-*

ing Stories whose title metamorphosed to *Astounding Science Fiction* and finally to today's *Analog Science Fiction-Science Fact.* In the course of those years he took a crude form of pulp fiction and forced it and its practitioners to grow up, to face the realities of science and its impact upon the world, and in doing so invested science fiction as we know it today. Young writers are changing the field again—you'll find some of their stories here in this anthology—but they are changing it by adding to it. Neither they nor anyone else will ever be able to take anything away from the accomplishments of this man who was a giant among us.

It is not an exaggeration to say that his death—as did his life—had worldwide impact. An obituary issue of the fanzine *Locus* containing tributes from the many writers who knew him was published in New York. *John W. Campbell: An Australian Tribute* was published in Australia, where two Melbourne groups also organized a John W. Campbell Symposium that was held in the Classics Theatre at Melbourne University. In England the Science Fiction Foundation has arranged the publication of a collection of the best stories of John Campbell, who was a respected author as well as editor. In the United States a memorial volume consisting of new stories and articles by the writers who worked with him through the years is being prepared. Science fiction will continue, but an era is over.

The science fiction world still goes on. Continuing a trend started last year, more original anthologies are coming on the market and, as last year, there are more stories anthologized here from books than from magazines. One magazine, the British *New Worlds,* has even ended its existence as a magazine and has been transformed into a quarterly book. In addition to the series anthologies, such as Damon Knight's *Orbit* and Robert Silverberg's newly begun *New Dimensions,* there were more of what might be called one-shot original anthologies this year, most of them organized around a central theme. *Eco-Fiction* is one such, as is *Clarion,* selections from the writings of the students

who attended the first-ever course in science fiction writing. You will find stories here from each of these books as well as from *The New Yorker, National Lampoon* and—as exotic a source as we have ever used—two selections from the British political weekly, *New Statesman.*

Like the Hong Kong flu, science fiction seems to be everywhere these days. Many more SF college courses are being taught. as well as high school courses. *At the Edge of History,* a political-philosophical work by William Irwin Thompson, has been called "history as science fiction," and it is just that. Articles about SF have appeared in journals as disparate as *The Trend in Engineering,* official publication of the University of Washington, and the *Wall Street Journal,* which, I know you will be glad to hear, approves of this form of literature. SF might even be called a secret weapon; at least it is being used that way by the underground movement in the Soviet Union. The clandestine press there publishes a magazine titled *Mytsyry* which features the comic strip adventures of Octobriana, a formidably mammalian-endowed superwoman with a red star on her forehead who gallops through SF adventures of an eye-boggling kind. Closer to home is *Pimienta!,* a Spanish language skin magazine that is distributed in Puerto Rico and New York—one assumes that its Cuban circulation is severely limited—that featured, among the photos of unclad Latin beauties, a story entitled "*Orgía en el Espacio*" which is just what the title indicates. It opens with some solid SF action to set the scene: "The intense force of pressure crushed David for fifteen minutes, the time it took the capsule to enter its orbit. . . ." This well-fueled rocket, with a burning time of fifteen minutes, is soon forgotten in the heady pleasures of *Con la boca y los labios, el joven acarició ferozmente los erectos rojizos pezones de la chica. . . .* I feel now that science fiction can indeed be said to have come of age.

There is beginning to be a growing body of criticism in SF. The Modern Language Association holds an annual seminar about SF, as well as publishing the critical journal

Extrapolation, while individual conferences such as the one at Wesleyan University are held. Two books about science fiction have been published this year, and I know of others being written or in press. *The Universe Makers* (Harper & Row) by Donald Wollheim is a personal view of the field by one of the men who grew up in it. *Science Fiction: What It's All About* (Ace) reflects the international character of SF. Originally written and published in Swedish, it was translated into English by its author, Sam J. Lundwall. It is a history of SF, from its remote antecedents to the present day, flavored by the very different viewpoint of a European reader.

Since the job of this anthology is to uncover the best science fiction of the year, we do survey the entire SF scene—exempting only the motion picture, which is a separate field of endeavor from the printed word (though we are aware of the cinema and did print reviews of *2001 : A Space Odyssey* when they were relevant to SF at large). This means that we can anthologize short stories, novelettes, poems when we can find them, and even graphics such as the Gahan Wilson chart this year. Because of space limitations, novels and novellas are out. The very brief item here, *[Untitled]*, will, I sincerely hope, lead the interested reader to the volume from which it was taken, *Cancerqueen* by Tommaso Landolfi (Dial Press). The title story opens the book and is a novella about the good spaceship *Cancerqueen,* a vessel unique in SF, and incredibly well worth reading. Another novel of excellent science fiction, although it was not published as SF, is *The Bodyguard* (Doubleday) by Adrian Mitchell, a novel of character that coldly and almost incidentally takes place in the future fascist state of Europe. It is in my belief the best SF novel of the year but has been ignored by the parochials of SF. Brian Aldiss has much more to say about this in his Afterword, where he presents a viewpoint with which I heartily concur.

Aldiss also talks about feedback for writers from their reading audience. To me one of the pleasures of editing an

annual anthology like this one is the feedback from readers and critics. The reviewer of *The Athens Messenger,* who incidentally likes the series, is concerned that the title contains the previous year's designation. It does—and with a reason: This is a volume of the best short science fiction that could be found during the publishing year stated clearly on the cover. A boon, I sincerely hope, to readers who want to know what they are reading and to librarians who can shelf it with the knowledge that the date on the cover is the date of the contents. We could very easily, as others do, date this anthology with the year it is published, but that is another thing again. Let us say that in these days of exotic and tricky packaging we prefer the straightforward statement and hope that the gentleman from Athens will go along with us.

However the reader with better than ordinary eyesight will notice what appear to be discrepancies on the acknowledgment page, where dates appear other than the calendar year. Usually these are caused by the interesting magazine policy of copyrighting the January—and occasionally the February—issues of magazines in the previous year. There are other reasons; publishing and distribution are not the cut-and-dried operations we all wish they would be. Two stories in this year's collection are from an original anthology published at the very end of 1970. However, copies did not reach California until early in 1971, when I first saw one in a bookstore. In fact, I never received a copy of it from the publisher despite the fact it even contained one of my own stories.

The fine story by Cynthia Ozick is a different case altogether. It was first published in a literary magazine of limited circulation in 1966, the year before this present series began. Happily, this story has now been included in a collection of her stories, published in 1971, that has received great critical attention—with good reason. This has also given me the opportunity to present the story here to make up for the fact that this anthology had not yet been born the first time it appeared. With these few exceptions

all the material is the best that the year of 1971, from January to December, could provide.

As in previous years, my thanks to my good companion Brian Aldiss for his labors in scouring the British and European sources for likely stories. There his responsibility ends, as he has many times noted with a sigh of relief, so that the contents of this volume have been chosen by myself alone. Here are the best science fiction stories of the year 1971.

It was a good year.

HARRY HARRISON

DOCTOR ZOMBIE AND HIS FURRY LITTLE FRIENDS

ROBERT SHECKLEY

Sheckley last appeared in Best SF: 1968 *with his wickedly humorous "Budget Planet." We welcome him back with a story in a totally different vein, a dark look at one man's attempt to correct a problem that indeed threatens us all.*

I think I am fairly safe here. I live at present in a small apartment northeast of the Zócalo, in one of the oldest parts of Mexico City. As a foreigner, my inevitable first impression is how like Spain this country seems, and how dif-

ferent it really is. In Madrid the streets are a maze which draws you continually deeper, toward hidden centers with tedious, well-guarded secrets. Concealment of the commonplace is surely a heritage of the Moors. Whereas Mexican streets are an inverted labyrinth which leads outward toward the mountains, toward openness, toward revelations which remain forever elusive. Nothing is concealed; but nothing in Mexico is comprehensible. This is the way of the Indians, past and present—a defense based upon permeability; a transparent defense like that of the sea anemone.

I find this style profound and compatible. I conform to insight born in Tenochtitlán or Tlaxcala; I conceal nothing, and thus contrive to hide everything.

How often I have envied the thief who has nothing to hide but a handful of game! Some of us are less lucky, some of us possess secrets which won't fit into our pockets, or into our closets; secrets which cannot even be contained in our parlors or buried in our back yards. Gilles de Retz required a private hidden cemetery scarcely smaller than Père La Chaise. My own needs are more modest; but not by much.

I am not a sociable man. I dream of a house in the country, on the barren slopes of Ixtaccíhuatl, where there is no other human habitation for miles in any direction. But that would be madness. The police assume that a man who isolates himself has something to conceal; the equation is as true as it is banal. Those polite, relentless Mexican police! How they distrust foreigners, and how rightfully so! They would have searched my lonely house on some pretext, and the truth would have come out—a three-day sensation for the newspapers.

I have avoided all of that, or at least put it off, by living where I live. Not even García, the most zealous policeman in my neighborhood, can make himself believe that I use this small permeable apartment for *secret ungodly experi-*

ments of a terrible nature. As is rumored.

My door is usually ajar. When the shopkeepers deliver my provisions, I tell them to walk right in. They never do so, they are innately respectful of a man's privacy. But I tell them in any case.

I have three rooms arranged in line. One enters through the kitchen. Next is the parlor, and after that the bedroom. Each room has a door, none of which I ever close completely. Perhaps I carry this fetish of openness too far. For if anyone ever walked through my apartment, pushed the bedroom door fully open and looked inside, I suppose I would have to kill myself.

To date, my callers have never gone beyond the kitchen. I think they are frightened of me.

And why not? I am frightened of myself.

My work forces me into an uncongenial mode of life. I must take all of my meals in my apartment. I am a bad cook; even the meanest neighborhood restaurant exceeds my efforts. Even the sidewalk vendors with their overcooked tacos surpass my indigestible messes.

And to make it worse, I am forced to invent ridiculous reasons for always eating at home. I tell my neighbors that my doctor allows me no spices whatsoever, no chilies, no tomatoes, no salt . . . Why? A rare condition of the liver. How did I contact it? From eating tainted meat many years ago in Jakarta . . .

All of which is easy enough to say, you may think. But I find it difficult to remember the details. A liar is forced to live in a hateful and unnatural state of consistency. His role becomes his punishment.

My neighbors find it easy to accept my contorted explanations. A little incongruity feels very lifelike to them, and they consider themselves excellent arbiters of truth; whereas all they really pass judgment on are questions of verisimilitude.

Still, despite themselves, my neighbors sense something monstrous about me. Eduardo the butcher once said: "Did

you know, Doctor, that zombies are allowed no salt? Maybe you are a zombie, eh?"

Where on earth did he learn about zombies? In the cinema, I suppose, or from a comic book. I have seen old women make a sign to avert the evil eye when I pass, and I have heard children whisper behind my back: "Doctor Zombie, Doctor Zombie."

Old women and children! They are the repositories of what little wisdom this race possesses. Yes, and the butchers also know a thing or two.

I am neither a doctor nor a zombie. Nevertheless, the old women and the children are quite right about me. Luckily, no one listens to them.

So I continue to eat in my own kitchen—lamb, kid, pig, rabbit, beef, veal, chicken, and sometimes venison. It is the only way I can get the necessary quantities of meat into my house to feed my animals.

Someone else has recently begun to suspect me. Unfortunately, that man is Diego Juan García, a policeman.

García is stocky, broad-faced, careful, a good cop. Around the Zócalo he is considered incorruptible—an Aztec Cato, but with a better disposition. According to the vegetable woman—who is perhaps in love with me—García believes that I might well be an escaped German war criminal.

It is an amazing conception, factually wrong, but intuitionally correct. García is certain that, somehow, he has hit upon the truth. He would have acted by now if it were not for the intercession of my neighbors. The shoemaker, the butcher, the shoeshine boy, and especially the vegetable woman, all vouch for me. They are bourgeois rationalists, they believe their own projections of my character. They chide García: "Isn't it obvious that this foreigner is a quiet, goodhearted man, a harmless scholar, a dreamer?"

Madly enough, they too are factually wrong, but intuitionally correct.

My invaluable neighbors address me as "Doctor," and sometimes as "Professor." These are honorary degrees which they awarded me quite spontaneously, as a reward to my appearance. I did not solicit a title, but I do not reject it. "Señor Doctor" is another mask behind which I can hide.

I suppose I look to them like a doctor: huge glistening forehead, gray hair bristling from the sides of my balding head, square, stern, wrinkled face. Yes, and my European accent, my careful Spanish constructions, my absentminded air . . . And my gold-rimmed glasses! What else could I be but a doctor, and a German one at that?

My title demands an occupation, and I claim to be a scholar on extended leave from my university. I tell them that I am writing a book about the Toltecs, a book in which I will collate evidence of a cultural linkage between that mysterious race and the Incas.

"Yes, gentlemen, I expect that my book will create quite a stir in Heidelberg and Bonn. There are vested interests which will be offended. Attempts will doubtless be made to represent me as a crank. My theory, you see, could shake the entire world of pre-Columbian studies . . ."

I had prepared the above personality before coming to Mexico. I read Stephens, Prescott, Vaillant, Alfonso Caso. I even went to the trouble of copying out the first third of Dreyer's discredited thesis on cultural diffusion, in which he postulates a Mayan-Toltec cultural exchange. That gave me an opus of some eighty handwritten pages which I could claim as my own. The unfinished manuscript was my excuse for being in Mexico. Anyone could glance at the erudite pages scattered over my desk and see for himself what sort of man I was.

I thought that would suffice; but I hadn't allowed for the dynamism inherent in my role. Señor Ortega, my grocer, is also interested in pre-Columbian studies, and is disturbingly knowledgeable. Señor Andrade, the barber, was born in a pueblo within five miles of the ruins of Teotihuacán. And little Jorge Silverio, the shoeshine boy whose mother works

in a *tortillería,* dreams of attending a great university, and asks me very humbly if I might use my influence at Bonn . . .

I am the victim of my neighbors' expectations. I have become *their* professor, not mine. Because of them I must spend endless hours at the National Museum of Anthropology, and waste whole days at Teotihuacán, Tula, Xochicalco. My neighbors force me to work hard at my scholarly pursuit. And I have become quite literally what I purported to be: an expert, possessed of formidable knowledge, more than a little mad.

The role has penetrated me, mingled with me, transformed me; to the extent that now I really *do* believe in the likelihood of a Toltec-Incan connection, I have unassailable evidence, I have seriously considered publishing my findings . . .

All of which I find tiresome and quite beside the point.

I had a bad scare last month. My landlady, Señora Elvira Macias, stopped me on the street and demanded that I get rid of my dog.

"But, señora, I have no dog."

"Excuse me, señor, but you do have a dog. I heard it last night, whining and scratching at your door. And my rules, which were also those of my poor late husband, expressly forbid—"

"My dear señora, you must be mistaken. I can assure you . . ."

And there was García, inevitable as death, in freshly starched khakis, puffing on a Delicado and listening to our conversation.

"A scratching sound? Perhaps it was the termites, señora, or the cockroaches."

She shook her head. "It was not that kind of sound."

"Rats, then. Your building, I regret to say, is infested with rats."

"I know very well what rats sound like," Señora Elvira said, invincibly ingenuous. "But this was not like that, this was a doglike sound which came from your apartment. And

as I have told you, I have an absolute rule against pets."

García was watching me, and I saw reflected in his eyes my deeds at Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Theresienstadt. I wanted to tell him that he was wrong, that I was one of the victims, that I had spent the war years as a prisoner in the Tjilatjap concentration camp in Java.

But I also knew that the specific facts did not matter. My crimes against humanity were real enough: García just happened to be sensing next year's frightfulness rather than last year's.

I might have confessed everything at that moment if Señora Elvira had not turned to García and said, "Well, what are you going to do about all this? He keeps a dog, perhaps two dogs, he keeps God knows what in that apartment of his. What are you going to do?"

García said nothing. His immobile face reminded me of the stone mask of Tlacoc in the Cholula museum. My own reaction was in keeping with that transparent defense by which I hide my secrets. I ground my teeth, flared my nostrils, tried to simulate the *furia español.*

"Dogs?" I howled. "I'll show you dogs! Come up and search my apartment! I will pay you a hundred pesos for each dog you find, two hundred for purebreeds. You come too, García, and bring all your friends. Perhaps I have a horse up there as well, eh? And maybe a pig? Bring witnesses, bring newspaper reporters, I want my menagerie to be noted with accuracy."

"Calm yourself," García said, unimpressed by my rage.

"I will calm myself after we dispose of the dogs!" I shouted. "Come, señora, enter my rooms and look under the bed for your hallucinations. And when you are satisfied, you will kindly refund me the remainder of my month's rent and my month's security, and I will go live somewhere else with my invisible dogs."

García looked at me curiously. I suppose he has seen a great deal of bravado in his time. It is said to be typical of a certain type of criminal. He said to Señora Elvira: "Shall we take a look?"

My landlady surprised me. She said—in-

credibly!—"Certainly not! The gentleman has given his word." And she turned and walked away.

I was about to complete the bluff by insisting that García search for himself if he were not completely satisfied. Luckily, I stopped myself. García is no respector of properties. He is not afraid of making a fool of himself.

"I am tired," I said. "I am going to lie down."

And that was the end of it.

This time I locked my front door. It had been a near thing. While we had been talking, the poor wretched creature had gnawed through its leash and died on the kitchen floor.

I disposed of it in the usual way, by feeding it to the others. Thereafter I doubled my precautions. I bought a radio to cover what little noise they made. I put heavy straw matting under their cages. And I masked their odor with heavy tobacco, for I thought that incense would be too obvious.

But it is strange and ironic that anyone should suspect *me* of keeping dogs. They are my implacable enemies. They know what goes on in my apartment. They have allied themselves with mankind. They are renegade animals, just as I am a renegade human. If the dogs could speak, they would hurry to the police station with their *denunciamentos.*

When the battle against humanity is finally begun, the dogs will have to stand or fall with their masters.

A note of cautious optimism: the last litter was quite promising. Four of the twelve survived, and grew sleek and clever and strong. But they are not as ferocious as I had expected. That part of their genetic inheritance seems to have been lost. They actually seem fond of me—like dogs! But this surely can be bred out of them.

Mankind has dire legends of hybrids produced by the cross-breeding of various species. Among these are the

chimera, the griffin, and the sphinx, to name but a few. It seems to me that these antique nightmares might have been a *memory of the future*—like García's perception of my not-yet-committed crimes.

Pliny and Diodorus record the monstrous offspring of camel and ostrich, lion and eagle, horse, dragon, and tiger. What would they have thought of a composite wolverine and rat? What would a modern biologist think of this prodigy?

The scientists of today will deny its existence even when my heraldic beasts are swarming into towns and cities. No reasonable man will believe in a creature the size of a wolf, as savage and cunning as a wolverine, as social, adaptable, and as great a breeder as a rat. A confirmed rationalist will deny credence to this indescribable and apocryphal beast even as it tears out his throat.

And he will be almost right in his skepticism. Such a product of cross-hybridization was clearly impossible—until I produced it last year.

Secrecy can begin as a necessity and end as a habit. Even in this journal, in which I intended to tell everything, I see that I have not recorded my reasons for breeding monsters, nor what I intend them to do.

Their work should begin in about three months, in early July. By then, local residents will be remarking on a horde of animals which has begun to infest the slums surrounding the Zócalo. Descriptions will be hazy, but people will remark on the size of these creatures, their ferocity and elusiveness. The authorities will be notified, the newspapers will take note. The blame will probably be laid to wolves or wild dogs at first, despite the uncanine appearance of these beasts.

Standard methods of extermination will be tried, and will fail. The mysterious creatures will spread out through the capital, and then into the wealthy suburbs of Pedregal and Coyoacán. It will be known by now that they are

omnivores, like man himself. And it will be suspected—correctly—that they possess an extremely high rate of reproduction.

Perhaps not until later will their high degree of intelligence be appreciated.

The armed forces will be called in, to no avail. The air force will thunder over the countryside; but what will they find to bomb? These creatures present no mass target for conventional weaponry. They live behind the walls, under the sofa, inside the closet—always just beyond the outer edge of your eyesight.

Poison? But these hybrids eat what you possess, not what you offer.

And besides, it is August now, the situation is completely out of hand. The army is spread symbolically throughout Mexico City; but the cohorts of the beasts have overrun Toluca, Ixtapan, Tepalcingo, Cuernavaca, and they have been reported in San Luis Potosí, in Oaxaca and Veracruz.

Scientists confer, crash programs are drawn up, experts come to Mexico from all over the world. The beasts hold no conferences and publish no manifestos. They simply spawn and spread, north to Durango, south to Villahermosa.

The United States closes its borders; another symbolic gesture. The beasts come down to Piedras Negras, they cross the Eagle Pass without permission; unauthorized, they appear in El Paso, Laredo, Brownsville.

They sweep across the plains and deserts like a whirlwind, they flow into the cities like a tidal wave. Doctor Zombie's little furry friends have arrived, and they are here to stay.

And at last mankind realizes that the problem is not how to exterminate these creatures. No, the problem is how to prevent these creatures from exterminating man.

This can be done, I have no doubt. But it is going to require the full efforts and ingenuity of the human race.

That is what I expect to achieve by breeding monsters.

You see, something must be done. I intend my hybrids to act as a counterbalance, a load to control the free-running human engine that is tearing up the earth and itself. I consider this job ethically imperative. After all: Does man have the right to exterminate whatever species he pleases? Must everything in creation serve his ill-considered schemes, or be obliterated? Don't all life forms and systems have a right to live, an absolute right with no possibility of qualification?

Despite the extremity of the measure, there will be benefits to mankind. No one will have to worry again about hydrogen bombs, germ warfare, defoliation, pollution, greenhouse effect, and the like. Overnight, these preoccupations will become—medieval. Man will return to a life in nature. He will still be unique, still intelligent, still a predator; but now he will be subject again to certain checks and balances which he had previously evaded.

His most prized freedom will remain; he will still be at liberty to kill; he will simply lose the ability to exterminate.

Pneumonia is a great leveler of aspirations. It has killed my creatures. Yesterday the last of them raised its head and looked at me. Its large pale eyes were filmed over. It raised a paw, extended its claws, and scratched me lightly on the forearm.

I cried then, for I knew that my poor beast had done that only to please me, knowing how much I desired it to be fierce, implacable, a scourge against mankind.

The effort was too much. Those marvelous eyes closed. It died with barely a twitch.

Pneumonia is not really a sufficient explanation, of course. Beyond that, the will was simply not there. No species has had much vitality since man pre-empted the earth. The slave-raccoons still play in the tattered Adirondack forests, and the slave-lions sniff beer cans in Kruger Park. They and all the others exist only on our sufferance, as squatters on our land. And they know it.

Under the circumstances, you can't expect to find much

vitality and spirit among non-humans. Spirit is the property of the victors.

The death of my last beast has become my own end. I am too tired and too heartsick to begin again. I regret that I have failed mankind. I regret having failed the lions, ostriches, tigers, whales, and other species threatened with extinction. But most of all I regret having failed the sparrows, crows, rats, hyenas—the vermin of the earth, the trash species who exist only to be exterminated by man. My truest sympathy has always been with the outlawed, abandoned, or worthless, in whose categories I include myself.

Are they vermin simply because they do not serve man? Don't all life forms and systems have a right to live, an absolute right with no possibility of qualification? Must everything in creation continue to serve one species, or be obliterated?

Some other man must feel as I do. I ask him to take up the fight, become a guerrilla against his own kind, oppose them as he would oppose a raging fire.

The record has been written for that hypothetical man.

As for me: not long ago, García and another official came to my apartment on a "routine" health inspection. They found the bodies of several of my composite creatures, which I had not yet had the opportunity to destroy. I was arrested and charged with cruelty to animals, and with operating a slaughter-house without a license.

I shall plead guilty to the charges. Despite their falseness, I recognize them as essentially and undeniably true.

CONQUEST *AND* GEHENNA

BARRY N. MALZBERG

A tall, shambling man, Malzberg divides his time between writing excellent science fiction and being possessed by a dark gloom about the fate of the world. A creator of cameos, he packs more content into a thousand words than most writers do in ten thousand, enabling us to use two of his stories here. They are from different sources, united only by the cold, piercing pen of their author.

CONQUEST

I

Entering the dock Redleaf has a vision: the aliens will look exactly like his wife and their mouths bent into the accusatory *o* they will say to him "what the hell are you doing in here looking like that? you barely have any right to the universe let alone our quarters, you clean yourself up right this minute or we'll throw you out and take away your oxygen mask!" Or merely, perhaps, he is confusing one image with the other and is thinking of his mother. The point is that neither he nor anybody else has ever been in a situation quite like this before and he thinks that he is doing quite well, quite well all things considered, in being able to come to any terms with it.

II

"Hello," the alien says as Redleaf shakes himself through the trap of the porthole. It has red eyes the alien does and a rather squarish countenance, otherwise it looks entirely—as the scientists would put it—humanoid. Maybe there is a question of some intricate maladjustment of the limbs and maybe the alien's voice tends to squeak a bit but really it is quite all right, it is almost comforting, it is very much within the ken of acceptance behavior. Redleaf feels enormously relieved although the problems of negotiation remain ahead and he does not know if anything can be solved.

"You took a hell of a long time to get over here, pal," the alien says and when Redleaf starts says, "oh, didn't you know that? we know your whole idiom and like that, we picked it up in our thought sensors which have been intercepting your communications for ages, we only thought that we'd better speak formally when we made contact because it would keep the government cool. Actually, Jack,

we know everything: every bit of the old argot. Why don't you drift in and make yourself comfortable, we'll rap for a while and then after we've learned to hang loose we'll see what we can do." Dreamily, Redleaf follows him, reflecting that his agency above all would have little tolerance for the aliens' slang.

III

Looking around the curiously homey surfaces of the room into which the alien has conducted him Redleaf is reminded of nothing so much as his own living room at home: there is a couch, in the corner a table and some chairs, even a few execrable watercolors scattered around the walls, the taste much like that of his wife's. Except for the unusual circumstances and his strange companion, of course, he could be sitting in his own home, feeling the slow slide of the day pulsing away from him, the dormant throb of the television set keeping the children quiet in the other room, the harsh whistle of his wife's breath as with some concentration she works over a crossword puzzle. So much, so much to come from that to this; it is an irony which in other circumstances he is sure that he would appreciate if he were able, that is, to maintain that taste for irony which his wife says is something he has always lacked and which has made their life together so progressively intolerable.

IV

"You see, Jack," the alien is saying, sitting at some cross-legged ease now on the couch facing him. Redleaf has taken one of the chairs, explaining that he finds it more comfortable in his bulky spacesuit. "You see, the thing is that we've been following you all these years, maybe five hundred of your cycles and we've finally decided that

you've reached a point where you're going to blow up the whole waxworks unless we can negotiate and bring you to your senses and get you to join the great confederation. The galactic confederation that is; all thinking and feeling races belong to it except for a few on the fringes like yourselves and it's all pretty free and easy and wild stuff except that we got a couple of ground rules, otherwise that's it. What we want you to do is to brief up, take a load off your minds, join our federation, turn in the heavy weaponry and live good. You can keep the rockets of course, that's fine. And you can have the whole solar system as a trade zone. There's nothing really worthwhile to us in it; we consider it a sort of ghetto area if you dig what I'm saying. You wouldn't see us for eons and eons. But the weaponries gotta go. We can defuse them for you easy."

"But you don't understand," Redleaf says, rubbing his palms together in their steel, feeling the loss of calloused contact as profoundly as he might notification of his own irreversible illness. "I'm not authorized for anything like that. I mean I can't negotiate with you. I was merely sent as the emissary in answer to your request. I have no authority, I can only convey—"

"Convey, shmonvey," the alien says, "what the hell's the difference; we make the pact with you and that's the end of it, our boys move in and do their duty. All you got to say is the word, under the law we gotta have the consent of one member of the planet. Just leave it to me, I'll swing it all the way. Yes or no? Look: I'll go even further with you. Listen to this—you got the whole solar system and all the radioactives too, we just got to make a few adjustments on the table of half-lives and that's it."

"You aren't logical," Redleaf says. "How can you reduce radioactivity on the one hand and keep the rocketry on the other? It doesn't sound consistent."

"So what's a little fraud?" the alien says and shrugs. "You give me the word, I'll do it and no one will ever know the difference. You don't need space anyway; you got all those ghettos to clean up and the poor to rehabilitate. The

conflicts you got down there will take five hundred years to solve and that's if you started today which you won't. Who do you know that's going to be alive five hundred years from now? Immortality, incidentally, is impossible; you're practically at the maximum optimum span already."

"Look," Redleaf says, "I don't like your attitude, this was just supposed to be an initial contact and—"

"And what?" the alien says and shrugs. "You think that we can't work things out in a gentlemanly way? Modal point of relationships and all decisions is one to one, something which your technology must conceal. You make the deal; that's it. Of course there'll be something in it for you too."

V

Once, hovering over his wife in the small doom of orgasm Redleaf had thought that he had a vision, some signal profundity which would foreshadow the rest of his life: he was sitting at some vast remove in a position of security administering irrevocable rules, and this vision had come to him with such truth and clarity that the force of it alone had made him grunt; his wife had thought that he was still spilling and had considerately contracted her limbs, but concentrate as he could upon it the vision would not stay, it drained away with his semen and he fell heavily over her, panting slightly, seeing the shapes of the room spin around him and he realized then, against the thudding of his heart, that it had been nothing, nothing at all, merely a wisp of that fragmentary megalomania which sometimes came over him in the act of generation and which had no connection to either his history or his outcome; it was destiny, his fate was settled in his cells. Everything would always be the same and someday they would shoot him too for Mars from which he would broadcast back reports of the terrain. Nothing would come of any of this. "Nothing, nothing," he had said to her and clasping her left breast

had begun to work himself into the rocking motions again, trying to force out of himself (as occasionally happened) the surprise of a second orgasm but none of that, none of that tonight and so he had slid indolently against her thinking of Deimos and Phobos, damned witchery of spheres, spinning in the frozen night and he and the others on Mars, trapped in ozone, telling rumors of space.

VI

"I don't mean to be a devil figure or a tempter," the alien says, "but after all, what did you expect up here, gin rummy? We do business, that's our function. I've been manning this damned substation for forty years, it gets to be a bore. Can't beat around the bush or just flay the rabbit."

"Flay the rabbit?"

"Beat the band. Who knows? Can't keep everything in your head, the idiom changes so quickly down there."

"You mean you're alone in this station?"

"Of course," the alien says, "it's all civil service, you know, all of it figured out in terms of credits and actually I'm a very junior member. I'll get better posts and get back to the center of the galaxy and wind up marrying and being very well off. But little acorns make big oaks."

"Forty years?"

"Make it forty-two. No inconsistency, that's the way we live. What do you say? We keep the radioactives and you get a bonus. We can make you a hero or something like that. Or I just can give you money if you want. We keep a bit of it up here for emergencies "

"But so fast," Redleaf says, "it all happens so—"

"Sooner we get this wrapped up, sooner I can close the substation and get home," the alien says. He seems to be drooling slightly. "What do you say, we can work things out anyway you want it and split the difference; all the same to me. Give me the word and I'll move the big babies

in and exert a little payload."

"I don't know," Redleaf says. "I don't know."

VII

In the briefing they had reminded him that he was going up as the best hope of mankind and that once he consented to greet the alien there was no turning back; he was committed to the mission. They had reminded him of television, however, and of the lucrative magazine and book contracts that would come as the result of the chance. "There are others," they had told him, "lots of others who would do this; we're just picking you because you seem a shade the bit most qualified, but if you don't want to you don't have to," and he had said "no, no, I'll go" and had told them that he would serve the best purposes of earth in making a contact with the aliens who had been signaling them and his first thought, virtually his very first thought when he left the briefing was that if he got through it he would probably be able to parlay his way out of the mess, somehow vault himself entirely clear of it and toward some clear element of possibility where the project would not matter, Mars would not matter, the whole agency or his wife would not matter, it would only be him alone and with the breeze of increase always on his face although about twenty years too late for that, twenty years too late kid and don't forget it.

VIII

"I can't do it," Redleaf says and fumbles for the weapon in his suit, it is heavy and clumsy work but he finds it, "I simply can't do it; I got too much integrity, I got to think of earth and future generations of unborn children," and drills the unprotected alien through what should be the heart. The alien's eyes widen, he twitches, he collapses moaning

before Redleaf spilling blood, spilling little bits of tissue, his very brain seeming to expectorate in agony through his lips as he tries unsuccessfully to gasp out something then rolls over once, twitches and is still. Redleaf pockets the weapon with a sense of satisfaction; perhaps it will be said in future generations that he is the man who has saved the earth and he guesses that he can come to terms with that, either way, certainly, he will not be an anonymous man anymore.

Redleaf turns on his radio and speaking into the small wrist microphone says, "I got him. I got him good. There's no reason why we have to put up with that shit. He wanted to take away our armaments."

"That's splendid," says a thin, high voice, "glad to hear it. That means you passed the test."

GEHENNA

Something went wrong with the subway that night. Of course, in New York City not even those directly affected noticed, the capacity for urban disaster having reached its fullest extremes in that well-known tourist attraction.

A

Edward got on the IRT downtown local at 42nd Street for Greenwich Village. The train stopped at 33rd Street, 27th Street, 17th Street and Christopher Circle. As it

turned out he met his wife at this party.

It was a standard Greenwich Village all-of-us-are-damned gathering. She was sitting in a corner of the room, her feet bare, listening to a man with sad mustaches play a mandolin. Edward went over to say hello to her. She looked at him with vague disinterest and huddled closer to the mandolin player, who turned out—on further inspection—to be her date for the night. But Edward was persistent—his parents had always told him that his fearfulness was his chief detracting characteristic—and later that night he got her address.

Two days later he showed up with a shopping cart filled with gourmet food and asked her if she would help him eat it. She shrugged and introduced him to her cats. Three weeks later they slept with one another for the first time and the week after that the mandolin player and he had a fight, at the end of which the mandolin player wished them well and left her flat forever. Edward and Julie were engaged only a few days after that and during the month he married her in Elktown.

They went back to New York and started life together. He gave up mathematics, of course, and became an accountant. She gave up painting and took to going to antique shops once a week, bringing back objects every now and then. It was not a bad life, even if it had started out, perhaps, a bit on the contrived side.

Three years later Edward opened the door and found Julie playing with their year-old daughter, shaking a rattle and putting it deep into the baby's mouth. The scene was a pleasing one and he felt quite contented until she looked up at him and he saw that she was crying.

He put down his briefcase and asked her what was wrong. She told him that their life had been an utter waste. Everything she wanted she had not gotten—everything that she had gotten she did not want. She was surrounded by things, she told him, she had prepared herself as a child to despise. And the worst of it was that all of it was her own fault. She talked of divorce but only by inference.

Realizing that the fault was all his, Edward said that he would check up on some suburbs, get them a nice-sized house and some activities for her during the day. And so he did—all of it and they were very happy for a while if gravely in debt—until he came home from the circus one night with his daughter and found that Julie, feet bare, had drowned herself in the bathtub.

B

Julie got on the IRT downtown local at 42nd Street for Greenwich Village. The train stopped at 32nd Street, 24th Street, 13th Street and the Statue of Christ. As it turned out, she met her husband at this party. It was a standard Greenwich Village we-are-finding-ourselves party and he came in late, dressed all wrong, his hands stretching his pockets out of shape. He was already very drunk.

She was there with a boy named Vincent who meant little to her but who played the mandolin beautifully and sang her love songs. If the songs were derivative and the motions a trifle forced—well, it was a bad period for both of them and she took what comfort she could. But when her husband-to-be came over and spoke to her—his name was Edward as it turned out—she could see beyond his embarrassment and her misery that a certain period of her life and of the mandolin player's was over. He wanted her telephone number but because she didn't believe in telephones she gave him her address instead while Vincent was off changing his clothes. She told him that she was very unsure of herself.

Three days later, while she was still in bed, he came with flowers and candy and told her that he could not forget her. With a smile she invited him in and the first time was very good—better than it had been with Vincent, anyway. Edward was gone when Vincent came later that evening and she told him that she had been lusting after the sea all her life—now she at least had found a pond. Then she told him

what she and Edward had done. He wept and cursed her. He told her that she had betrayed everything of importance, the small reality they had built together—but she was firm. She said that lines must be drawn for once and for all between the present and the possible.

After that she saw nothing of either Vincent or Edward for a week. Then Edward came with a suitcase. He said he had moved out of his parents' home and had come to marry her. She did not marry him right away but they lived together for some weeks—one evening she found a note in her mailbox, just like that, saying that Vincent had committed suicide.

She never found out who had sent the note and she never told Edward anything. But a week later they were married in Yonkers and went to a resort upstate, where they were happy for a few days.

They came back and bought furniture for her flat. He dropped out of astronomy and became an industrial research assistant—or something like that.

For a long time her days were simple—they were, as a matter of fact, exactly like the days she had known just before she met Edward—and the nights were good, pretty good anyway. Then she became pregnant in a difficult sort of way and eventually the child, Ann, was born—a perfect child with small hands and a musical capability. Edward said that they would have to find a real home now—he was very proud—but she said that the old life could keep up, at least until Ann was ready for school. But one night he came home early, very excited and—just like that—told her that he had found them a home in the suburbs. She told him that this was fine. He said that he was very happy, and she said the same.

They moved to the suburbs and were content for a while, what with car pools and bridge and whatnot, as well as good playmates and a healthy environment for Ann. But Edward, for no reason, began to get more and more depressed and one morning when she awoke to find his bed empty, she went into the bathroom to find him slumped

over the bathtub, his wrists open, blood all over the floor, a faint, fishlike look of appeal in his stunned and disbelieving eyes.

C

Vincent got on the IRT downtown local at 42nd Street for Greenwich Village. The train stopped at 37th Street, 31st Street, 19th Street and Christ Towers. As it turned out, he lost his girl at this party. It was a standard Greenwich Village look-how-liberated-we-are kind of party and it was a strange thing that the two of them went separately since the 42nd Street stop was the nearest to both of their apartments. But she believed in maintaining her privacy in small, damning ways.

She was sad that night, sad with a misery he could not touch, much less comprehend. It had been a good time for both of them—they had been going together for the four months since she broke off with his closest friend—and he played her songs on his mandolin—promises of lost and terrible loves, promises of a better future, songs of freedom and loneliness—and she loved his mandolin. She told him that she found her whole soul in his music.

So he was playing songs for her at the party this night, not even wanting to be there, hoping that they could go back to her flat and put the mandolin beside the bed and make their kind of love, when he saw that she was looking at another man in the corner of the room—a man of a different sort from the rest of them, since he was the only one who was not already drunk. The man was looking back at her and in that moment Vincent knew that he was quite doomed, that he and Julie were quite finished.

To prove it to himself he left his instrument on her knee and went to the bathroom. When he came back they sprang apart like assassins and he knew that the man had her address. There was nothing to do, of course, but to leave the party and he helped her with her coat, put his mandolin

over his shoulder and led her down the stairs. Halfway to the street he told her that she had betrayed them. She did not answer, later murmured that she could not help herself, much less another person—but she would make this night the best of all the nights that she had ever given him.

And so she did, all night and into the dawn while her cat stroked the mandolin, making wooden sounds, rolling the instrument around and around on the floor. In the morning he left her—and took his clothing—and then he did not see her at all for a few days. When he came back there was a different look on her face and the man was in her bed, lying next to her.

He did not care—he had lost any capacity for surprise when she had come from his closest friend, broken enough to need him. He only wanted to meet the man named Edward (who might become his closest friend too) but the man did not want any part of him at all and there was a very bad scene—a scene that ended only when Vincent knocked the man to the door and smashed him there to the floor.

But he never saw her again, victory or not. He had no need to—everything that needed proof had been proven. But he thought of her often and many years later, when he killed himself by leaping from a stranger's penthouse, his last thought as he felt the dry wind and saw the street coming at him was of his old mandolin, her solemn cat and the night she had given him her best because she had already partaken of his worst.

D

The child Ann—who had very sensitive and gentle hands—became a young woman who was drawn at odd moments to the windows of pawn shops in which she saw old mandolins—and once, for a week, she took flute lessons. But she had no money and less patience—that last was her biggest fault, along with a lack of asser-

tiveness—and she dropped them.

Now she is going to a party in Greenwich Village. She does not know what will happen to her. The night is still a mystery. She is still young enough to scent possibilities in the wind—tonight may hold some finality, although one never knows. See her, see her—she is in the Times Square stop of the IRT—the engineer sounds a song in the density.

She counts the stops and waits. The train stops at 34th Street, 28th Street and 14th Street. Now it is at Christopher Street and Sheridan Square.

A MEETING WITH MEDUSA

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

Well before 2001: A Space Odyssey, *Arthur Clarke was known for his solid, three-dimentional novels of the future, such as* A Fall of Moondust, *and for memorable short stories like "The Star," much anthologized, well remembered. Somerset born, Ceylon based, world traveled, Clarke treats voyages away from this planet as a logical and natural step in a progression already well under way. Such as this journey deep into the incredibly alien atmosphere of Jupiter.*

A DAY TO REMEMBER

The *Queen Elizabeth* was five kilometers above the Grand Canyon, dawdling along at a comfortable 180, when Howard Falcon spotted the camera platform closing in from the right. He had been expecting it—nothing else was cleared to fly at this altitude—but he was not too happy to have company. Although he welcomed any signs of public interest, he also wanted as much empty sky as he could get. After all, he was the first man in history to navigate a ship half a kilometer long.

So far, this first test flight had gone perfectly; ironically enough, the only problem had been the century-old aircraft carrier *Chairman Mao,* borrowed from the San Diego naval museum for support operations. Only one of *Mao*'s four nuclear reactors was still operating, and the old battlewagon's top speed was barely 30 knots. Luckily, wind speed at sea level had been less than half this, so it had not been too difficult to maintain still air on the flight deck. Though there had been a few anxious moments during gusts, when the mooring lines had been dropped, the great dirigible had risen smoothly, straight up into the sky, as if on an invisible elevator. If all went well, *Queen Elizabeth IV* would not meet *Chairman Mao* for another week.

Everything was under control; all test instruments gave normal readings. Commander Falcon decided to go upstairs and watch the rendezvous. He handed over to his second officer and walked out into the transparent tubeway that led through the heart of the ship. There, as always, he was overwhelmed by the spectacle of the largest space ever enclosed by man.

The ten spherical gas cells, each more than 100 meters across, were ranged one behind the other like a line of gigantic soap bubbles. The tough plastic was so clear that he could see through the whole length of the array and make out details of the elevator mechanism almost half a kilometer from his vantage point. All around him, like a

three-dimensional maze, was the structural framework of the ship—the great longitudinal girders running from nose to tail, the 15 hoops that were the ribs of this skyborne colossus, whose varying sizes defined its graceful, streamlined profile.

At this low speed, there was very little sound—merely the soft rush of wind over the envelope and an occasional creak of metal as the pattern of stresses changed. The shadowless light from the rows of lamps far overhead gave the whole scene a curiously submarine quality, and to Falcon this was enhanced by the spectacle of the translucent gasbags. He had once encountered a squadron of large but harmless jellyfish, pulsing their mindless way above a shallow tropical reef, and the plastic bubbles that gave *Queen Elizabeth* her lift often reminded him of these—especially when changing pressures made them crinkle and scatter new patterns of light.

He walked 50 meters down the axis of the ship, until he came to the forward elevator, between gas cells one and two. Riding up to the observation deck, he noticed that it was uncomfortably hot and dictated a brief memo to himself on his pocket recorder. The *Queen* obtained almost a quarter of her buoyancy from the unlimited amounts of waste heat produced by her fusion power plant; on this lightly loaded flight, indeed, only six of the ten gas cells contained helium and the remaining four were full of air; yet she still carried 200 tons of water as ballast. However, running the cells at high temperatures did produce problems in refrigerating the accessways; it was obvious that a little more work would have to be done here.

A refreshing blast of cooler air hit him in the face when he stepped out onto the observation deck and into the dazzling sunlight streaming through the Plexiglas roof. Half a dozen workmen, with an equal number of superchimp assistants, were busily laying the partly completed dance floor, while others were installing electric wiring and fixing furniture. It was a scene of controlled chaos and Falcon found it hard to believe that everything would be ready for

the maiden voyage, only four weeks ahead. Well, that was not *his* problem, thank goodness. He was merely the captain, not the cruise director.

The human workers waved to him and the simps flashed toothy smiles as he walked through the confusion into the already completed sky lounge. This was his favorite place in the whole ship and he knew that once she was operating, he would never again have it all to himself. He would allow himself just five minutes of private enjoyment.

He called the bridge, checked that everything was still in order and relaxed into one of the comfortable swivel chairs. Below, in a curve that delighted the eye, was the unbroken silver sweep of the ship's envelope. He was perched at the highest point, surveying the whole immensity of the largest vehicle ever built. And when he had tired of *that*—all the way out to the horizon was the fantastic wilderness carved by the Colorado River in half a billion years of time.

Apart from the camera platform (it had now fallen back and was filming from amidships), he had the sky to himself. It was blue and empty, clear down to the horizon. In his grandfather's day, Falcon knew, it would have been streaked with vapor trails and stained with smoke. Both had gone; the aerial garbage had vanished with the primitive technologies that spawned it, and the long-distance transportation of this age arced too far beyond the stratosphere for any sight or sound of it to reach Earth. Once again, the lower atmosphere belonged to the birds and the clouds—and now to *Queen Elizabeth IV*.

It was true, as the old pioneers had said at the beginning of the twentieth century; this was the only way to travel—in silence and luxury, breathing the air around you and not cut off from it, near enough to the surface to watch the ever-changing beauty of land and sea. The subsonic jets of the 1980's, packed with hundreds of passengers seated ten abreast, could not even begin to match such comfort and spaciousness.

Of course, the *Q. E.* would never be an economic

proposition; and even if her projected sister ships were built, only a few of the world's quarter of a billion inhabitants would ever enjoy this silent gliding through the sky. But a secure and prosperous global society could afford such follies and, indeed, needed them for its novelty and entertainment. There were at least 1,000,000 men on Earth whose discretionary income exceeded 1,000 new dollars a year, so the *Queen* would not lack for passengers.

Falcon's pocket communicator beeped; the copilot was calling from the bridge.

"OK for rendezvous, Captain? We've got all the data we need from this run and the TV people are getting impatient."

Falcon glanced at the camera platform, now matching his speed a quarter of a kilometer away.

"OK," he replied. "Proceed as arranged. I'll watch from here."

He walked back through the busy chaos of the observation deck, so that he could have a better view amidships. As he did so, he could feel the change of vibration underfoot; by the time he had reached the rear of the lounge, the ship had come to rest. Using his master key, he let himself out onto the small external platform flaring from the end of the deck; half a dozen people could stand there, with only low guardrails separating them from the vast sweep of the envelope—and from the ground, thousands of meters below. It was an exciting place to be and perfectly safe even when the ship was traveling at speed, for it was in the dead air behind the huge dorsal blister of the observation deck. Nevertheless, it was not intended that the passengers would have access to it; the view was a little too vertiginous.

The covers of the forward cargo hatch had already opened like giant trap doors and the camera platform was hovering above them, preparing to descend. Along this route, in the years to come, would travel thousands of passengers and tons of supplies; only on rare occasions would the *Queen* drop down to sea level and dock with her floating base.

A sudden gust of crosswind slapped Falcon's cheek and he tightened his grip on the guardrail. The Grand Canyon was a bad place for turbulence, though he did not expect much at this altitude. Without any real anxiety, he focused his attention on the descending platform, now about 50 meters above the ship. He knew that the highly skilled operator who was flying the remotely controlled vehicle had performed this very simple maneuver a dozen times already; it was inconceivable that he would have any difficulties.

Yet he seemed to be reacting rather sluggishly; that last gust had drifted the platform almost to the edge of the open hatchway. Surely the pilot could have corrected before this . . . did he have a control problem? It was very unlikely; these remotes had multiple-redundancy, fail-safe takeovers and any number of backup systems. Accidents were almost unheard of.

But there he went again, off to the left. Could the pilot be *drunk?* Improbable though that seemed, Falcon considered it seriously for a moment. Then he reached for his microphone switch.

Once again, without warning, he was slapped violently in the face. He hardly felt it, for he was staring in horror at the camera platform. The distant operator was fighting for control, trying to balance the craft on its jets—but he was only making matters worse. The oscillations increased—20 degrees, 40, 60, 90. . . .

"Switch to automatic, you fool!" Falcon shouted uselessly into his microphone. "Your manual control's not working!"

The platform flipped over onto its back; the jets no longer supported it but drove it swiftly downward. They had suddenly become allies of the gravity they had fought until this moment.

Falcon never heard the crash, though he felt it; he was already inside the observation deck, racing for the elevator that would take him down to the bridge. Workmen shouted at him anxiously, asking what had happened. It would be

many months before he knew the answer to that question.

Just as he was stepping into the elevator cage, he changed his mind. What if there were a power failure? Better be on the safe side, even if it took longer and time was of the essence. He began to run down the spiral stairway enclosing the shaft.

Halfway down, he paused for a second to inspect the damage. That damned platform had gone clear through the ship, rupturing two of the gas cells as it did so. They were still collapsing slowly, in great falling veils of plastic. He was not worried about the loss of life—the ballast could easily take care of that, as long as eight cells remained intact. Far more serious was the possibility of structural damage; already he could hear the great latticework around him groaning and protesting under its abnormal loads. It was not enough to have sufficient lift; unless it was properly distributed, the ship would break her back.

He was just resuming his descent when a superchimp, shrieking with fright, came racing down the elevator shaft, moving with incredible speed hand over hand along the *outside* of the latticework. In its terror, the poor beast had torn off its company uniform, perhaps in an unconscious attempt to regain the freedom of its ancestors.

Falcon, still descending as swiftly as he could, watched its approach with some alarm; a distraught simp was a powerful and potentially dangerous animal, especially if fear overcame its conditioning. As it overtook him, it started to call out a string of words, but they were all jumbled together and the only one he could recognize was a plaintive, frequently repeated "boss." Even now, Falcon realized, it looked toward humans for guidance; he felt sorry for the creature, involved in a man-made disaster beyond its comprehension and for which it bore no responsibility.

It stopped opposite him, on the other side of the lattice; there was nothing to prevent it from coming through the open framework if it wished. Now its face was only inches from his and he was looking straight into the terrified eyes.

Never before had he been so close to a simp and able to study its features in such detail; he felt that strange mingling of kinship and discomfort that all men experience when they gaze thus into the mirror of time.

His presence seemed to have calmed the creature; Falcon pointed up the shaft, back toward the observation deck, and said very clearly and precisely: "Boss—boss—*go*." To his relief, the simp understood; it gave him a grimace that might have been a smile and at once started to race back the way it had come. Falcon had given it the best advice he could; if any safety remained aboard the *Queen*, it was in that direction. But his duty lay in the other.

He had almost completed his descent when, with a sound of rending metal, the vessel pitched nose down and the lights went out. But he could still see quite well, for a shaft of sunlight streamed through the open hatch and the huge tear in the envelope. Many years ago, he had stood in a great cathedral nave, watching the light pouring through the stained-glass windows and forming pools of multicolored radiance on the ancient flagstones. The dazzling shaft of sunlight through the ruined fabric high above reminded him of that moment. He was in a cathedral of metal, falling down the sky.

When he reached the bridge and was able for the first time to look outside, he was horrified to see how close the ship was to the ground. Only 1,000 meters below were the beautiful and deadly pinnacles of rock and the red rivers of mud that were still carving their way down into the past. There was no level area anywhere in sight where a ship as large as the *Queen* could come to rest on an even keel.

A glance at the display board told him that all the ballast had gone. However, rate of descent had been reduced to a few meters a second; they still had a fighting chance.

Without a word, Falcon eased himself into the pilot's seat and took over such control as remained. The instrument board showed him everything he wished to know; speech was superfluous. In the background, he could hear

the communications officer giving a running report over the radio. By this time, all the news channels of Earth would have been pre-empted and he could imagine the utter frustration of the program controllers. One of the most spectacular wrecks in history was occurring—without a single camera to record it. The last moments of the *Queen* would never fill millions with awe and terror, as had those of the *Hindenburg* a century and a half before.

Now the ground was only half a kilometer away, still coming up slowly. Though he had full thrust, he had not dared use it, lest the weakened structure collapse; but now he realized that he had no choice. The wind was taking them toward a fork in the canyon, where the river was split by a wedge of rock, like the prow of some gigantic, fossilized ship of stone. If she continued on her present course, the *Queen* would straddle that triangular plateau and come to rest with at least a third of her length jutting out over nothingness; she would snap like a rotten stick.

From far away, above the sound of straining metal and escaping gas, came the familiar whistle of the jets as Falcon opened up the lateral thrusters. The ship staggered and began to slew to port. The shriek of tearing metal was now almost continuous—and the rate of descent had started to increase ominously. A glance at the damage-control board showed that cell number five had just gone.

The ground was only meters away; even now, he could not tell whether his maneuver would succeed or fail. He switched the thrust vectors over to vertical, giving maximum lift to reduce the force of impact.

The crash seemed to last forever. It was not violent—merely prolonged and irresistible. It seemed that the whole universe was falling about them.

The sound of crunching metal came nearer, as if some great beast were eating its way through the dying ship.

Then floor and ceiling closed upon him like a vise.

"BECAUSE IT'S THERE"

"Why do you want to go to Jupiter?"

"As Springer said when he lifted for Pluto—because it's there."

"Thanks. Now we've got *that* out of the way—the real reason." Howard Falcon smiled, though only those who knew him well could have interpreted the slight, leathery grimace. Webster was one of them; for more than twenty years, they had been involved in each other's projects. They had shared triumphs and disasters—including the greatest disaster of all.

"Well, Springer's cliché is still valid. We've landed on all the terrestrial planets but none of the gas giants. They are the only real challenge left in the Solar System."

"An expensive one. Have you worked out the cost?"

"As well as I can; here are the estimates. But remember—this isn't a one-shot mission but a transportation system. Once it's proved out, it can be used over and over again. And it will open up not merely Jupiter but *all* the giants."

Webster looked at the figures and whistled.

"Why not start with an easier planet—Uranus, for example? Half the gravity and less than half the escape velocity. Quieter weather, too—if that's the right word for it."

Webster had certainly done his homework. But that, of course, was why he was head of Long Range Planning.

"There's very little saving, when you allow for the extra distance and the logistics problems. For Jupiter, we can use the facilities on Ganymede. Beyond Saturn, we'd have to establish a new supply base."

Logical, thought Webster; but he was sure that it was not the important reason. Jupiter was lord of the Solar System; Falcon would be interested in no lesser challenge.

"Besides," Falcon continued, "Jupiter is a major scientific scandal. It's more than a hundred years since its radio storms were discovered, but we still don't know what

causes them—and the Great Red Spot is as big a mystery as ever. That's why I can get matching funds from the Bureau of Astronautics. Do you know how many probes they have dropped into that atmosphere?"

"A couple of hundred, I believe."

"*Three* hundred and twenty-six, over the past fifty years—about a quarter of them total failures. Of course, they've learned a hell of a lot, but they've barely scratched the planet. Do you realize how *big* it is?"

"More than ten times the size of Earth."

"Yes, yes—but do you know what that really means?"

Falcon pointed to the large globe in the corner of Webster's office.

"Look at India—how small it seems. Well, if you skinned Earth and spread it out on the surface of Jupiter, it would look about as big as India does here."

There was a long silence while Webster contemplated the equation: Jupiter is to Earth as Earth is to India. Falcon had—deliberately, of course—chosen the best possible example. . . .

Was it already ten years ago? Yes, it must have been. The crash lay seven years in the past (*that* date was engraved on his heart) and those initial tests had taken place three years before the first and last flight of the *Queen Elizabeth.*

Ten years ago, then, Commander (no, Lieutenant) Falcon had invited him to a preview—a three-day drift across the nothern plains of India, within sight of the Himalayas. "Perfectly safe," he had promised. "It will get you away from the office—and will teach you what this whole thing is about."

Webster had not been disappointed. Next to his first journey to the Moon, it had been the most memorable experience of his life. And yet, as Falcon had assured him, it had been perfectly safe and quite uneventful.

They had taken off from Srinagar just before dawn, with the huge silver bubble of the balloon already catching the first light of the Sun. The ascent had been made in total

silence; there were none of the roaring propane burners that had lifted the hot-air balloons of an earlier age. All the heat they needed came from the little pulsed-fusion reactor, weighing only 100 kilograms, hanging in the open mouth of the envelope. While they were climbing, its laser was zapping ten times a second, igniting the merest whiff of deuterium fuel; once they had reached altitude, it would fire only a few times a minute, making up for the heat lost through the great gasbag overhead.

And so, even while they were a kilometer above the ground, they could hear dogs barking, people shouting, bells ringing. Slowly the vast, Sun-smitten landscape expanded around them; two hours later, they had leveled out at five kilometers and were taking frequent drafts of oxygen. They could relax and admire the scenery; the onboard instrumentation was doing all the work—gathering the information that would be required by the designers of the still-unnamed liner of the skies.

It was a perfect day; the southwest monsoon would not break for another month and there was hardly a cloud in the sky. Time seemed to have come to a stop; they resented the hourly radio reports that interrupted their reverie. And all around, to the horizon and far beyond, was that infinite, ancient landscape drenched with history—a patchwork of villages, fields, temples, lakes, irrigation canals.

With a real effort, Webster broke the hypnotic spell of that ten-year-old memory. It had converted him to lighter-than-air flight—and it had made him realize the enormous size of India, even in a world that could be circled within ninety minutes. And yet, he repeated to himself, Jupiter is to Earth as Earth is to India.

"Granted your argument," he said, "and supposing the funds are available, there's another question you have to answer. Why should you do better than the—what is it?—three hundred and twenty-six robot probes that have already made the trip?"

"I am better qualified than they were—as an observer

and as a pilot. *Especially* as a pilot; don't forget—I've more experience of lighter-than-air flight than anyone in the world."

"You could still serve as controller and sit safely on Ganymede."

"*But that's just the point!* They've already done that. Don't you remember what killed the *Queen*?"

Webster knew perfectly well, but he merely answered, "Go on."

"Time lag—*time lag!* That idiot of a platform controller thought he was using a local radio circuit. But he'd been accidentally switched through a satellite—oh, maybe it wasn't his fault, but he should have noticed. That's a half-second time lag for the round trip. Even then it wouldn't have mattered, flying in calm air. It was the turbulence over the Grand Canyon that did it. When the platform tipped and he corrected for that—it had already tipped the other way. Ever tried to drive a car over a bumpy road with a half-second delay in the steering?"

"No, and I don't intend to try. But I can imagine it."

"Well, Ganymede is more than a million kilometers from Jupiter. That means a round-trip delay of six seconds. No, you need a controller on the spot—to handle emergencies in real time. Let me show you something. Mind if I use this?"

"Go ahead."

Falcon picked up a postcard that was lying on Webster's desk; they were almost obsolete on Earth, but this one showed a 3-D view of a Martian landscape and was decorated with exotic and expensive stamps. He held it so that it dangled vertically.

"This is an old trick but helps make my point. Place your thumb and finger on either side, not quite touching. That's right."

Webster put out his hand, almost but not quite gripping the card.

"Now catch it."

Falcon waited for a few seconds; then, without warning, he let go of the card. Webster's thumb and fingers closed on empty air.

"I'll do it again, just to show there's no deception. You see?"

Once again, the falling card slipped through Webster's fingers.

"Now you try it on me."

This time, Webster grasped the card and dropped it without warning. It had scarcely moved before Falcon had caught it; Webster almost imagined he could hear a click, so swift was the other's reaction.

"When they put me together again," Falcon remarked in an expressionless voice, "the surgeons made some improvements. This is one of them—and there are others. I want to make the most of them. Jupiter is the place where I can do it."

Webster stared for long seconds at the fallen card, absorbing the improbable colors of the Trivium Charontis Escarpment. Then he said quietly, "I understand. How long do you think it will take?"

"With your help, plus the bureau, plus all the science foundations we can drag in—oh, three years. Then a year for trials—we'll have to send in at least two test models. So with luck—five years."

"That's about what I thought. I hope you get your luck; you've earned it. But there's one thing I won't do."

"What's that?"

"Next time you go ballooning, don't expect *me* as passenger."

THE WORLD OF THE GODS

The fall from Jupiter V to Jupiter itself takes only three and a half hours; few men could have slept on so awesome a journey. Sleep was a weakness that Howard Falcon hated, and the little he still required brought dreams that

time had not yet been able to exorcise. But he could expect no rest in the three days that lay ahead and must seize what he could during the long fall down into that ocean of clouds, 100,000 kilometers below.

As soon as *Kon-Tiki* had entered her transfer orbit and all the computer checks were satisfactory, he prepared for the last sleep he might ever know. It seemed appropriate that at almost the same moment Jupiter eclipsed the bright and tiny Sun, he swept into the monstrous shadow of the planet. For a few minutes a strange, golden twilight enveloped the ship; then a quarter of the sky became an utterly black hole in space, while the rest was a blaze of stars. No matter how far one traveled across the Solar System, *they* never changed; these same constellations now shone on Earth, half a billion kilometers away. The only novelties here were the small, pale crescents of Callisto and Ganymede; doubtless there were a dozen other moons up there in the sky, but they were all much too tiny and too distant for the unaided eye to pick them out.

"Closing down for two hours," he reported to the mother ship, hanging 1,000 kilometers above the desolate rocks of Jupiter V, in the radiation shadow of the tiny satellite. If it never served any other useful purpose, Jupiter V was a cosmic bulldozer perpetually sweeping up the charged particles that made it unhealthy to linger close to Jupiter. Its wake was almost free of radiation, and here a ship could park in perfect safety while death sleeted invisibly all around.

Falcon switched on the sleep inducer and consciousness faded swiftly out as the electric pulses surged gently through his brain. While *Kon-Tiki* fell toward Jupiter, gaining speed second by second in that enormous gravitational field, he slept without dreams. They always came when he awoke; and he had brought his nightmares with him from Earth.

Yet he never dreamed of the crash itself, though he often found himself again face to face with that terrified superchimp, as he descended the spiral stairway between the

collapsing gasbags. None of the simps had survived; those that were not killed outright were so badly injured that they had been painlessly euthed. He sometimes wondered why he dreamed only of this doomed creature, which he had never met before the last minutes of its life—and not of the friends and colleagues he had lost aboard the dying *Queen.*

The dreams he feared most always began with his first return to consciousness. There had been little physical pain; in fact, there had been no sensation of any kind. He was in darkness and silence and did not even seem to be breathing. And—strangest of all—he could not locate his limbs. He could move neither his hands nor his feet, because he did not know where they were.

The silence had been the first to yield. After hours or days, he had become aware of a faint throbbing and eventually, after long thought, he deduced that this was the beating of his own heart. That was the first of his many mistakes.

Then there had been faint pinpricks, sparkles of light, ghosts of pressures upon still unresponsive limbs. One by one his senses had returned, and pain had come with them. He had had to learn everything anew, recapitulating babyhood and infancy. Though his memory was unaffected and he could understand words that were spoken to him, it was months before he was able to answer except by the flicker of an eyelid. He could still remember the moments of triumph when he had spoken the first word, turned the page of a book—and, finally, learned to move under his own power. *That* was a victory, indeed, and it had taken him almost two years to prepare for it. A hundred times he had envied that dead superchimp, but *he* had been given no choice. The doctors had made their decision—and now, twelve years later, he was where no human being had ever traveled before and moving faster than any man in history.

Kon-Tiki was just emerging from shadow and the Jovian dawn bridged the sky ahead in a titanic bow of light, when the persistent buzz of the alarm dragged Falcon up from

sleep. The inevitable nightmares (he had been trying to summon a nurse but did not even have the strength to push the button) swiftly faded from consciousness; the greatest—and perhaps last—adventure of his life was before him.

He called Mission Control, now 100,000 kilometers away and falling swiftly below the curve of Jupiter, to report that everything was in order. His velocity had just passed 50 kilometers a second (*that* was one for the books) and in half an hour, *Kon-Tiki* would hit the outer fringes of the atmosphere, as he started on the most difficult entry in the entire Solar System. Although scores of probes had survived this flaming ordeal, they had been tough, solidly packed masses of instrumentation, able to withstand several hundred gravities of drag. *Kon-Tiki* would hit peaks of 30 *g* and would average more than ten before she came to rest in the upper reaches of the Jovian atmosphere. Very carefully and thoroughly, Falcon began to attach the elaborate system of restrains that anchored him to the walls of the cabin. When he had finished, he was virtually a part of the ship's structure.

The clock was counting backward; 100 seconds to entry. For better or worse, he was committed. In a minute and a half, he would graze the Jovian atmosphere and would be caught irrevocably in the grip of the giant.

The countdown was three seconds late—not at all bad, considering the unknowns involved. Beyond the walls of the capsule came a ghostly sighing that rose steadily to a high-pitched, screaming roar. The noise was quite different from that of a re-entry on Earth or Mars; in this thin atmosphere of hydrogen and helium, all sounds were transformed a couple of octaves higher. On Jupiter, even thunder would have falsetto overtones.

With the rising scream came also mounting weight; within seconds, he was completely immobilized. His field of vision contracted until it embraced only the clock and the accelerometer; 15 *g*, and 480 seconds to go.

He never lost consciousness; but then, he had not ex-

pected to. *Kon-Tiki*'s trail through the Jovian atmosphere must be really spectacular—by this time, thousands of kilometers long. Five hundred seconds after entry, the drag began to taper off: ten *g*, five *g*, two. . . . Then weight vanished almost completely; he was falling free, all his enormous orbital velocity destroyed.

There was a sudden jolt as the incandescent remnants of the heat shield were jettisoned. It had done its work and would not be needed again; Jupiter could have it now. He released all but two of the restraining buckles and waited for the automatic sequencer to start the next and most critical series of events.

He did not see the first drogue parachute pop out, but he could feel the slight jerk and the rate of fall diminished immediately. *Kon-Tiki* had lost all her horizontal speed and was going straight down at 1,000 kilometers an hour. Everything depended on the next 60 seconds.

There went the second drogue. He looked up through the overhead window and saw, to his immense relief, that clouds of glittering foil were billowing out behind the falling ship. Like a great flower unfurling, the thousands of cubic meters of the balloon spread out across the sky, scooping up the thin gas until it was fully inflated. *Kon-Tiki*'s rate of fall dropped to a few kilometers an hour and remained constant. Now there was plenty of time; it would take him days to fall all the way down to the surface of Jupiter.

But he would get there eventually, if he did nothing about it; the balloon overhead was merely acting as an efficient parachute. It was providing no lift, nor could it do so while the gas inside and out was the same.

With its characteristic and rather disconcerting crack, the fusion reactor started up, pouring torrents of heat into the envelope overhead. Within five minutes, the rate of fall had become zero; within six, the ship had started to rise. According to the radar altimeter, it had leveled out at 430 kilometers above the surface—or whatever passed for a surface on Jupiter.

Only one kind of balloon will work in an atmosphere of hydrogen, which is the lightest of all gases—and that is a hot-hydrogen balloon. As long as the fusor kept ticking over, Falcon could remain aloft, drifting across a world that could hold a hundred Pacifics. After traveling more than half a billion kilometers, *Kon Tiki* had at last begun to justify her name. She was an aerial raft, adrift upon the currents of the Jovian atmosphere.

Though a whole new world was lying around him, it was more than an hour before Falcon could examine the view. First he had to check all the capsule's systems and test its response to the controls. He had to learn how much extra heat was necessary to produce a desired rate of ascent and how much gas he must vent in order to descend. Above all, there was the question of stability. He must adjust the length of the cables attaching his capsule to the huge, pear-shaped balloon, to damp out vibrations and get the smoothest possible ride. So far, he was lucky; at this level, the wind was steady and the Doppler reading on the invisible surface gave him a ground speed of 350 kilometers an hour. For Jupiter, that was modest; winds of up to 1,000 had been observed. But mere speed, of course, was unimportant; the real danger was turbulence. If he ran into that, only skill and experience and swift reaction could save him—and these were not matters that could yet be programmed into a computer.

Not until he was satisfied that he had got the feel of this strange craft did Falcon pay any attention to Mission Control's pleadings. Then he deployed the booms carrying the instrumentation and the atmospheric samplers; the capsule now resembled a rather untidy Christmas tree but still rode smoothly down the Jovian winds, while it radioed up its torrents of information to the recorders on the ship 100,000 kilometers above. And now, at last, he could look around.

His first impression was unexpected and even a little disappointing. As far as the scale of things was concerned,

he might have been ballooning over an ordinary cloudscape on Earth. The horizon seemed at a normal distance; there was no feeling at all that he was on a world eleven times the diameter of his own. Then he looked at the infrared radar, sounding the layers of atmosphere beneath him—and knew how badly his eyes had been deceived.

That layer of clouds, apparently 5 kilometers away, was really 60 kilometers below. And the horizon, whose distance he would have guessed at 200, was actually 3,000 kilometers from the ship.

The crystalline clarity of the hydrohelium atmosphere and the enormous curvature of the planet had fooled him completely. It was even harder to judge distances here than on the Moon; everything he saw must be multiplied by ten. It was a simple matter and he should have been prepared for it. Yet somehow it disturbed him profoundly. He did not feel that Jupiter was huge but that *he* had shrunk—to a tenth of his normal size. Perhaps, with time, he would grow accustomed to the inhuman scale of this world; yet as he stared toward that unbelievably distant horizon, he felt as if a wind colder than the atmosphere around him was blowing through his soul. Despite all his arguments, this might never be a place for man. He could well be both the first and the last to descend through the clouds of Jupiter.

The sky above was almost black, except for a few wisps of ammonia cirrus perhaps 20 kilometers overhead. It was cold up there on the fringes of space, but both pressure and temperature increased rapidly with depth. At the level where *Kon-Tiki* was drifting now, it was 50 degrees centigrade below zero and the pressure was five atmospheres. A hundred kilometers farther down, it would be as warm as equatorial Earth—and the pressure about the same as at the bottom of one of the shallower seas. Ideal conditions for life.

A quarter of the brief Jovian day had already gone; the Sun was halfway up the sky, but the light on the unbroken cloudscape below had a curious mellow quality. That extra

half billion kilometers had robbed the Sun of all its power; though the sky was clear, Falcon found himself continually thinking that it was a heavily overcast day. When night fell, the onset of darkness would be swift, indeed; though it was still morning, there was a sense of autumnal twilight in the air. But autumn, of course, was something that never came to Jupiter. There were no seasons here.

Kon-Tiki had come down in the exact center of the Equatorial Zone—the least colorful part of the planet. The sea of clouds that stretched out to the horizon was tinted a pale salmon; there were none of the yellows and pinks and even reds that banded Jupiter at higher latitudes. The Great Red Spot itself—most spectacular of all the planet's features—lay thousands of kilometers to the south. It had been a temptation to descend there, but the South Tropical Disturbance was unusually active, with currents reaching 1,500 kilometers an hour. It would have been asking for trouble to head into that maelstrom of unknown forces. The Great Red Spot and its mysteries would have to wait for future expeditions.

The Sun, moving across the sky twice as swiftly as it did on Earth, was now nearing the zenith and had become eclipsed by the great silver canopy of the balloon. *Kon-Tiki* was still drifting swiftly, smoothly westward at a steady 350, but only the radar gave any indication of this. Was it always as calm here? Falcon asked himself. The scientists who had talked learnedly of the Jovian doldrums and had predicted that the equator would be the quietest place seemed to know what they were talking about, after all. He had been profoundly skeptical of all such forecasts and had agreed with one unusually modest researcher who had told him bluntly, "There are *no* experts on Jupiter." Well, there would be at least one by the end of this day.

If he managed to survive until then.

THE VOICES OF THE DEEP

That first day, the Father of the Gods smiled upon him. It was as calm and peaceful here on Jupiter as it had been, years ago, when he was drifting with Webster across the plains of northern India. Falcon had time to master his new skills, until *Kon-Tiki* seemed an extension of his own body. Such luck was more than he had dared hope and he began to wonder what price he might have to pay for it.

The five hours of daylight were almost over; the clouds below were full of shadows, which gave them a massive solidity they had not possessed when the Sun was higher. Color was swiftly draining from the sky, except in the west itself, where a band of deepening purple lay along the horizon. Above this band was the thin crescent of a closer moon, pale and bleached against the utter blackness beyond.

With a speed perceptible to the eye, the Sun went straight down over the edge of Jupiter, 3,000 kilometers away. The stars came out in their legions—and there was the beautiful evening star of Earth, on the very frontier of twilight, reminding him how far he was from home. It followed the Sun down into the west; man's first night on Jupiter had begun.

With the onset of darkness, *Kon-Tiki* started to sink. The balloon was no longer heated by the feeble sunlight and was losing a small part of its buoyancy. Falcon did nothing to increase lift; he had expected this and was planning to descend.

The invisible cloud deck was still 50 kilometers below and he would reach it about midnight. It showed up clearly on the infrared radar, which also reported that it contained a vast array of complex carbon compounds, as well as the usual hydrogen, helium and ammonia. The chemists were dying for samples of that fluffy, pinkish stuff; though some atmospheric probes had already gathered a few grams, that had only whetted their appetites. Half the basic molecules of life were here, floating high above the surface of Jupiter.

And where there was food, could life be far away? That was the question that, after more than 100 years, no one had been able to answer.

The infrared was blocked by the clouds, but the microwave radar sliced right through and showed layer after layer, all the way down to the hidden surface more than 400 kilometers below. That was barred to him by enormous pressures and temperatures; not even robot probes had ever reached it intact. It lay in tantalizing inaccessibility at the bottom of the radar screen, slightly fuzzy and showing a curious granular structure that his equipment could not resolve.

An hour after sunset, he dropped his first probe. It fell swiftly for 100 kilometers, then began to float in the denser atmosphere, sending back torrents of radio signals, which he relayed up to Mission Control. Then there was nothing else to do until sunrise, except to keep an eye on the rate of descent, monitor the instruments and answer occasional queries. While she was drifting in this steady current, *Kon-Tiki* could look after herself.

Just before midnight, a woman controller came on watch and introduced herself with the usual pleasantries. Ten minutes later, she called again, her voice at once serious and excited.

"Howard! Listen in on channel forty-six—high gain."

Channel 46? There were so many telemetering circuits that he knew the numbers of only those that were critical; but as soon as he threw the switch, he recognized this one. He was plugged into the microphone on the probe, floating 130 kilometers below him in an atmosphere now almost as dense as water.

At first, there was only a soft hiss of whatever strange winds stirred down in the darkness of that unimaginable world. And then, out of the background noise, there slowly emerged a booming vibration that grew louder and louder, like the beating of a gigantic drum. It was so low that it was felt as much as heard and the beats steadily increased their tempo, though the pitch never changed. Now it was a swift,

almost infrasonic throbbing—and then, suddenly, in mid-vibration, it stopped, so abruptly that the mind could not accept the silence, but memory continued to manufacture a ghostly echo in the deepest caverns of the brain.

It was the most extraordinary sound that Falcon had ever heard, even among the multitudinous noises of Earth. He could think of no natural phenomenon that could have caused it, nor was it like the cry of any animal, not even one of the great whales.

It came again, following exactly the same pattern. Now that he was prepared for it, he estimated the length of the sequence; from first faint throb to final crescendo, it lasted just over ten seconds.

And this time, there was a real echo very faint and far away. Perhaps it came from one of the many reflecting layers deeper in this stratified atmosphere; perhaps it was another more distant source. Falcon waited for a second echo, but it never came.

Mission Control reacted quickly and asked him to drop another probe at once. With two microphones operating, it would be possible to find the approximate location of the sources. Oddly enough, none of *Kon-Tiki*'s own external mikes could detect anything except wind noises; the boomings, whatever they were, must have been trapped and channeled beneath an atmospheric reflecting layer far below.

They were coming, it was soon discovered, from a cluster of sources about 2,000 kilometers away. The distance gave no indication of their power; in Earth's oceans, quite feeble sounds could travel equally far. And as for the obvious assumption that living creatures were responsible, the chief exobiologist quickly ruled that out.

"I'll be very disappointed," said Dr. Brenner, "if there are no microorganisms or plants here. But nothing like animals, because there's no free oxygen. All biochemical reactions on Jupiter must be low-energy ones—there's just no way an active creature could generate enough power to function."

Falcon wondered if this were true; he had heard the argument before and reserved judgment.

"In any case," continued Brenner, "some of those sound waves are a hundred meters long! Even an animal as big as a whale couldn't produce them. They *must* have a natural origin."

Yes, that seemed plausible, and probably the physicists would be able to come up with an explanation. What would a blind alien make, Falcon wondered, of the sounds he might hear when standing beside a stormy sea or a geyser or a volcano or a waterfall? He might well attribute them to some huge beast.

About an hour before sunrise, the voices of the deep died away and Falcon began to busy himself with preparation for the dawn of his second day. *Kon-Tiki* was now only five kilometers above the nearest cloud layer; the external pressure had risen to ten atmospheres and the temperature was a tropical 30 degrees. A man could be comfortable here with no more equipment than a breathing mask and the right grade of heliox mixture.

"We've some good news for you," Mission Control reported soon after dawn. "The cloud layer's breaking up. You'll have partial clearing in an hour—but watch out for turbulence."

"I've already noticed some," Falcon answered. "How far down will I be able to see?"

"At least twenty kilometers, down to the second thermocline. *That* cloud deck is solid—it never breaks."

And it's out of my reach, Falcon told himself; the temperature down there must be over 100 degrees. This was the first time that any balloonist had ever had to worry not about his ceiling but about his—basement?

Ten minutes later, he could see what Mission Control had already observed from its superior vantage point. There was a change in color near the horizon and the cloud layer had become ragged and lumpy, as if something had torn it open. He turned up his little nuclear furnace and

gave *Kon-Tiki* another five kilometers of altitude so that he could get a better view.

The sky below was clearing rapidly—completely, as if something was dissolving away the solid overcast. An abyss was opening up before his eyes; a moment later, he sailed out over the edge of a cloud canyon 20 kilometers deep and 1,000 kilometers wide.

A new world lay spread beneath him; Jupiter had stripped away one of its many veils. The second layer of clouds, unattainably far below, was much darker in color than the first. It was almost salmon pink and curiously mottled with little islands of brick red. They were all oval-shaped, with their long axes pointing east-west, in the direction of the prevailing wind. There were hundreds of them, all about the same size, and they reminded Falcon of puffy little cumulus clouds in the terrestrial sky.

He reduced buoyancy and *Kon-Tiki* began to drop down the face of the dissolving cliff. It was then that he noticed the snow.

White flakes were forming in the air and drifting slowly downward. Yet it was much too warm for snow—and, in any event, there was scarcely a trace of water at this altitude. Moreover, there was no glitter nor sparkle about these flakes as they went cascading down into the depths; when, presently, a few landed on an instrument boom outside the main viewing port, he saw that they were a dull, opaque white—not crystalline at all—and quite large, several centimeters across. They looked like wax and Falcon guessed that this was precisely what they were. Some chemical reaction was taking place in the atmosphere around him, condensing out the hydrocarbons floating in the Jovian air.

A hundred kilometers ahead, a disturbance was taking place in the cloud layer. The little red ovals were being jostled around and were beginning to form a spiral—the familiar cyclonic pattern so common in the meterology of Earth. The vortex was emerging with astonishing speed; if

that was a storm ahead, Falcon told himself, he was in big trouble.

And then his concern changed to wonder—and to fear. For what was developing in his line of flight was not a storm at all. Something enormous—something scores of kilometers across—was rising through the clouds.

The reassuring thought that it, too, might be a cloud—a thunderhead boiling up from the lower levels of the atmosphere—lasted only a few seconds. No; this was *solid.* It shouldered its way through the pink-and-salmon overcast like an iceberg rising from the deeps.

An *iceberg,* floating on hydrogen? That was impossible, of course; but perhaps it was not too remote an analogy. As soon as he focused the telescope upon the enigma, Falcon saw that it was a whitish mass, threaded with streaks of red and brown. It must be, he decided the same stuff as the "snowflakes" falling around him—a mountain range of wax. And it was not, he soon realized, as solid as he had thought; around the edges, it was continually crumbling and re-forming.

"I know what it is," he radioed Mission Conrtol, which for the past few minutes had been asking anxious questions. "It's a mass of bubbles—some kind of foam. Hydrocarbon froth. Get the chemists working on—*just a minute!*"

"What is it?" called Mission Control. "What is it?"

He ignored the frantic pleas from space and concentrated all his mind upon the image in the telescope field. He had to be sure; if he made a mistake, he would be the laughingstock of the Solar System.

Then he relaxed, glanced at the clock and switched off the nagging voice from Jupiter V.

"Hello, Mission Control," he said very formally. "This is Howard Falcon aboard *Kon-Tiki,* Ephemeris Time Nineteen Hours Twenty-one Minutes Fifteen Seconds. Latitude Zero Degrees Five Minutes North. Longitude

One Hundred Five Degrees Forty-two Minutes, System One.

"Tell Dr. Brenner that there is life on Jupiter. And it's *big*."

THE WHEELS OF POSEIDON

"I'm very happy to be proved wrong," Dr. Brenner radioed back cheerfully. "Nature always has something up her sleeve. Keep the long-focus camera on target and give us the steadiest pictures you can."

The things moving up and down those waxen slopes were still too far away for Falcon to make out many details, and they must have been very large to be visible at all at such a distance. Almost black and shaped like arrowheads, they maneuvered by slow undulations of their entire bodies, so that they looked rather like giant manta rays swimming above some tropical reef.

Perhaps they were sky-borne cattle browsing on the cloud pastures of Jupiter, for they seemed to be feeding along the dark, red-brown streaks that ran like dried-up river beds down the flanks of the floating cliffs. Occasionally, one of them would dive headlong into the mountain of foam and disappear completely from sight.

Kon-Tiki was moving only slowly with respect to the cloud layer below; it would be at least three hours before she was above those ephemeral hills. She was in a race with the Sun; Falcon hoped that darkness would not fall before he could get a good view of the mantas, as he had christened them, as well as the fragile landscape over which they flapped their way.

It was a long three hours; during the whole time, he kept the external microphones on full gain, wondering if here was the source of that booming in the night. The mantas were certainly large enough to have produced it; when he could get an accurate measurement, he discovered that they were almost 100 meters across the wings. That was

three times the length of the largest whale—though he doubted if they could weigh more than a few tons.

Half an hour before sunset, *Kon-Tiki* was almost above the "mountains."

"No," said Falcon, answering Mission Control's repeated questions about the mantas. "They're still showing no reaction to me. I don't think they're intelligent—they look like harmless vegetarians. And even if they try to chase me—I'm sure they can't reach my altitude."

Yet he was a little disappointed when the mantas showed not the slightest interest in him as he sailed high above their feeding ground. Perhaps they had no way of detecting his presence; when he examined and photographed them through the telescope, he could see no signs of any sense organs. The creatures were merely huge black deltas rippling over hills and valleys that, in reality, were little more substantial than the clouds of Earth. Though they looked so solid, Falcon knew that anyone who stepped on those white mountains would go crashing through them as if they were made of tissue paper.

At close quarters, he could see the myriads of cellules or bubbles from which they were formed. Some of these were quite large—a meter or so in diameter—and Falcon wondered in what witch's caldron of hydrocarbons they had been brewed. There must be enough petrochemicals deep down in the atmosphere of Jupiter to supply all Earth's needs for 1,000,000 years.

The short day had almost gone when he passed over the crest of the waxen hills and the light was fading rapidly along their lower slopes. There were no mantas on this western side and for some reason, the topography was very different. The foam was sculpted into long, level terraces, like the interior of a lunar crater. He could almost imagine that they were gigantic steps leading down to the hidden surface of the planet.

And on the lowest of those steps, just clear of the swirling clouds that the mountain had displaced when it came surging skyward, was a roughly oval mass two or

three kilometers across. It was difficult to see, being only a little darker than the gray-white foam on which it rested. Falcon's first reaction was that he was looking at a forest of pallid trees, like giant mushrooms that had never seen the Sun.

Yes, it must be a forest—he could see hundreds of thin trunks springing from the white, waxy froth in which they were rooted. But the trees were packed astonishingly close together; there was scarcely any space between them. Perhaps it was not a forest after all but a single enormous tree—like one of the giant, multiple-trunked banyans of the East. He had once seen, in Java, a banyan tree 200 meters across; this monster was at least ten times that size.

The light had almost gone; the cloudscape had turned purple with refracted sunlight and in a few seconds that, too, would have vanished. In the very last light of his second day on Jupiter. Howard Falcon saw—or thought he saw—something that cast the gravest doubts on his interpretation of the white oval.

Unless the dim light had totally deceived him, those hundreds of thin trunks were beating back and forth, in perfect synchronism, like fronds of kelp rocking in the surge.

And the tree was no longer in the place where he had first seen it.

"Sorry about this," said Mission Control soon after sunset, "but we think Source Beta is going to blow within the next hour. Probability seventy percent."

Falcon glanced quickly at the chart. Beta—Jupiter latitude 140 degrees—was 30,000 kilometers away and well below his horizon. Even though major eruptions ran as high as ten megatons, he was much too far away for the shock wave to be a serious danger. The radio storm that it would trigger was, however, quite a different matter.

The decameter outbursts that sometimes made Jupiter the most powerful radio source in the whole sky had been discovered back in the 1950's, to the utter astonishment of the astronomers. Now, more than a century later, their real

cause was still a mystery. Only the symptoms were understood; the explanation was completely unknown.

The "volcano" theory had best stood the test of time—although no one imagined that this word had the same meaning on Jupiter as on Earth. At frequent intervals—often several times a day—titanic eruptions occurred in the lower depths of the atmosphere, probably on the hidden surface of the planet itself. A great column of gas, more than 1,000 kilometers high, would start boiling upward, as if determined to escape into space.

Against the most powerful gravitational field of all the planets, it had no chance. Yet some traces—a mere few million tons—usually managed to reach the Jovian ionosphere; and when they did, all hell broke loose.

The radiation belts surrounding Jupiter completely dwarf the feeble Van Allen belts of Earth. When they are short-circuited by an ascending column of gas, the result is an electrical discharge millions of times more powerful than any terrestrial flash of lightning; it sends a colossal thunderclap of radio noise flooding across the entire Solar System—and on out to the stars.

It had been discovered that these radio outbursts came from four main areas of the planet; perhaps there were weaknesses here that allowed the fires of the interior to break out from time to time. The scientists on Ganymede, largest of Jupiter's many moons, now thought that they could predict the onset of a decameter storm; their accuracy was about as good as a weather forecaster's of the early 1900's.

Falcon did not know whether to welcome or to fear a radio storm; it would certainly add to the value of the mission—if he survived it. His course had been planned to keep as far as possible from the main centers of disturbance, especially the most active one, Source Alpha. As luck would have it, the threatening Beta was the closest to him; he hoped that 30,000 kilometers—almost the circumference of Earth—was a safe enough distance.

"Probability ninety percent," said Mission Control with

a distinct note of urgency. "And forget that hour. Ganymede says it may be any moment."

The radio had scarcely fallen silent when the reading on the magnetic-field-strength meter started to shoot upward. Before it could go off-scale, it reversed and began to drop as rapidly as it had risen. Far away and thousands of kilometers below, something had given the planet's molten core a titanic jolt.

"There she blows!" called Mission Control.

"Thanks—I already know. When will the storm hit me?"

"You can expect onset in five minutes. Peak in ten."

Far around the curve of Jupiter, a funnel of gas as wide as the Pacific Ocean was climbing spaceward at thousands of kilometers an hour. Already, the thunderstorms of the lower atmosphere would be raging around it—but they were as nothing to the fury that would explode when the radiation belt was reached and it began dumping its surplus electrons onto the planet. Falcon began to retract all the instrument booms that were extended out from the capsule; there were no other precautions he could take. It would be four hours before the atmospheric shock wave reached him—but the radio blast, traveling at the speed of light, would be here in a tenth of a second once the discharge had been triggered.

The radio monitor, scanning back and forth across the spectrum, still showed nothing unusual—just the normal mush of background static. Then Falcon noticed that the noise level was slowly creeping upward. The explosion was gathering its strength.

At such a distance, he had never expected to *see* anything. But suddenly a flicker as of far-off heat lightning danced along the eastern horizon. Simultaneously, half the circuit breakers jumped out of the main switchboard, the lights failed and all communications channels went dead.

He tried to move but was completely unable to do so. The paralysis that gripped him was not merely psy-

chological; he seemed to have lost all control of his limbs and could feel a painful tingling sensation over his entire body. It was impossible that the electric field could have penetrated into this shielded cabin—yet there was a flickering glow over the instrument board and he could hear the unmistakable crackle of a brush discharge.

With a series of sharp bangs, the emergency systems operated and the overloads reset themselves. The lights flickered on again and Falcon's paralysis disappeared as swiftly as it had come. After glancing at the board to make sure that all circuits were back to normal, he moved quickly to the viewing ports.

There was no need to switch on the inspection lamps—the cables supporting the capsule seemed to be on fire. Lines of light, glowing an electric blue against the darkness, stretched upward from the main lift ring to the equator of the giant balloon; and rolling slowly along several of them were dazzling balls of fire.

The sight was so strange and so beautiful that it was hard to read any menace in it. Few people, Falcon knew, had ever seen ball lightning from such close quarters—and certainly none had survived if they were riding a hydrogen-filled balloon back in the atmosphere of Earth. He remembered the flaming death of the *Hindenburg,* destroyed by a stray spark when she docked at Lakehurst in 1937; as it had done so often in the past, the horrifying old newsreel film flashed through his mind. But at least that could not happen here, though there was more hydrogen above his head than had ever filled the last of the zeppelins. It would be a few billion years yet before anyone could light a fire in the atmosphere of Jupiter.

With a sound like briskly frying bacon, the speech circuit came back to life.

"Hello, *Kon-Tiki*—are you receiving? Are you receiving?"

The words were chopped and badly distorted but in-

telligible. Falcon's spirits lifted; he had resumed contact with the world of men.

"I receive you," he said. "Quite an electrical display, but no damage—so far."

"Thanks—thought we'd lost you. Please check telemetry channels three, seven, twenty-six. Also gain on camera two. And we don't quite believe the readings on the external ionization probes."

Reluctantly, Falcon tore his gaze away from the fascinating pyrotechnic display around *Kon-Tiki*, though from time to time he kept glancing out the windows. The ball lightning disappeared first, the fiery globes slowly expanding until they reached a critical size, at which they vanished in a gentle explosion. But for an hour later, there were still faint glows around all the exposed metal on the outside of the capsule; and the radio circuits remained noisy until well after midnight.

The remaining hours of darkness were completely uneventful—until just before dawn. Because it came from the east, Falcon assumed that he was seeing the first faint hint of sunrise. Then he realized that it was still twenty minutes too early for it—and the glow that had appeared along the horizon was moving toward him even as he watched. It swiftly detached itself from the arch of stars that marked the invisible edge of the planet and he saw that it was a relatively narrow band, quite sharply defined. The beam of an enormous searchlight appeared to be swinging beneath the clouds.

Perhaps 100 kilometers behind the first racing bar of light came another, parallel to it and moving at the same speed. And beyond that another, and another—until all the sky flickered with alternating sheets of light and darkness.

By this time, Falcon thought, he had been inured to wonders and it seemed impossible that this display of pure, soundless luminosity could present the slightest danger. But it was so astonishing and so inexplicable that he felt cold naked fear gnawing at his self-control. No man could look upon such a sight without feeling a helpless pygmy, in

the presence of forces beyond his comprehension. Was it possible that, after all, Jupiter carried not only life but intelligence? And, perhaps, an intelligence that only now was beginning to react to his alien presence.

"Yes, we see it," said Mission Control in a voice that echoed his own awe. "We've no idea what it is. Stand by—we're calling Ganymede."

The display was slowly fading; the bands racing in from the far horizon were much fainter, as if the energies that powered them were becoming exhausted. In five minutes, it was all over; the last faint pulse of light flickered along the western sky and then was gone. Its passing left Falcon with an overwhelming sense of relief. The sight was so hypnotic and so disturbing that it was not good for any man's peace of mind to contemplate it too long.

He was more shaken than he cared to admit. The electrical storm was something that he could understand, but *this* was totally incomprehensible.

Mission Control was still silent. Falcon knew that the information banks up on Ganymede were now being searched while men and computers turned their minds to the problem. If no answer could be found there, it would be necessary to call Earth; that would mean a delay of almost an hour. The possibility that even Earth might be unable to help was one that Falcon did not care to contemplate.

He had never before been so glad to hear the voice of Mission Control as when Dr. Brenner finally came on the circuit. The biologist sounded relieved—yet subdued, like a man who had just come through some great intellectual crisis.

"Hello, *Kon-Tiki*. We've solved your problem, but we can still hardly believe it.

"What you've been seeing is bioluminescence—very similar to that produced by microorganisms in the tropical seas of Earth. Here they're in the atmosphere, not the ocean, but the principle is the same."

"But the pattern," protested Falcon, "It was so

regular—so *artificial.* And it was hundreds of kilometers across!"

"It was even larger than you imagine—you observed only a small part of it. The whole pattern was five thousand kilometers wide and looked like a revolving wheel. You merely saw the spokes, sweeping past you at about a kilometer a second——"

"A *second,*" Falcon could not help interjecting. "No animals could move that fast!"

"Of course not—let me explain. What you saw was triggered by the shock wave from Source Beta, moving at the speed of sound."

"But what about the pattern?" Falcon insisted.

"That's the surprising part. It's a very rare phenomenon, but identical wheels of light—except that they're a thousand times smaller—have been observed in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Listen to this: British India Company's Patna, Persian Gulf, May, 1880, eleven thirty p.m.—'An enormous luminous wheel, whirling round, the spokes of which appeared to brush the ship along. The spokes were two hundred or three hundred yards long . . . each wheel contained about sixteen spokes. . . .' And here's one from the Gulf of Oman, dated 23 May, 1906: 'The intensely bright luninescence approached us rapidly, shooting sharply defined light rays to the west in rapid succession, like the beam from the searchlight of a warship. . . . To the left of us, a gigantic fiery wheel formed itself, with spokes that reached as far as one could see. The whole wheel whirled around for two or three minutes.' The archive computer on Ganymede dug up about five hundred cases—it would have printed out the lot if we hadn't stopped it in time."

"I'm convinced—but still baffled."

"I don't blame you; the full explanation wasn't worked out until late in the twentieth century. It seems that these luminous wheels are the results of submarine earthquakes and always occur in shallow waters, where the

shock waves can be reflected and cause standard wave patterns. Sometimes bars—sometimes rotating wheels—the 'Wheels of Poseidon,' they've been called. The theory was finally proved by making underwater explosions and photographing the results from a satellite. No wonder sailors used to be superstitious. Who would have believed a thing like *this?*"

So that was it, Falcon told himself. When Source Beta blew its top, it must have sent shock waves in all directions—through the compressed gas of the lower atmosphere, through the solid body of Jupiter itself. Meeting and crisscrossing, those waves must have canceled here, reinforced there; the whole planet must have rung like a bell.

Yet the explanation did not destroy the sense of wonder and awe; he would never be able to forget those flickering bands of light racing through the unattainable depths of the Jovian atmosphere. He felt that he was not merely on a strange planet but in some magical realm between myth and reality.

This was a world where absolutely *anything* could happen and no man could possibly guess what the future would bring.

And he still had a whole day to go.

MEDUSA

When the true dawn finally arrived, it brought a sudden change of weather. *Kon-Tiki* was moving through a blizzard; waxen snowflakes were falling so thickly that visibility was reduced to zero. Falcon began to worry about the weight that might be accumulating on the envelope; then he noticed that any flakes settling outside the windows quickly disappeared. *Kon-Tiki*'s continuous outpouring of heat was evaporating them as swiftly as they arrived.

If he had been ballooning on Earth, he would also have

worried about the possibility of collision. That, at least, was no danger here; any Jovian mountains were several hundred kilometers below him. And as for the floating islands of foam, hitting them would probably be like plowing into slightly hardened soap bubbles.

Nevertheless, he switched on the horizontal radar, which until now had been completely useless; only the vertical beam, giving his distance from the invisible surface, so far had been of any value. And then he had another surprise.

Scattered across a huge sector of the sky ahead were dozens of large and brilliant echoes. They were completely isolated from one another and hung apparently unsupported in space. Falcon suddenly remembered a phrase that the earliest aviators had used to describe one of the hazards of their profession—"clouds stuffed with rocks." That was a perfect description of what seemed to lie in the track of *Kon-Tiki.*

It was a disconcerting sight; then Falcon again reminded himself that nothing *really* solid could possibly hover in this atmosphere. Perhaps it was some strange meteorological phenomenon—and, in any case, the nearest echo was over 200 kilometers away.

He reported to Mission Control, which could provide no explanation. But it gave the welcome news that he would be clear of the blizzard in another 30 minutes.

It did not warn him, however, of the violent cross wind that abruptly grabbed *Kon-Tiki* and swept it almost at right angles to its previous track. Falcon needed all his skill and the maximum use of what little control he had over his ungainly vehicle to prevent it from being capsized. Within minutes, he was racing northward at 500 kilometers an hour; then, as suddenly as it had started, the turbulence ceased; he was still moving at high speed but in smooth air. He wondered if he had been caught in the Jovian equivalent of a jet stream.

Then the snowstorm suddenly dissolved and he saw what Jupiter had been preparing for him.

Kon-Tiki had entered the funnel of a gigantic whirlpool, at least 300 kilometers across. The balloon was being swept along a curving wall of cloud; overhead, the Sun was shining in a clear sky, but far beneath, this great hole in the atmosphere drilled down to unknown depths, until it reached a misty floor where lightning flickered almost continuously.

Though the vessel was being dragged downward so slowly that it was in no immediate danger, Falcon increased the flow of heat into the envelope, until *Kon-Tiki* hovered at a constant altitude. Not until then did he abandon the fantastic spectacle outside and consider again the problem of the radar.

The nearest echo was now only 40 kilometers away—and all of them, he quickly realized, were distributed along the wall of the vortex; they were moving with it, apparently caught in the whirlpool like *Kon-Tiki* itself. He aimed the telescope along the radar bearing and found himself looking at a curious mottled cloud that almost filled the field of view.

It was not easy to see, being only a little darker than the whirling wall of mist that formed its background. Not until he had been staring for several minutes did Falcon realize that he had met it once before.

The first time, it had been crawling across the drifting mountains of foam and he had mistaken it for a giant, many-trunked tree. Now at last he could appreciate its real size and complexity and he could give it a better name to fix its image in his mind. It did not resemble a tree at all but a jellyfish—a medusa, such as might be met trailing its tentacles as it drifted along the warm eddies of the Gulf Stream.

This medusa was two kilometers across and its scores of dangling tentacles were hundreds of meters long. They swayed slowly back and forth in perfect unison, taking more than a minute for each complete undulation—almost

as if the creature were clumsily rowing itself through the sky.

The other echoes were more distant medusae; Falcon turned the telescope on half a dozen and could see no variations in shape or size. They all seemed to be of the same species and he wondered just why they were drifting lazily around in this 1,000-kilometer orbit. Perhaps they were feeding upon the aerial plankton sucked in by the whirlpool—as *Kon-Tiki* itself had been.

"Do you realize, Howard," said Dr. Brenner when he had recovered from his initial astonishment, "that this thing is about a hundred thousand times as large as the biggest whale? And even if it's only a gasbag it must still weigh a million tons! I can't even guess at its metabolism; it must generate megawatts of heat to maintain its buoyancy."

"But if it's just a gasbag, why is it such a damn good radar reflector?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Can you get any closer?"

Brenner's question was not an idle one; if Falcon changed altitude to take advantage of the differing wind velocities, he could approach the medusa as closely as he wished. At the moment, he preferred his present 40 kilometers and said so, firmly.

"I see what you mean," Brenner answered a little reluctantly. "Let's stay where we are for the present." That "we" gave Falcon a certain wry amusement; an extra 100,000 kilometers made a considerable difference to one's point of view.

For the next two hours, *Kon-Tiki* drifted uneventfully in the gyre of the great whirlpool, while Falcon experimented with filters and camera contrast, trying to get a clear view of the medusa. He began to wonder if its elusive coloration were some kind of camouflage; perhaps, like many animals of Earth, it was trying to lose itself against its background. That was a trick used both by hunters and by the hunted.

In which category was the medusa? That was a question

he could hardly expect to have answered in the short time that was left to him. Yet just before noon, without the slightest warning, the answer came.

Like a squadron of antique jet fighters, five mantas came sweeping through the wall of mist that formed the funnel of the vortex. They were flying in a V formation, directly toward the pallid gray cloud of the medusa—and there was no doubt, in Falcon's mind, that they were on the attack. He had been quite wrong to assume that they were harmless vegetarians.

Yet everything happened at such a leisurely pace that it was like watching a slow-motion film. The mantas undulated along at perhaps 50 kilometers an hour; it seemed ages before they reached the medusa, which continued to paddle imperturbably along at an even slower speed. Huge though they were, the mantas looked tiny beside the monster they were approaching; when they flapped down onto its back, they appeared about as large as birds landing on a whale.

Could the medusa defend itself? Falcon wondered. As long as they avoided those huge, clumsy tentacles, he did not see how the attacking mantas could be in any danger. And perhaps their host was not even aware of them; they could be insignificant parasites, as tolerated as fleas upon a dog.

But now it was obvious that the medusa was in distress. With agonizing slowness. it began to tip over, like a capsizing ship. After ten minutes, it had tilted 45 degrees; it was also rapidly losing altitude. It was impossible not to feel a sense of pity for the beleaguered monster, and to Howard Falcon the sight brought bitter memories. In a grotesque way, the fall of the medusa was almost a parody of the dying *Queen*'s last moments.

Yet he knew that his sympathies were on the wrong side. High intelligence could only develop among predators—not among the drifting browsers of either sea or air. The mantas were far closer to him than was this

monstrous bag of gas; and anyway, who could *really* sympathize with a creature 100,000 times larger than a whale?

Then he noticed that the medusa's tactics seemed to be having some effect. The mantas had been disturbed by its slow roll and were flapping heavily away from its back—like gorged vultures interrupted at mealtime. But they did not move very far, continuing to hover a few meters from the still capsizing monster.

There was a sudden, blinding flash of light, synchronized with a crash of static over the radio. One of the mantas, slowly twisting end over end, was plummeting straight downward. As it fell, it trailed behind it a smoky black plume. Though there could be no fire, the resemblance to an aircraft going down in flames was quite uncanny.

In unison, the remaining mantas dived steeply away from the medusa, gaining speed by losing altitude. Within minutes, they had vanished back into the wall of cloud from which they had emerged. And the medusa, no longer falling, began to roll back toward the horizontal. Soon it was sailing along once more on an even keel, as if nothing had happened.

"Beautiful!" said Dr. Brenner after a moment of stunned silence. "It's developed electric defenses—like some of our eels and rays. But that must have been about a million volts! Can you see any organs that might produce the discharge? Anything looking like electrodes?"

"No," Falcon answered, after switching to the highest power of the telescope. "But here's something odd. Do you see this pattern? Check back on the earlier images—I'm sure it wasn't there before."

A broad, mottled band had appeared along the side of the medusa. It formed a startlingly regular checkerboard, each square of which was itself speckled in a complex subpattern of short horizontal lines. They were spaced equal distances apart, in a geometrically perfect array of rows and columns.

"You're right," said Dr. Brenner, and now there was

something very much like awe in his voice. "That's just appeared. And I'm afraid to tell you what I think it is."

"Well, I have no reputation to lose—at least as a biologist. Shall I give my guess?"

"Go ahead."

"That's a large meter-band radio array. The sort of thing they used back at the beginning of the twentieth century."

"I was afraid you'd say that. Now we know why it gave such a massive echo."

"But why has it just appeared?"

"Probably an aftereffect of the discharge."

"I've just had another thought," said Falcon rather slowly. "Do you suppose it's *listening* to us?"

"On this frequency? I doubt it. Those are meter—no, *decameter* antennas, judging by their size. Hmm . . . that's an idea!"

Dr. Brenner fell silent, obviously contemplating some new line of thought. Presently, he continued: "I bet they're tuned to the radio outbursts! That's something nature never got round to doing on Earth. We have animals with sonar and even electric senses, but nothing ever developed a radio sense. Why bother, where there was so much light?

"But it's different here. Jupiter is *drenched* with radio energy. It's worthwhile using it—maybe even tapping it. That thing could be a floating power plant!"

A new voice cut into the conversation.

"Mission Commander here. This is all very interesting—but there's a much more important matter to settle. *Is it intelligent?* If so, we've got to consider the First Contact directives."

"Until I came here," said Dr. Brenner somewhat ruefully, "I would have sworn that anything that can make a shortwave antenna system *must* be intelligent. Now I'm not sure. This could have evolved naturally. I suppose it's no more fantastic than the human eye."

"Then we have to play safe and assume intelligence. For the present, therefore, this expedition comes under all the

clauses of the Prime Directive."

There was a long silence while everyone on the radio circuit absorbed the implications of this. For the first time in the history of space flight, the rules that had been established through more than a century of argument might have to be applied. Man had—it was hoped—profited from his mistakes on Earth. Not only moral considerations but his own self-interest demanded that he should not repeat them among the planets. It could be disastrous to treat a superior intelligence as the American settlers had treated the red Indians or as almost everyone had treated the Africans.

The first rule was: Keep your distance—make no attempt to approach nor even to communicate until "they" have had plenty of time to study you. Exactly what was meant by plenty of time no one had ever been able to decide; it was left to the discretion of the man on the spot.

A responsibility of which he had never dreamed had descended upon Howard Falcon. In the few hours that remained to him on Jupiter, he might become the first ambassador of the human race.

And *that* was an irony so delicious that he almost wished the surgeons had restored to him the power of laughter.

PRIME DIRECTIVE

It was growing darker, but Falcon scarcely noticed as he strained his eyes toward that living cloud in the field of the telescope. The wind that was still sweeping *Kon-Tiki* steadily around the funnel of the great whirlpool had now brought him within 20 kilometers of the creature; if he got much closer than 10 he would take evasive action. Though he felt certain that the medusa's electric weapons were short-ranged, he did not wish to put the matter to the test. That would be a problem for future explorers, and he wished them luck.

Now it was quite dark in the capsule—and that was strange because sunset was still hours away. Automatically, he glanced at the horizontally scanning radar, as he had done every few minutes. Apart from the medusa he was studying, there was no other object within 100 kilometers of him.

Suddenly, with startling power, he heard the sound that had come booming out of the Jovian night—the throbbing beat that grew more and more rapid, then stopped mid-crescendo. The whole capsule vibrated with it, like a pea in a kettledrum.

Howard Falcon realized two things almost simultaneously, during the sudden, aching silence. *This* time, the sound was not coming from thousands of kilometers away, over a radio circuit. It was in the very atmosphere around him.

The second thought was even more disturbing. He had quite forgotten—it was inexcusable, but there had been other apparently more important things on his mind—that most of the sky above him was completely blanked out by *Kon-Tiki*'s gasbag. Being lightly silvered to conserve its heat, the great balloon was an effective shield both to radar and to vision.

He had known this, of course; it had been a minor defect of the design, tolerated because it did not appear important. It seemed very important to Howard Falcon now—as he saw that fence of gigantic tentacles, thicker than the trunks of any tree, descending all around the capsule.

He heard Brenner yelling: "Remember the Prime Directive! Don't alarm it!" Before he could make an appropriate answer, that overwhelming drumbeat started again and drowned all other sounds.

The sign of a really skilled test pilot is how he reacts not to foreseeable emergencies but to ones that nobody could have anticipated. Falcon did not hesitate for more than a second to analyze the situation; then, in a lightning-swift movement, he pulled the rip cord.

That word was an archaic survival from the days of the first hydrogen balloons; on *Kon-Tiki,* the rip cord did not tear open the gasbag but merely operated a set of louvers round the upper curve of the envelope. At once, the hot gas started to rush out; *Kon-Tiki,* deprived of her lift, began to fall swiftly in this gravity field two and a half times as strong as Earth's.

Falcon had a momentary glimpse of great tentacles whipping upward and away; he had just time to note that they were studded with large bladders or sacs, presumably to give them buoyancy, and that they ended in multitudes of thin feelers like the roots of a plant. He half expected a bolt of lightning, but nothing happened.

His precipitous rate of descent was slackening as the atmosphere thickened and the deflated envelope acted as a parachute. *Kon Tiki* had dropped more than three kilometers; it should be safe to close the louvers again. By the time he had restored buoyancy and was in equilibrium once more, he had lost another two kilometers of altitude and was getting dangerously near his safety limit.

He peered anxiously through the overhead windows, though he did not expect to see anything except the obscuring bulk of the balloon. But he had side-slipped during his descent and part of the medusa was just visible a couple of kilometers above him. It was much closer than he expected—and it was still coming down, faster than he would have believed possible.

Mission Control was calling anxiously; he shouted, "I'm OK—but it's still coming after me. I can't go any deeper."

That was not quite true. He could go a lot deeper—about 300 kilometers. But it would be a one-way trip and most of the journey would be of little interest to him.

Then, to his great relief, he saw that the medusa was leveling off about a kilometer above him. Perhaps it had decided to approach this strange intruder with caution—or perhaps it, too, found this deeper layer uncomfortably hot. The temperature was over 50 degrees and Falcon won-

dered how much longer his life-support system could handle matters.

Dr. Brenner was back on the circuit, still worrying about the Prime Directive.

"Remember—it may only be inquisitive!" he cried without much conviction. "Try not to frighten it!"

Falcon was getting rather tired of this advice and recalled a TV discussion he had once seen between a space lawyer and an astronaut. After the full implications of the Prime Directive had been carefully spelled out, the incredulous spacer had exclaimed: "So, if there were no alternative, I must sit still and let myself be eaten?" The lawyer had not even cracked a smile when he answered: "That's an *excellent* summing up."

It had seemed funny at the time; it was not at all amusing now.

And then Falcon saw something that made him even more unhappy. The medusa was still hovering a kilometer above him—but one of its tentacles was becoming incredibly elongated and was stretching down toward *Kon-Tiki,* thinning out at the same time. As a boy, he had once seen the funnel of a tornado descending from a storm cloud over the Kansas plains; the thing coming toward him now evoked vivid memories of that black, twisting snake in the sky.

"I'm rapidly running out of options," he reported to Mission Control. "I now have only a choice between frightening it and giving it a bad stomach-ache. I don't think it will find *Kon-Tiki* very digestible, if that's what it has in mind."

He waited for comments from Brenner, but the biologist remained silent.

"Very well—it's twenty-seven minutes ahead of time, but I'm starting the ignition sequencer. I hope I'll have enough reserve to correct my orbit later."

He could no longer see the medusa; it was directly overhead once more. But he knew that the descending ten-

tacle must now be very close to the balloon. It would take almost five minutes to bring the reactor up to full thrust.

The fusor was primed. The orbit computer had not rejected the situation as wholly impossible. The air scoops were open, ready to gulp in tons of the surrounding hydrohelium on demand. Even under optimum conditions, this would have been the moment of truth—for there had been no way of testing how a nuclear ram jet would *really* work in the strange atmosphere of Jupiter.

Very gently, something rocked *Kon-Tiki,* Falcon tried to ignore it.

Ignition had been planned 10 kilometers higher than this, in an atomosphere of less than a quarter of the density—and 30 degrees cooler. Too bad.

What was the shallowest dive he could get away with for the air scoops to work? When the ram ignited, he'd be heading *toward* Jupiter, with two and a half *g* to help him get there. Could he possibly pull out in time?

A large, heavy hand patted the balloon. The whole vessel bobbed up and down, like one of the yo-yos that had just become the craze back on Earth.

Of course, Brenner *might* be perfectly right. Perhaps it was just trying to be friendly. Maybe he should try to talk to it over the radio. Which should it be: "Pretty pussy"? "Down, Fido!"? or "Take me to your leader"?

The tritium-deuterium ratio was correct. He was ready to light the candle, with a 100,000,000-degree match.

The thin tip of the tentacle came slithering round the edge of the balloon, only 20 meters away. It was about the size of an elephant's trunk and by the delicate way it was moving, appeared to be almost as sensitive. There were little palps at its very end, like questing mouths. He was sure that Dr. Brenner would be fascinated.

This seemed about as good a time as any. He gave a swift scan of the entire control board, started the final four-second ignition count, broke the safety seal and pressed the jettison switch.

There was a sharp explosion and an instant loss of weight, *Kon-Tiki* was falling freely, nose down. Overhead, the discarded balloon was racing upward, dragging the inquisitive tentacle with it. Falcon had no time to see if the gasbag actually hit the medusa, because at that moment the ram jet fired and he had other matters to think about.

A roaring column of hot hydrohelium was pouring out of the reactor nozzles, swiftly building up thrust—but *toward* Jupiter, not away from it. He could not pull out yet, for vector control was too sluggish. Unless he could gain complete control and achieve horizontal flight within the next 5 seconds, the vehicle would dive too deeply into the atmosphere and would be destroyed.

With agonizing slowness—those 5 seconds seemed like 50—he managed to flatten out, then pull the nose upward. He glanced back only once and caught a final glimpse of the medusa many kilometers away. *Kon-Tiki*'s discarded gasbag had apparently escaped from its grasp, for he could see no sign of it.

Now he was master once more—no longer drifting helplessly on the winds of Jupiter but riding his own column of atomic fire back to the stars. The ram jet would steadily give him velocity and altitude, until he had reached near orbital speed at the fringes of the atmosphere. Then, with a brief burst of pure rocket power, he would retain the freedom of space.

Halfway to orbit, he looked south and saw the tremendous enigma of the Great Red Spot—that floating island twice the size of Earth—coming up over the horizon. He stared into its mysterious beauty until the computer warned him that conversion to rocket thrust was only 60 seconds ahead, then tore his gaze reluctantly away.

"Some other time," he murmured.

"What's that?" said Mission Control. "What did you say?"

"It doesn't matter," he replied.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

"You're a hero now, Howard," said Webster, "not just a celebrity. You've given them something to think about—injected some excitement into their lives. Not one in a million will actually travel to the Outer Giants—but the whole human race will go in imagination. And that's what counts."

"I'm glad to have made your job a little easier."

Webster was too old a friend to take offense at the note of irony. Yet it surprised him; this was not the first change in Howard that he had noticed since the return from Jupiter.

The administrator pointed to the famous sign on his desk, borrowed from an impresario of an earlier age: "Astonish me!"

"I'm not ashamed of my job. New knowledge, new resources—they're all very well. But men also need novelty and excitement. Space travel has become routine; you've made it a great adventure once more. It will be a long, long time before we get Jupiter pigeonholed. And maybe longer still before we understand those medusae. I still think that one *knew* where your blind spot was. Anyway, have you decided on your next move? Saturn, Uranus, Neptune—you name it."

"I don't know. I've thought about Saturn, but I'm not really needed there. It's only one gravity, not two and a half like Jupiter. So men can handle it."

Men, thought Webster. He said men. He's never done that before. And when did I last hear him use the word "we"? He's changing—slipping away from us.

"Well," he said aloud, rising from his chair to conceal his slight uneasiness, "Let's get the conference started. The cameras are all set up and everyone's waiting. You'll meet a lot of old friends.

He stressed the last word, but Howard showed no

response; the leathery mask of his face was becoming more and more difficult to read. Instead, he rolled back from the administrator's desk, unlocked his undercarriage so that it no longer formed a chair and rose on his hydraulics to his full seven feet of height. It had been good psychology on the part of the surgeons to give him that extra 12 inches as some compensation for all else that he had lost when the *Queen* had crashed.

He waited until Webster had opened the door, then pivoted neatly on his balloon tires and headed for it at a smooth and silent 30 kilometers an hour. The display of speed and precision was not flaunted arrogantly; already, it was quite unconscious.

Howard Falcon, who had once been a man and could still pass for one over a voice circuit, felt a calm sense of achievement—and, for the first time in years, something like peace of mind. Since his return from Jupiter, the nightmares had ceased. He had found his role at last.

He knew now why he had dreamed about that superchimp aboard the doomed *Queen Elizabeth.* Neither man nor beast, it was between two worlds; and so was he.

He alone could travel unprotected on the lunar surface; the life-support system inside the metal cylinder that had replaced his fragile body functioned equally well in space or under water. Gravity fields ten times that of Earth were an inconvenience but nothing more. And no gravity was best of all.

The human race was becoming more remote from him, the ties of kinship more tenuous. Perhaps these air-breathing, radiation-sensitive bundles of unstable carbon compounds had no right beyond the atmosphere; they should stick to their natural homes—Earth, Moon, Mars.

Someday, the real masters of space would be machines, not men—and he was neither. Already conscious of his destiny, he took a somber pride in his unique loneliness—the first immortal, midway between two orders of creation.

He would, after all, be an ambassador; between the old and the new—between the creatures of carbon and the creatures of metal who must one day supersede them.

Both would have need of him in the troubled centuries that lay ahead.

THE GENIUS

DONALD BARTHELME

He has been called "the master experimentalist of his genre" and "a worthy successor to Kafka." High praise indeed for a writer still looking forward to his fortieth birthday, yet Barthelme well deserves the acclaim. It is a great pleasure to discover that his experimentation has taken him into the realm of science fiction with this compact, highly polished gem of a story about a man who is above all other men.

His assistants cluster about him. He is severe with them, demanding, punctilious, but this is for their own ultimate

benefit. He devises hideously difficult problems, or complicates their work with sudden oblique comments that open whole new areas of investigation—yawning chasms under his feet. It is as if he wishes to place them in situations where only failure is possible. But failure, too, is a part of mental life. "I will make you failure-proof," he says jokingly. His assistants pale.

Is it true, as Valéry said, that every man of genius contains within himself a false man of genius?

"This is an age of personal ignorance. No one knows what others know. No one knows enough."

The genius is afraid to fly. The giant aircraft seem to him . . . *flimsy*. He hates the takeoff and he hates the landing and he detests being in the air. He hates the food, the stewardesses, the voice of the captain, and his fellow-passengers, especially those who are conspicuously at ease, who remove their coats, loosen their ties, and move up and down the aisles with a drink in their hands. In consequence, he rarely travels. The world comes to him.

Q: What do you consider the most important tool of the genius of today?
A: Rubber cement.

He has urged that America be divided into four smaller countries. America, he says, is too big. "America does not look where it puts its foot," he says. This comment, which, coming from anyone else, would have engendered widespread indignation, is greeted with amused chuckles. The Chamber of Commerce sends him four cases of Teacher's Highland Cream.

The genius defines "inappropriate response":
"Suppose my friend telephones and asks, 'Is my wife there?' 'No,' I reply, 'they went out, your wife and my wife,

wearing new hats, they are giving themselves to sailors.' My friend is astounded at this news. 'But it's Election Day!' he cries. 'And it's beginning to rain!' I say."

The genius pays close attention to work being done in fields other than his own. He is well read in all of the sciences (with the exception of the social sciences); he follows the arts with a connoisseur's acuteness; he is an accomplished amateur musician. He jogs. He dislikes chess. He was once photographed playing tennis with the Marx Brothers.

He has devoted considerable thought to an attempt to define the sources of his genius. However, this attempt has led approximately nowhere. The mystery remains a mystery. He has therefore settled upon the following formula, which he repeats each time he is interviewed: "Historical forces."

The government has decided to award the genius a few new medals—medals he has not been previously awarded. One medal is awarded for his work prior to 1936, one for his work from 1936 to the present, and one for his future work.

"I think that this thing, my work, has made me, in a sense, what I am. The work possesses a consciousness which shapes that of the worker. The work flatters the worker. Only the strongest worker can do this work, the work says. You must be a fine fellow, that you can do this work. But disaffection is also possible. The worker grows careless. The worker pays slight regard to the work, he ignores the work, he flirts with other work, he is *unfaithful* to the work. The work is insulted. And perhaps it finds little ways of telling the worker. . . . The work slips in the hands of the worker—a little cut on the finger. You understand? The work becomes slow, sulky, consumes more time, becomes more tiring. The gaiety that once existed between the worker and the work has evaporated. A fine

situation! Don't you think?"

The genius has noticed that he does not interact with children successfully. (Anecdote)

Richness of the inner life of the genius:

(1) Manic-oceanic states
(2) Hatred of children
(3) Piano playing
(4) Subincised genitals
(5) Subscription to *Harper's Bazaar*
(6) Stamp collection

The genius receives a very flattering letter from the University of Minnesota. The university wishes to become the depository of his papers, after he is dead. A new wing of the Library will be built to house them.

The letter makes the genius angry. He takes a pair of scissors, cuts the letter into long thin strips, and mails it back to the Director of Libraries.

He takes long walks through the city streets, noting architectural details—particularly old ironwork. His mind is filled with ideas for a new—But at this moment a policeman approaches him. "Beg pardon, sir. Aren't you—" "Yes," the genius says, smiling. "My little boy is an admirer of yours," the policeman says. He pulls out a pocket notebook. "If it's not too much trouble . . ." Smiling, the genius signs his name.

The genius carries his most important papers about with him in a green Sears, Roebuck toolbox.

He did not win the Nobel Prize again this year.

It was neither the year of his country nor the year of his discipline. To console him, the National Foundation gives him a new house.

The genius meets with a group of students. The students tell the genius that the concept "genius" is not, currently, a popular one. Group effort, they say, is more socially productive than the isolated efforts of any one man, however gifted. Genius by its very nature sets itself over against the needs of the many. In answering its own imperatives, genius tends toward, even embraces, totalitarian forms of social organization. Tyranny of the gifted over the group, while producing some advances in the short run, inevitably produces a set of conditions which—

The genius smokes thoughtfully.

A giant brown pantechnicon disgorges the complete works of Thomas Aquinas, in all translations, upon the genius's lawn—a gift from the people of Cincinnati!

The genius is leafing through a magazine. Suddenly he is arrested by an advertisement:

WHY DON'T *YOU*
BECOME A
PROFESSIONAL
INTERIOR DECORATOR?

Interior decoration is a high-income field, the advertisement says. The work is varied and interesting. One moves in a world of fashion, creativity, and ever-new challenge.

The genius tears out the advertisement's coupon.

Q: Is America a good place for genius?
A: I have found America most hospitable to genius.

"I always say to myself, 'What is the most important thing I can be thinking about at this minute?' But then I don't think about it."

His driver's license expires. But he does nothing about renewing it. He is vaguely troubled by the thought of the

expired license (although he does not stop driving). But he loathes the idea of taking the examination again, of going physically to the examining station, of waiting in line for an examiner. He decides that if he writes a letter to the License Bureau requesting a new license, the bureau will grant him one without an examination, because he is a genius. He is right. He writes the letter and the License Bureau sends him a new license, by return mail.

In the serenity of his genius, the genius reaches out to right wrongs—the sewer systems of cities, for example.

The genius is reading *The Genius,* a 736-page novel by Theodore Dreiser. He arrives at the last page:

> ". . . What a sweet welter life is—how rich, how tender, how grim, how like a colorful symphony."
> Great art dreams welled up into his soul as he viewed the sparkling deeps of space . . .

The genius gets up and looks at himself in a mirror.

An organization has been formed to appreciate his thought: the Blaufox Gesellschaft. Meetings are held once a month, in a room over a cafeteria in Buffalo, New York. He has always refused to have anything to do with the Gesellschaft, which reminds him uncomfortably of the Browning Society. However, he cannot prevent himself from glancing at the group's twice-yearly *Proceedings,* which contains such sentences as "The imbuement of all reaches of the scholarly community with Blaufox's views must, *ab ovo,* be our . . ."
He falls into hysteria.

Moments of self-doubt . . .
"Am I really a—"
"What does it *mean* to be a—"
"Can one *refuse* to be a—"

His worst moment: He is in a church, kneeling in a pew near the back. He is gradually made aware of a row of nuns, a half-dozen, kneeling twenty feet ahead of him, their heads bent over their beads. One of the nuns however has turned her head almost completely around, and seems to be staring at him. The genius glances at her, glances away, then looks again: she is still staring at him. The genius is only visiting the church in the first place because the nave is said to be a particularly fine example of Burgundian Gothic. He places his eyes here, there, on the altar, on the stained glass, but each time they return to the nuns, *his* nun is still staring. The genius says to himself, *This is my worst moment.*

He is a drunk.

"A truly potent abstract concept avoids, resists closure. The ragged, blurred outlines of such a concept, like a net in which the fish have eaten large, gaping holes, permit entry and escape equally. What does one catch in such a net? The sea horse with a Monet in his mouth. How did the Monet get there? Is the value of the Monet less because it has gotten wet? Are there tooth marks in the Monet? Do sea horses have teeth? How large is the Monet? From which period? Is it a water lily or group of water lilies? Do sea horses eat water lilies? Does Parke-Bernet know? Do oil and water mix? Is a mixture of oil and water bad for the digestion of the sea horse? Should art be expensive? Should artists wear beards? Ought beards to be forbidden by law? Is underwater art better than overwater art? What does the expression 'glad rags' mean? Does it refer to Monet's paint rags? In the Paris of 1878, what was the average monthly rent for a north-lit, terrific studio in an unfashionable district?

"If sea horses eat water lilies, what percent of their daily work energy, expressed in ergs, is generated thereby? Should the holes in the net be mended? In a fight between a

sea horse and a flittermouse, which would you bet on? If I mend the net, will you forgive my sins? Are you empowered to forgive my sins? Are you empowered to bind and loose? What is on the flip side of the record in which you are heard binding and loosing? Do water rats chew upon the water lilies? Is there a water buffalo in the water cooler? If I fill my water gun to the waterline, can I then visit the watering place? Is fantasy an adequate substitute for correct behavior?"

The genius proposes a world inventory of genius, in order to harness and coordinate the efforts of genius everywhere to create a better life for all men.

Letters are sent out. . . .

The response is staggering!

Telegrams pour in. . . .

Geniuses of every stripe offer their cooperation.

The *Times* prints an editorial praising the idea. . . .

Three thousand geniuses in one room.

The genius falls into an ill humor. He refuses to speak to anyone for eight days.

But now a green Railway Express truck arrives at his door. It contains a field of stainless-steel tulips, courtesy of the Mayor and City Council of Houston, Texas. The genius signs the receipt, smiling. . . .

ANGOULEME

THOMAS M. DISCH

There is some hope for the future of SF with Tom Disch around, perhaps the best of the newer and younger writers. "The Asian Shore," his story in Best SF: 1970, *is rapidly on its way to becoming a classic. It is a pleasure to have him with us again this year with a look at the future of our favorite hate-love city, New York.*

There were seven Alexandrians involved in the Battery plot—Jack, who was youngest and from the Bronx, Celeste DiCecca, Sniffles and MaryJane, Tancred Miller, Amparo (of course), and *of course*, the leader and mastermind, Bill

Harper, better known as Little Mister Kissy Lips. Who was passionately, hopelessly in love with Amparo. Who was nearly thirteen (she would be, fully, by September this year), and breasts just beginning. Very very beautiful skin, like lucite, Amparo Martinez.

Their first, nothing operation was in the East 60's, a broker or something like that. All they netted was cufflinks, a watch, a leather satchel that wasn't leather after all, some buttons, and the usual lot of useless credit-cards. He stayed calm through the whole thing, even with Sniffles slicing off buttons and *soothing*. None of them had the nerve to ask, though they all wondered, how often he'd been through this scene before. What they were about wasn't an innovation. It was partly that, the need to innovate, that led them to think up the plot. The only really memorable part of the holdup was the name laminated on the cards, which was, weirdly enough, Lowen, Richard W. An omen (the connection being that they were all at the Alexander Lowen School), but of what?

Little Mister Kissy Lips kept the cufflinks for himself, gave the buttons to Amparo (who gave them to her uncle), and donated the rest (the watch was a piece of crap) to the Conversation booth outside the Plaza right where he lived.

His father was a TV executive. In, as he would quip, both senses. They had got married, his Mama and Papa, young and divorced soon after but not before he'd come to fill out their quota. Papa, the executive, remarried, a man this time and somewhat more happily. Anyhow it lasted long enough that the offspring, the leader and mastermind, had to learn to adjust to the situation, it being permanent. Mama simply went down to the Everglades and disappeared, sploosh.

In short, he was well-to-do. Which is how, more than by overwhelming talent, he got into the Lowen School in the first place. He had the right kind of body though, so with half a desire there was no reason in the city of New York he couldn't grow up to be a professional dancer, even a

choreographer. He'd have the connections for it, as Papa was fond of pointing out.

For the time being, however, his bent was literary and religious rather than balletic. He loved, and what seventh grader doesn't, the abstracter foxtrots and more metaphysical twists of a Dostoevsky, a Gide, a Mailer. He longed for the experience of some vivider pain than the mere daily hollowness knotted into his tight young belly, and no weekly stomp-and-holler of group therapy with other jejune eleven-year-olds was going to get him his stripes in the major leagues of suffering, crime and resurrection. Only a bona fide crime would do that, and of all the crimes available murder certainly carried the most prestige, as no less an authority than Loretta Couplard was ready to attest, Loretta Couplard being not only the director and co-owner of the Lowen School but the author, as well, of two nationally televised scripts, both about famous murders of the twentieth century. They'd even done a unit in social studies on the topic: A History of Crime in Urban America.

The first of Loretta's murders was a comedy involving Pauline Campbell, R.N., of Ann Arbor, Michigan, circa 1951, whose skull had been smashed by three drunken teenagers. They had meant to knock her unconscious so they could screw her, which was 1951 in a nutshell. The eighteen-year-olds, Bill Morey and Max Pell, got life; Dave Royal (Loretta's hero) was a year younger and got off with 22 years.

Her second murder was tragic in tone and consequently inspired more respect, though not among the critics, unfortunately. Possibly because her heroine, also a Pauline (Pauline Wichura), though more interesting and complicated, had also been more famous in her own day and ever since. Which made the competition, one best-selling novel and a serious film biography, considerably stiffer. Miss Wichura had been a welfare worker in Atlanta, Georgia, very much into environment and the population

problem, this being the immediate pre-Regents period when anyone and everyone was legitimately starting to fret. Pauline decided to do something, viz., reduce the population herself and in the fairest way possible. So whenever any of the families she visited produced one child above the three she'd fixed, rather generously, as the upward limit, she found some unobtrusive way of thinning that family back to the preferred maximal size. Between 1989 and 1993 Pauline's journals (Random House, 1994) record twenty-six murders, plus an additional fourteen failed attempts. In addition she had the highest welfare department record in the U.S. for abortions and sterilizations among the families whom she advised.

"Which proves, I think," Little Mister Kissy Lips had explained one day after school to his friend Jack, "that a murder doesn't have to be of someone *famous* to be a form of idealism."

But of course idealism was only half the story; the other half was curiosity. And beyond idealism *and* curiosity there was probably even another half, the basic childhood need to grow up and kill someone.

They settled on the Battery because: (1) none of them ever were there ordinarily; (2) it was posh and at the same time relatively (3) uncrowded, at least once the night shift were snug in their towers tending their machines. The night shift seldom ate their lunches down in the park.

And (4) because it was beautiful, especially now at the beginning of summer. The dark water, chromed with oil, flopping against the buttressed shore; the silences blowing in off the Upper Bay, silences large enough sometimes that you could sort out the different noises of the city behind them, the purr and quaver of the skyscrapers, the ground-shivering *misterioso* of the expressways, and every now and then the strange sourceless screams that are the melody of New York's theme song; the blue-pink of sunsets in a visible sky; the people's faces, calmed by the sea and their own nearness to death, lined up in rhythmic rows on the green benches. Why, even the statues looked

beautiful here, as though someone had believed in them once, the way people must have believed in the statues in the Cloisters, so long ago.

His favorite was the gigantic killer-eagle landing in the middle of the monoliths in the memorial for the soldiers, sailors, and airmen killed in World War II. The largest eagle, probably, in all Manhattan. His talons ripped apart what was *surely* the largest artichoke.

Amparo, who went along with some of Miss Couplard's ideas, preferred the more humanistic qualities of the memorial (him on top, and an angel gently probing an enormous book with her sword) for Verrazzano, who was not, as it turned out, the contractor who put up the bridge that had, so famously, collapsed. Instead, as the bronze plate in back proclaimed:

IN APRIL 1524
THE FLORENTINE-BORN NAVIGATOR
VERRAZZANO
LED THE FRENCH CARAVEL LA DAUPHINE
TO THE DISCOVERY OF THE HARBOR
OF NEW YORK
AND NAMED THESE SHORES ANGOULEME
IN HONOR OF FRANCIS I KING OF FRANCE

"Angouleme" they all agreed, except Tancred, who favored the more prevalent and briefer name, was much classier. Tancred was ruled out of order, and the decision became unanimous.

It was there, by the statue, looking across the bay of Angouleme to Jersey that they took the oath that bound them to perpetual secrecy. Whoever spoke of what they were about to do, unless he were being tortured by the police, solemnly called upon his co-conspirators to insure his silence by other means. Death. All revolutionary organizations take similar precautions, as the history unit on Modern Revolutions had made clear.

How he got the name: it had been Papa's theory that what modern life cried out for was a sweetening of old-fashioned sentimentality. Ergo, among all the other indignities this theory gave rise to, scenes like the following: "Who's my Little Mister Kissy Lips!" Papa would bawl out, sweetly, right in the middle of Rockefeller Center (or a restaurant, or in front of the school), and he'd shout right back, "I am!" At least until he knew better.

Mama had been, variously, "Rosebud," "Peg o' My Heart" and (this only at the end) "The Snow Queen." Mama, being adult, had been able to vanish with no other trace than the postcard that still came every Xmas postmarked from Key Largo, but Little Mister Kissy Lips was stuck with the New Sentimentality willy-nilly. True, by age seven he'd been able to insist on being called "Bill" around the house (or, as Papa would have it, "Just Plain Bill"). But that left the staff at the Plaza to contend with, and Papa's assistants, schoolmates, anyone who'd ever heard the name. Then a year ago, aged ten and able to reason, he laid down the new law—that his name *was* Little Mister Kissy Lips, the whole awful mouthful, each and every time. His reasoning being that if anyone would be getting his face rubbed in shit by this it would be Papa, who deserved it. Papa didn't seem to get the point, or else he got it and another point besides, you could never be sure how stupid or how subtle he really was, which is the worst kind of enemy.

Meanwhile at the nationwide level the New Sentimentality had been a rather overwhelming smash. *The Orphans,* which Papa produced and sometimes was credited with writing, pulled down the top Thursday evening ratings for two years. Now it was being overhauled for a daytime slot. For one hour every day our lives were going to be a lot sweeter, and chances were Papa would be a millionaire or more as a result. On the sunny side this meant that *he'd* be the son of a millionaire. Though he generally had contempt for the way money corrupted everything it touched, he had to admit that in cer-

tain cases it didn't have to be a bad thing. It boiled down to this (which he'd always known): that Papa was a necessary evil.

This was why every evening when Papa buzzed himself into the suite he'd shout out, "Where's my Little Mister Kissy Lips," and he'd reply, "Here, Papa!" The cherry on this sundae of love was a big wet kiss, and then one more for their new "Rosebud," Jimmy Ness. (Who drank, and was not in all likelihood going to last much longer.) They'd all three sit down to the nice *family* dinner Jimmyness had cooked, and Papa would tell them about the cheerful, positive things that had happened that day at CBS, and Little Mister Kissy Lips would tell all about the bright fine things that had happened to *him*. Jimmy would sulk. Then Papa and Jimmy would go somewhere or just disappear into the private Everglades of sex, and Little Mister Kissy Lips would buzz himself out into the corridor (Papa knew better than to be repressive about hours), and within half an hour he'd be at the Verrazzano statue with the six other Alexandrians, five if Celeste had a lesson, to plot the murder of the victim they'd all finally agreed on.

No one had been able to find out his name. They called him Alyona Ivanovna, after the old pawnbroker woman that Raskalnikov kills with an ax.

The spectrum of possible victims had never been wide. The common financial types of the area would be carrying credit cards like Lowen, Richard W., while the generality of pensioners filling the benches were even less tempting. As Miss Couplard had explained, our economy was being refeudalized and cash was going the way of the ostrich, the octopus, and the moccasin flower.

It was such extinctions as these, but especially seagulls, that were the worry of the first lady they'd considered, a Miss Kraus, unless the name at the bottom of her hand-lettered poster (STOP THE SLAUGHTER of The *Innocents*! ! etc.) belonged to someone else. Why, if she were Miss Kraus, was she wearing what seemed to be the old-

fashioned diamond ring and gold band of a Mrs.? But the more crucial problem, which they couldn't see how to solve, was: was the diamond real?

Possibility Number Two was in the tradition of the original Orphans of the Storm, the Gish sisters. A lovely semi-professional who whiled away the daylight pretending to be blind and serenading the benches. Her pathos was rich, if a bit worked-up; her repertoire was archaeological; and her gross was fair, especially when the rain added its own bit of too-much. However: Sniffles (who'd done this research) was certain she had a gun tucked away under the rags.

Three was the least poetic possibility, just the concessionaire in back of the giant eagle selling Fun and Synthamon. His appeal was commercial. But he had a licensed Weimaraner, and though Weimaraners can be dealt with, Amparo liked them.

"You're just a Romantic," Little Mister Kissy Lips said. "Give me one good reason."

"His eyes," she said. "They're amber. He'd haunt us."

They were snuggling together in one of the deep embrasures cut into the stone of Castle Clinton, her head wedged into his armpit, his fingers gliding across the lotion on her breasts (summer was just beginning). Silence, warm breezes, sunlight on water, it was all ineffable, as though only the sheerest of veils intruded between them and an understanding of something (all this) really meaningful. Because they thought it was their own innocence that was to blame, like a smog in their souls' atmosphere, they wanted more than ever to be rid of it at times, like this, when they approached so close.

"Why not the dirty old man, then?" she asked, meaning Alyona.

"Because he *is* a dirty old man."

"That's no reason. He must take in at least as much money as that singer."

"That's not what I mean." What he meant wasn't easy to define. It was as though he'd be too easy to kill. If you'd

seen him in the first minutes of a program, you'd know he was marked for destructon by the second commercial. He was the defiant homesteader, the crusty senior member of a research team who understood Algol and Fortran but couldn't read the secrets of his own heart. He was the Senator from South Carolina with his own peculiar brand of integrity but a racist nevertheless. Killing that sort was too much like one of Papa's scripts to be a satisfying gesture of rebellion.

But what he said, mistaking his own deeper meaning, was: "It's because he deserves it, because we'd be doing society a favor. Don't ask me to give *reasons*."

"Well, I won't pretend I understand that, but do you know what I think, Little Mister Kissy Lips?" She pushed his hand away.

"You think I'm scared."

"Maybe you *should* be scared."

"Maybe you should shut up and leave this to me. I said we're going to do it. We'll do it."

"To him then?"

"Okay. But for gosh sakes, Amparo, we've got to think of something to call the bastard besides 'the dirty old man'!"

She rolled over out of his armpit and kissed him. They glittered all over with little beads of sweat. The summer began to shimmer with the excitement of first night. They had been waiting so long, and now the curtain was rising.

M-Day was scheduled for the first weekend in July, a patriotic holiday. The computers would have time to tend to their own needs (which have been variously described as "confession," "dreaming," and "throwing up"), and the Battery would be as empty as it ever gets.

Meanwhile their problem was the same as any kids face anywhere during summer vacation, how to fill the time.

There were books, there were the Shakespeare puppets if you were willing to queue up for that long, there was always TV, and when you couldn't stand sitting any longer

there were the obstacle courses in Central Park, but the density there was at lemming level. The Battery, because it didn't try to meet anyone's needs, seldom got so overpopulated. If there had been more Alexandrians and all willing to fight for the space, they might have played ball. Well, another summer. . . .

What else? There were marches for the political, and religions at various energy levels for the apolitical. There would have been dancing, but the Lowen School had spoiled them for most amateur events around the city.

As for the supreme pastime of sex, for all of them except Little Mister Kissy Lips and Amparo (and even for them, when it came right down to orgasm) this was still something that happened on a screen, a wonderful hypothesis that lacked empirical proof.

One way or another it was all consumership, everything they might have done, and they were tired, who isn't, of being passive. They were twelve years old, or eleven, or ten, and they couldn't wait any longer. For what? they wanted to know.

So, except when they were just loafing around solo, all these putative resources, the books, the puppets, the sports, arts, politics, and religions, were in the same category of usefulness as merit badges or weekends in Calcutta, which is a name you can still find on a few old maps of India. Their lives were not enhanced, and their summer passed as summers have passed immemorially. They slumped and moped and lounged about and teased each other and complained. They acted out desultory, shy fantasies and had long pointless arguments about the more peripheral facts of existence—the habits of jungle animals or how bricks had been made or the history of World War II.

One day they added up all the names on the monoliths set up for the soldiers, sailors, and airmen. The final figure they got was 4,800.

"Wow," said Tancred.

"But that can't be *all* of them," MaryJane insisted,

speaking for the rest. Even that "wow" had sounded half ironic.

"Why not?" asked Tancred, who could never resist disagreeing. "They came from every different state and every branch of the service. It has to be complete or the people who had relatives left off would have protested."

"But so *few*? It wouldn't be possible to have fought more than one battle at that rate."

"Maybe . . ." Sniffles began quietly. But he was seldom listened to.

"Wars were different then," Tancred explained with the authority of a prime time news analyst. "In those days more people were killed by their own automobiles than in wars. It's a fact."

"Four thousand eight *hundred*?"

". . . a lottery?"

Celeste waved away everything Sniffles had said or would ever say. "MaryJane is right, Tancred. It's simply a *ludicrous* number. Why, in that same war the Germans gassed seven *million* Jews."

"Six million Jews," Little Mister Kissy Lips corrected. "But it's the same idea. Maybe the ones here got killed in a particular campaign."

"Then it would say so." Tancred was adamant, and he even got them to admit at last that 4,800 was an impressive figure, especially with every name spelled out in stone letters.

One other amazing statistic was commemorated in the park: over a 35-year period Castle Clinton had processed 7.7 million immigrants into the United States.

Little Mister Kissy Lips sat down and figured out that it would take 12,800 stone slabs the size of the ones listing the soldiers, sailors, and airmen in order to write out all the immigrants' names, with country of origin, and an area of five square miles to set that many slabs up in, or all of Manhattan from here to 28th Street. But would it be worth the trouble, after all? Would it be that much different from

the way things were already?

Alyona Ivanovna:

An archipelago of irregular brown islands were mapped on the tan sea of his bald head. The mainlands of his hair were marble outcroppings, especially his beard, white and crisp and coiling. The teeth were standard MODICUM issue; clothes, as clean as any fabric that old can be. Nor did he smell, particularly. And yet. . . .

Had he bathed every morning you'd still have looked at him and thought he was filthy, the way floorboards in old brownstones seem to need cleaning moments after they've been scrubbed. The dirt had been bonded to the wrinkled flesh and the wrinkled clothes, and nothing less than surgery, or burning, would get it out.

His habits were as orderly as a polka-dot napkin. He lived at a Chelsea dorm for the elderly, a discovery they owed to a rainstorm that had forced him to take the subway home one day instead of, as usual, walking. On the hottest nights he might sleep over in the park, nesting in one of the Castle windows. He bought his lunches from a Water Street specialty shop, Dumas Fils: cheeses, imported fruit, smoked fish, bottles of cream, food for the gods. Otherwise he did without, though his dorm must have supplied prosaic necessities like Breakfast. It was a strange way for a panhandler to spend his quarters, drugs being the norm.

His professional approach was out-and-out aggression. For instance, his hand in your face and, "How about it, Jack?" Or, confidingly, "I need sixty cents to get home." It was amazing how often he scored but actually it wasn't amazing. He had charisma.

And someone who relies on charisma *wouldn't* have a gun.

Agewise he might have been sixty, seventy, seventy-five, a bit more even, or much less. It all depended on the kind of life he'd led, and where. He had an accent none of them

could identify. It was not English, not French, not Spanish, and probably not Russian.

Aside from his burrow in the Castle wall there were two distinct places he preferred. One, the wide-open stretch of pavement along the water. This was where he worked, walking up past the Castle and down as far as the concession stand. The passage of one of the great Navy cruisers, the USS *Dana* or the USS *Melville,* would bring him, and the better part of the Battery, to a standstill, as though a whole parade were going by, white, soundless, slow as a dream. It was a part of history, and even the Alexandrians were impressed, though three of them had taken the cruise down to Andros Island and back. Sometimes, though, he'd stand by the guardrail for long stretches of time without any real reason, just looking at the Jersey sky and the Jersey shore. After a while he might start talking to himself, the barest whisper but very much in earnest to judge by the way his forehead wrinkled. They never once saw him sit on one of the benches.

The other place he liked was the aviary. On days when they'd been ignored he'd contribute peanuts or breadcrumbs to the cause of the birds' existence. There were pigeons, parrots, a family of robins, and a proletarian swarm of what the sign declared to be chickadees, though Celeste, who'd gone to the library to make sure, said they were nothing more than a rather swank breed of sparrow. Here too, naturally, the militant Miss Kraus stationed herself when she bore testimony. One of her peculiarities (and the reason, probably, she was never asked to move on) was that under no circumstances did she ever deign to argue. Even sympathizers pried no more out of her than a grim smile and a curt nod.

One Tuesday a week before M-Day (it was the early a.m. and only three Alexandrians were on hand to witness this confrontation) Alyona so far put aside his own reticence as to try to start a conversation going with Miss Kraus.

He stood squarely in front of her and began by reading aloud, slowly, in that distressingly indefinite accent, from the text of STOP THE SLAUGHTER: "The Department of the Interior of the United States Government, under the secret direction of the Zionist Ford Foundation, is *systematically* poisoning the oceans of the World with so-called 'food farms.' Is this 'peaceful application of Nuclear Power'? Unquote, the New York *Times,* August 2, 2024. 'Or a new Moondoggle! !' *Nature World,* Jan. Can we afford to remain indifferent any longer. Every day 15,000 Seagulls die as a direct result of Systematic Genocides while elected Officials falsify and distort the evidence. Learn the facts. Write to the Congressmen. *Make your voice heard! !*"

As Alyona had droned on, Miss Kraus turned a deeper and deeper red. Tightening her fingers about the turquoise broomhandle to which the placard was stapled, she began to jerk the poster up and down rapidly, as though this man with his foreign accent were some bird of prey who'd perched on it.

"Is that what you think?" he asked, having read all the way down to the signature despite her jiggling tactic. He touched his bushy white beard and wrinkled his face into a philosophical expression. "I'd *like* to know more about it, yes, I would. I'd be interested in hearing what *you* think."

Horror had frozen up every motion of her limbs. Her eyes blinked shut, but she forced them open again.

"Maybe," he went on remorselessly, "we can discuss this whole thing. Some time when you feel more like talking. All right?"

She mustered her smile, and a minimal nod. He went away then. She was safe, temporarily, but even so she waited till he'd gone halfway to the other end of the seafront promenade before she let the air collapse into her lungs. After a single deep breath the muscles of her hands thawed into trembling.

M-Day was an oil of summer, a catalog of everything

painters are happiest painting—clouds, flags, leaves, sexy people, and in back of it all the flat empty baby-blue of the sky. Little Mister Kissy Lips was the first one there, and Tancred, in a kind of kimono (it hid the pilfered Luger), was the last. Celeste never came. (She'd just learned she'd been awarded the exchange scholarship to Sofia.) They decided they could do without Celeste, but the other nonappearance was more crucial. Their victim had neglected to be on hand for M-Day. Sniffles, whose voice was most like an adult's over the phone, was delegated to go to the Citibank lobby and call the West 16th Street dorm.

The nurse who answered was a temporary. Sniffles, always an inspired liar, insisted that his mother—"Mrs. *Anderson,* of course she lives there, Mrs. Alma F. Anderson"—had to be called to the phone. This was 248 West 16th, wasn't it? Where *was* she if she wasn't there? The nurse, flustered, explained that the residents, all who were fit, had been driven off to a July 4th picnic at Lake Hopatcong as guests of a giant Jersey retirement condominium. If he called bright and early tomorrow they'd be back, and he could talk to his mother then.

So the initiation rites were postponed, it couldn't be helped. Amparo passed around some pills she'd taken from her mother's jar, a consolation prize. Jack left, apologizing that he was a borderline psychotic, which was the last that anyone saw of Jack till September. The gang was disintegrating, like a sugarcube soaking up saliva, then crumbling into the tongue. But what the hell—the sea still mirrored the same blue sky, the pigeons behind their wicket were no less iridescent, and trees grew for all of that.

They decided to be silly and made jokes about what the M *really* stood for in M-Day. Sniffles started off with "Miss Nomer, Miss Carriage, and Miss Steak." Tancred, whose sense of humor did not exist or was very private, couldn't do better than "Mnemone, mother of the Muses." Little Mister Kissy Lips said, "Merciful Heavens!" Mary-

Jane maintained reasonably that M was for MaryJane. But Amparo said it stood for "Aplomb" and carried the day.

Then, proving that when you're sailing the wind always blows from behind you, they found Terry Riley's day-long *Orfeo* at 99.5 on the FM dial. They'd studied *Orfeo* in mime class, and by now it was part of their muscle and nerve. As Orpheus descended into a hell that mushroomed from the size of a pea to the size of a planet, the Alexandrians metamorphosed into as credible a tribe of souls in torment as any since the days of Jacopo Peri. Throughout the afternoon little audiences collected and dispersed to flood the sidewalk with libations of adult attention. Expressively they surpassed themselves, both one by one and all together, and though they couldn't have held out till the apotheosis (at 9:30) without a stiff psychochemical wind in their sails, what they had danced was authentic and very much their own. When they left the Battery that night they felt better than they'd felt all summer long. In a sense they had been exorcised.

But back at the Plaza Little Mister Kissy Lips couldn't sleep. No sooner was he through the locks than his guts knotted up into a Chinese puzzle. Only after he'd unsealed his window and crawled out onto the ledge did he get rid of the bad feelings. The city was real. His room was not. The stone ledge was real, and his bare buttocks absorbed reality from it. He watched slow movements in enormous distances and pulled his thoughts together.

He knew without having to talk to the rest that the murder would never take place. The idea had never meant for them what it had meant for him. One pill and they were actors again, content to be images in a mirror.

Slowly, as he watched, the city turned itself off. Slowly the dawn divided the sky into an east and a west. Had a pedestrian been going past on 58th Street and had that pedestrian looked up, he would have seen the bare soles of a boy's feel swinging back and forth, angelically.

He would have to kill Alyona Ivanovna himself. Nothing else was possible.

Back in his bedroom, long ago, the phone was ringing its fuzzy nighttime ring. That would be Tancred (or Amparo?) trying to talk him out of it. He foresaw their arguments. Celeste and Jack couldn't be trusted now. Or, more subtly: they'd all made themselves too visible with their *Orfeo*. If there were even a small investigation, the benches would remember them, remember how well they had danced, and the police would know where to look.

But the real reason, which at least Amparo would have been ashamed to mention now that the pill was wearing off, was that they'd begun to feel sorry for their victim. They'd got to know him too well over the last month, and their resolve had been eroded by compassion.

A light came on in Papa's window. Time to begin. He stood up, golden in the sunbeams of another perfect day, and walked back along the foot-wide ledge to his own window. His legs tingled from having sat so long.

He waited till Papa was in the shower, then tippytoed to the old secretaire in his bedroom (W. & J. Sloan, 1952). Papa's keychain was coiled atop the walnut veneer. Inside the secretaire's drawer was an antique Mexican cigar box, and in the cigar box a velvet bag, and in the velvet bag Papa's replica of a French dueling pistol, circa 1790. These precautions were less for his son's sake than on account of Jimmyness, who every so often felt obliged to show he was serious with his suicide threats.

He'd studied the booklet carefully when Papa had bought the pistol and was able to execute the loading procedure quickly and without error, tamping the premeasured twist of powder down into the barrel, and then the lead ball on top of it.

He cocked the hammer back a single click.

He locked the drawer. He replaced the keys, just so. He buried, for now, the pistol in the stuffs and cushions of the Turkish corner, tilted upright to keep the ball from rolling

out. Then with what remained of yesterday's ebullience he bounced into the bathroom and kissed Papa's cheek, damp with the morning's allotted two gallons and redolent of 47-11.

They had a cheery breakfast together in the coffee room, which was identical to the breakfast they would have made for themselves except for the ritual of being waited on by a waitress. Little Mister Kissy Lips gave an enthusiastic account of the Alexandrians' performance of *Orfeo,* and Papa made his best effort of seeming not to condescend. When he'd been driven to the limit of this pretense, Little Mister Kissy Lips touched him for a second pill, and since it was better for a boy to get these things from his father than from a stranger on the street, he got it.

He reached the South Ferry stop at noon, bursting with a sense of his own imminent liberation. The weather was M-Day all over again, as though at midnight out on the ledge he'd forced time to go backward to the point when things had started going wrong. He'd dressed in his most anonymous shorts, and the pistol hung from his belt in a dun dittybag.

Alyona Ivanovna was sitting on one of the benches near the aviary, listening to Miss Kraus. Her ring hand gripped the poster firmly, while the right chopped at the air, eloquently awkward, like a mute's first words following a miraculous cure.

Little Mister Kissy Lips went down the path and squatted in the shadow of his memorial. It had lost its magic yesterday, when the statues had begun to look so silly to everyone. They still looked silly. Verrazzano was dressed like a Victorian industrialist taking a holiday in the Alps. The angel was wearing an angel's usual bronze nightgown.

His good feelings were leaving his head by little and little, like Aeolian sandstone attrited by the centuries of wind. He thought of calling up Amparo, but any comfort she might bring to him would be a mirage so long as his purpose in coming here remained unfulfilled.

He looked at his wrist, then remembered he'd left his watch home. The gigantic advertising clock on the façade of the First National Citibank said it was fifteen after two. That wasn't possible.

Miss Kraus was *still* yammering away.

There was time to watch a cloud move across the sky from Jersey, over the Hudson, and past the sun. Unseen winds nibbled at its wispy edges. The cloud became his life, which would disappear without ever having turned into rain.

Later, and the old man was walking up the sea promenade toward the Castle. He stalked him, for miles. And then they were alone, together, at the far end of the park.

"Hello," he said, with the smile reserved for grown-ups of doubtful importance.

He looked directly at the dittybag, but Little Mister Kissy Lips didn't lose his composure. He would be wondering whether to ask for money, which would be kept, if he'd had any, in the bag. The pistol made a noticeable budge but not the kind of bulge one would ordinarily associate with a pistol.

"Sorry," he said coolly. "I'm broke."

"Did I ask?"

"You were going to."

The old man made as if to return in the other direction, so he had to speak quickly, something that would hold him here.

"I saw you speaking with Miss Kraus."

He was held.

"Congratulations—you broke through the ice!"

The old man half-smiled, half-frowned. "You know her?"

"Mm. You could say that we're *aware* of her." The "we" had been a deliberate risk, an hors d'oeuvre. Touching a finger to each side of the strings by which the heavy bag hung from his belt, he urged on it a lazy pendular motion.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

There was nothing indulgent now in the man's face. "I probably do."

His smile had lost the hard edge of calculation. It was the same smile he'd have smiled for Papa, for Amparo, for Miss Couplard, for anyone he liked. "Where do you come from? I mean, what country?"

"That's none of your business, is it?"

"Well, I just wanted . . . to know."

The old man (he had ceased, somehow, to be Alyona Ivanovna) turned away and walked directly toward the squat stone cylinder of the old fortress.

He remembered how the plaque at the entrance—the same that had cited the 7.7 million—had said that Jenny Lind had sung there and it had been a great success.

The old man unzipped his fly and, lifting out his cock, began pissing on the wall.

Little Mister Kissy Lips fumbled with the strings of the bag. It was remarkable how long the old man stood there pissing because despite every effort of the stupid knot to stay tied he had the pistol out before the final sprinkle had been shaken out.

He laid the fulminate cap on the exposed nipple, drew the hammer back two clicks, past the safety, and aimed.

The man made no haste zipping up. Only then did he glance in Little Mister Kissy Lips' direction. He saw the pistol aimed at him. They stood not twenty feet apart, so he must have seen it.

He said, "Ha!" And even this, rather than being addressed to the boy with the gun, was only a parenthesis from the faintly aggrieved monologue he resumed each day at the edge of the water. He turned away and a moment later he was back on the job, hand out, asking some fellow for a quarter.

IF "HAIR" WERE REVIVED IN 2016

ARNOLD M. AUERBACH

What an insidious form of fiction SF is, creeping into the strangest places like some mad virus. The latest locale to show the infection is the very staid and serious Theater Section of the New York Times. *Here, briefly but with much gusto, Arnold Auerbach transcribes a review from his time-machine viewer of a theatrical production that is still forty-four years in our future.*

The following might possibly be written some years hence by The Times's dance, drama, film, Wall Street, baseball and ping-pong critic.

By ELVIC BRASEN

What a brilliant idea it was to revive "Hair"! And how clever to duplicate the ambience of the original production: the low building devoted solely to dramatic presentations (our elders called them "theaters"), the quaint, old-fashioned 7:30 curtain, instead of our 5 p.m. monstrosity, which seems designed solely to get Australian commuters home to Melbourne in time for tea.

And how canny of the producers to coax Gerome Ragni and James Rado out of their Scarsdale retirement to enact their original roles! When the two elderly gentlemen—now prosperous marijuana farmers—came cavorting onstage to shake their shaggy gray locks at the audience, their erstwhile impertinence, though somewhat muted by the kindly twinkle behind their spectacles, was as endearing as ever.

At the preview, which I saw two weeks ago, the once notorious nude scene, now a cliché of "Late Show" cassettes, was enlivened by several old-timers in the audience who, carried away by nostalgia, defied flabbiness and arthritis and took off their clothes to join the cast onstage. (Here let me compliment ex-Mayor Lindsay on retaining his figure despite advancing years!)

"Hair's" book, of course, was never its strong point. Yet its "draft dodgers," "pot smokers" and "acid heads" (if memory serves, they were also called "flappers") remain charming relics of a naïve era, when young people still thought protests might shorten the war in Vietnam—soon, let us hope, about to wind down.

As for the show's direction, only the sternest of purists would quibble at the few anachronistic touches which have crept in, such as the fiddler on the roof at the opening, or the Sigmund Romberg duet in Act Two. Perhaps these embellishments were not part of the original production, as some sticklers insist. But, to quote the old Gershwin ballad, "Who Cares?" They are pastiches of an untroubled period. (Was Coolidge our President then, or Nixon? Only

our grannies know for sure.)

Yes, as the decades recede and memory blurs, let's be grateful for "Hair." It recalls a time when, mercifully, young people were sedate and respectful of their elders, and not in their present state of frenetic ferment.

Go see this revival, by all means. As you may have gathered, I come to praise "Hair," not to bury it.

STATISTICIAN'S DAY

JAMES BLISH

Blish is a free man these days, finally free of big cities and time-consuming offices and settled in a wonderfully lovely house in the Thames Valley in England. Neither he nor his artist wife, Judith, seem to miss the East Coast megalopolis and this story, from one of the most respected authors and critics in science fiction, contains more than a pleasant overtone of the country that has made them welcome.

Wiberg had been a foreign correspondent for the New York *Times* for fourteen years, ten of them devoted also to

his peculiar specialty, and had at one time or another spent a total of eighteen weeks in England. (He was, as one would expect, precise about such matters.) As a result, he was considerably surprised by the home of Edmund Gerrard Darling.

Population Control had been instituted just ten years ago, after the fearful world famine of 1980, and since that time England had not changed much. Driving along the M.4 motorway from London, he saw again the high-rise "developments" which had obliterated the Green Belt which once had surrounded the city, just as they had taken over Westchester County in New York, Arlington in Virginia, Evanston in Illinois, Berkeley in California. Few new ones had been built since—after all, with population static, there was no need—though the hurried construction of many of them was going to force replacement before long.

Similarly, the town of Maidenhead, stabilized at 20,000 souls, looked just as it had when he had passed through it last time on the way to Oxford. (Then, he had been paying this kind of call on the coastal erosion expert Charles Charleston Shackleton, who had also been something of a writer.) This time, however, he had to turn off the motorway at Maidenhead Thicket, and suddenly found himself in a kind of countryside he had not dreamed existed any more, at least certainly not anywhere between London and Reading.

A road exactly one car wide, completely overhung with trees, led him nearly five miles to a roundabout the mall of which a child could have spat across, were it not for the moss-grown, ten-foot World War I memorial pillar in the middle. On the other side of this was Shurlock Row, his destination—a village which seemed to consist of nothing but a church, a pub and five or six shops. There must have been a duckpond somewhere nearby, too, for he could hear a faint quacking.

"The Phygtle," the novelist's home, was also on the High Street—there seemed to be no other. It was a large, two-story thatched cottage, with white walls and oak tim-

bers which had been painted black. Over the thatching, which was necessarily very recent, there was chicken-wire to discourage birds; the rest of the house looked as though it had been started about the sixteenth century, and probably had.

Wiberg parked the Morris and felt in his inside jacket pocket for the canned Associated Press obituary, which rewarded him with a faint but reassuring crackle. He did not need to take it out; he knew it by heart by now. It had been the arrival by mail, a week ago, of that galley proof which had started him on this journey. The obit was not due to be published for nearly a year, but Darling had been reported ill, and that always made a good pretext—indeed, the usual one.

He got out of the car and walked to the stable-type front door, which at his knock was opened by a plump, ruddy, well-scrubbed young girl in a housemaid's uniform. He gave his name.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Wiberg, Sir Edmund's expectin' ye," she said in a strong Irish accent. "Perhaps ye'd care to be waitin' in the garden?"

"I'd like that," he said. The girl was evidently brand-new, for the novelist was not a knight but an O.M., an honor a good deal higher; but Darling reputedly cared little for such gauds and probably did not even bother to correct her.

He was led through a large dining room with a low, beamed ceiling and a fireplace built of hand-made briquettes, and out a glazed door at the back. The gardens covered about half an acre, and consisted chiefly of flowering shrubs and rose bushes through which gravel paths wound; there were also several old apple and pear trees, and even a fig tree. Part of the area had been hedged off as a vegetable garden, which included a small potting shed, and the whole was screened from the road and from the neighbors by a willow-withe fence and close-set evergreens.

What interested Wiberg most, however, was a brick guest house or staff annex at the back of the gardens. This,

he knew from the obit, had its own bathroom (or wardrobe, as middle-class Britishers still delicately called it); and it was in this building that Darling had done his writing in the days when his family had still been living at home. It had originally had a peaked, tiled roof, but much of this had been cut away to accommodate the famous little astronomical observatory.

The seeing around here, Wiberg reflected, must have been terrible even before Darling had been born, but again, that wouldn't have mattered much to Darling. He was an amateur of the sciences ("the world's finest spectator sport," he had called them), and had built the observatory not for research, but only because he liked to look at the heavens.

Wiberg peered in a window, but there was no remaining trace of the novelist's occupancy; evidently only the maid used the outbuilding now. Wiberg sighed. He was not a particularly sensitive man—he could not afford to be—but there were times when his occupation depressed even him.

He resumed prowling around the garden, sniffing at roses and at stands of wallflowers. He had never encountered the latter in the States and they had a spicy, exotic odor, rather like that of flowering tobacco, or what he imagined as the smell of the herbs used by ancient Egyptian embalmers.

Then the maid called him. He was led back through the dining room, and then around the L of an immense, book-lined lounge with a polished-stone fireplace to the main staircase. At the head of these was the master bedroom. As he approached the door, the maid called out, "Mind your head, sir," but she was a moment too late; he cracked the crown of it on the lintel.

A chuckle came from inside. "You're far from the first," a male voice said. "One had to be bloody careful carrying a kid through that door."

The impact had been minor and Wiberg forgot it instantly. Edmund Gerrard Darling, in a plaid robe, was propped up amid pillows in an immense bed—a feather

bed, judging by the way even his slight frame sank into it. He still had quite a lot of his hair, although it began farther back from his forehead than it had even in his most recent jacket photograph, and he wore the same rimless glasses with the gold bows. His face, though still patrician, had become a little heavier in its contours despite his illness, giving it a rather avuncular expression hard to reconcile with that of a man who, as a critic, had for nearly sixty years mercilessly flayed his colleagues for their ignorance of elementary English, let alone any other literature.

"I'm honored and pleased to see you, sir," Wiberg said, producing his notebook.

"I wish I could say as much," Darling said, waving him to a wing chair. "However, I've expected you for a long time. There's really only one question remaining in my mind, and I'd appreciate your answering it straight off—always providing, of course, that you're allowed to."

"Anything at all, sir. After all, I came to ask questions, too. What is it?"

"Are you," the novelist said, "only the advance man for the executioner, or are you the executioner himself?"

Wiberg managed an uncertain laugh. "I'm afraid I don't understand the question, sir."

In point of fact, he understood it perfectly. What he did not understand was how Darling had come by enough information to have been able to frame it. For ten whole years, the chief secret of PopCon had been extremely well kept.

"If you won't answer my question, I need hardly feel obligated to answer yours," Darling said. "You won't deny, I trust, that you've got my obituary in your pocket?"

This was so common a suspicion in Wiberg's experience that he had no trouble responding to it with every appearance of complete candor.

"Of course I do," he said. "As I'm sure you know, both large newspapers like the *Times* and the big press associations keep obituaries of eminent or newsworthy living people standing in their files, in case of accident. Every so

often they have to be updated as a matter of course; and every reporter who's sent out on an interview briefs himself first from those files, also as a matter of course."

"I began as a newspaperman," Darling said. "Hence I also know that it is not the custom of large journals to send one of their chief foreign correspondents on such cubs' assignments."

"Not everyone to be interviewed is a Nobel Prize winner," Wiberg said. "And when such a figure is eighty years of age, and is reliably reported to be ill, getting from him what may be a final interview is not assigned to a cub. If you choose to regard this simply as updating an obituary, sir, there's nothing I can do to prevent you. No doubt there is something a little ghoulish about it, but as I know you're also aware, a lot of newspaper work is amenable to the same description."

"I know, I know," Darling said testily. "And under the circumstances, without your for a minute wishing to exalt yourself in any way, the fact that you were given the assignment might also be taken as a gesture of respect. Eh?"

"Well," Wiberg said, "yes, sir, I might put it that way." In fact, he had been just about to put it exactly that way.

"Bosh."

Wiberg shrugged. "As I say, sir, I can't prevent you from seeing it in any light you choose. But I do regret it."

"I didn't say I saw it in a different light. What I said was, 'Bosh.' What you have told me is largely true, but also so irrelevant as to be actively misleading. I had hoped you would tell me the facts, to which I think I am entitled. Instead, you have answered my question with what obviously is a standard line of chatter for difficult customers."

Wiberg leaned back in the chair, his apprehension growing. "Then perhaps you'll tell me what you see as the relevant facts, sir?"

"You don't deserve it, but there would be no sense in my keeping from you what you already know—which was precisely what I wanted you to see in my case," Darling said. "Very well, let's stay with the newspapers a while."

He fingered in the breast pocket of his jacket and produced a cigarette, and then pressed a torpedo switch on his nightstand. The maid came in at once.

"Matches," he said.

"Sir, the doctor—"

"Bother the doctor, I now know when I'm going to die almost to the day. Never mind, don't look so distressed, just bring me some matches, and light the fire with them on your way past."

The day was still warm, but for some reason Wiberg too was glad to see the little grate begin to catch. Darling drew on the cigarette and then regarded it appreciatively.

"Damn nonsense anyhow, those statistics," he said. "Which in fact has a direct bearing on the subject. When you get to be in your sixties, Mr. Wiberg, you begin to become rather a fan of the obituary notices. Your boyhood heroes begin to die, your friends begin to die, and insensibly you become interested in the deaths of people you neither knew nor cared about, and then of people you never even heard of.

"It's perhaps rather a mean pastime, with no little amount of self-congratulation in it: 'Well, *he's* gone, but *I'm* still here.' Of course, if you're of at all an introspective turn of mind, it can also begin to make you increasingly aware of your own growing isolation in the world. And if your inner resources are few, it can also increase your fear of your own death.

"Luckily, one of my interests for many years has been in the sciences, with particular emphasis upon mathematics. And after a lot of reading of death notices in the New York *Times,* the *Times* of London, and some other large newspapers I keep up with, at first casually, then assiduously, I began to become conscious of a run of coincidences. Do you follow me so far?"

"I think so," Wiberg said guardedly. "What kind of coincidences?"

"I could produce you specific examples, but I think a general description will suffice. To find such coincidences,

one must read the minor death notices, as well as the deaths that produce the headlines and the formal obituaries. Then, you will find, say, a day in which what seems to be an abnormally large number of doctors have died. On another day, an abnormally large number of lawyers. And so on.

"I first noticed this on a day when almost all the chief executives of a large American engineering firm had been killed in the same airplane disaster. This struck me as peculiar, because by that time it had become standard practice among American firms *never* to allow more than two executives to travel on the same flight. On a hunch, I ran down the minor notices, and I found that it had been a very bad day for engineers in general. And also I found something quite unexpected: that almost all of them had died in some sort of travel accident. The plane crash had been the unlucky coincidence that drew my attention to what seemed to be a real pattern.

"I began to keep tallies. I discovered a good many other correlations. For one, in deaths-by-travel, whole families often die—and in such instances, it most often turns out that the wife may be related to the husband by profession, as well as simply by matrimony."

"Interesting . . . and a little eerie," Wiberg agreed. "But as you say, obviously only coincidence. In so small a sample—"

"It's not a small sample after you watch it for twenty years," Darling said. "And I no longer believe that any part of it is coincidence except the initial plane crash that started me looking for it. It isn't, in fact, a question of belief at all any more. I kept exact records, and periodically I phone my figures in to the computation center at London University, without, of course, telling the programmers what the figures stand for. I had the last such computation run when I got your cable asking to visit me, with a chi-square test. I got a significance of point zero zero zero one at the five percent level of confidence. That's better than anything the anti-cigarette forces have ever

been able to come up with, and we've had regiments of medical asses, and even whole governments, behaving as if those figures stood for a real phenomenon, ever since about 1950.

"And while I'm at it, I run counter-checks. It occurred to me that the *age* at death might be the really significant factor. The chi-square test shows that it is not; there is no correlation with age at all. But it is *perfectly* clear that these deaths are being selected for upon the basis of business, trade or profession."

"Hmm. Suppose—for the sake of argument—that this is really happening. Can you suggest how?"

"*How* is not the problem," Darling said. "It cannot be a natural phenomenon, because natural forces like biological selection do not show that high a degree of specificity, or act over so brief a secular period. The real question, therefore, is: Why? And there can be only one answer to that."

"Which is?"

"Policy."

"Excuse me, sir," Wiberg said, "but with all due respect, the idea seems to me to be, well, faintly paranoid."

"It is massively paranoid, but it is happening; I notice that you don't dispute that. And it is the policy-makers who are paranoid, not I."

"What would be the use of such a policy—or what would someone imagine its use to be?"

The novelist looked steadily into Wiberg's eyes through the rimless glasses.

"Universal Population Control," he said, "has been officially in force for ten years, and unofficially, it seems, for twenty. And it works; the population is now static. Most people believe, and are told, that it consists entirely of enforced birth control. They do not stop to think that to maintain a genuinely static population, you also need an absolutely predictable economy. Second, they do not stop to think—and are *not* told, indeed the facts they would need to deduce it are now suppressed even on the

grammar-school level—that at our present state of knowledge we can control only *numbers* of births; we cannot control *who* gets born. Oh, of course we can now control the sex of the child, that's easy; but we cannot control whether he will turn out to be an architect, a navvy or just a plain ordinary clot.

"Yet in a completely controlled economy, one must take care to have only a fixed number of architects, navvies and clots extant at any given era. Since you can't do that by birth control, *you must do it by death control.* Hence, when you find yourself with an uneconomic surplus of, say, novelists, you skim off the surplus. Of course, you try to confine the skimming to the oldest, but since the period in which such a surplus is going to appear is inherently unpredictable, how old the oldest are when the skimming takes place varies too widely to attain statistical significance. It is probably further masked by such tactical considerations as making all the deaths look accidental and unconnected, which must often mean killing off a few younger members of a given class and leaving a few oldsters behind for nature to deal with.

"Also, of course, it simplifies record-keeping for the historian. If one knows as a matter of policy that a given novelist is scheduled to die on or about a given date, one need never lack for a final interview and an updated obituary. And the same excuse, or a similar one—such as a routine visit by the victim's physician—can become the agency of his actual death.

"Which brings me back, Mr. Wiberg, to my original question. Which are you—the Angel of Death himself, or just his harbinger?"

In the ensuing silence, the fire popped loudly in the grate. At last Wiberg said:

"I cannot tell you whether or not your hypothesis is valid. As you suggested yourself at the beginning of this interview, if it were true, I wouldn't be allowed to tell you so, as a simple logical consequence. All I can say is that I

enormously admire your ingenuity—and I'm not entirely surprised by it.

"But again for the sake of the argument, let's push the logic one step further. Assume that the situation is just as you postulate it to be. Assume further that you have been selected to be . . . 'skimmed off' . . . say, about a year from now. And assume, finally, that I was originally only to be your final interviewer, not your executioner. Wouldn't your revealing to me your conclusions *force* me to become your executioner instead?"

"It might," Darling said, with astonishing cheerfulness. "It is a consequence I had not overlooked. My life has been very rich, and my present illness is so annoying that being shut of a year of it—since I know very well that it's incurable—would not strike me as a terrible deprivation. On the other hand, the risk does not seem to me to be very real anyhow. Killing me a year early would produce a slight mathematical discontinuity in the system. It would not be a significant discontinuity, but bureaucrats hate any deviation from established procedure, whether it matters or not. Either way, *I* wouldn't care. But I wonder about you, Mr. Wiberg. I really do."

"About me?" Wiberg said uneasily. "Why about me?"

There was no doubt, now, but that the old malicious glitter was back in Darling's eyes, in full vitality.

"You are a statistician. I can tell by the way in which you received, and followed, my statistical terms. I, on the other hand, am an amateur mathematician, not limited in my interests to stochastic procedures; and one of my interests is projective geometry. I have been watching population statistics, and death figures, and so on, but I have also been constructing curves. I therefore know that next April fourteenth will be the day of my death. Let us call it, for the sake of commemoration, Novelists' Day.

"Well then, Mr. Wiberg. I also know that this coming November third is what we might call Statisticians' Day.

And I do not think you are very safely under age, Mr. Wiberg.

"Tell me: *How will you face it?* Eh? How will *you* face it? Speak up, Mr. Wiberg, speak up. Your time, too, is running out."

THE SCIENCE FICTION HORROR MOVIE POCKET COMPUTER

GAHAN WILSON

Readers of magazines from Playboy *to* Fantasy and Science Fiction *laugh, cry, and scream over Wilson's way-out cartoons, and all of them are encouraged to buy his new book packed full of them,* I Paint What I See. *Having shocked us into paralytic submission, he now carefully outlines for his readers the simplest and most correct manner to watch our favorite films.*

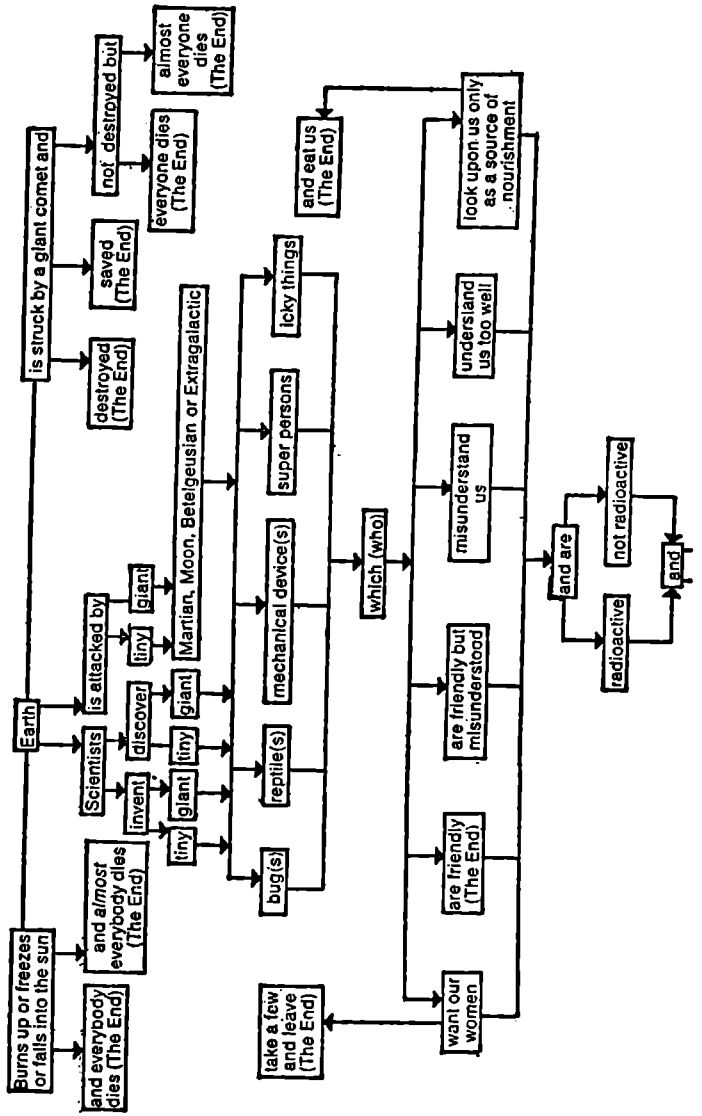
Have you ever been seized by a certainty, halfway through the second reel of a science fiction horror movie,

say, when Dr. Yamamura laughs off the silly native fisherman's legend about a clam the size of Kyoto, that you've seen it all before? Or fallen prey to an overwhelming sense of *déja vu* when the Zirconium robot starts eyeing the leading lady's boobs and makes lewd short-circuit noises? Or had an odd premonition when Pastor Feebley heads for the grounded saucer with a Bible under his arm, mumbling something about the Unity of All Life, and you see a creature that looks a lot like a 500-pound side order of potato salad peer out of a porthole and tuck a minister bib under its chin?

But if you're the sort of person who ends up watching sci-fi movies in the first place, then chances are that overriding all will be the brute compulsion to sit there, glued to the TV tube or riveted to your seat; a compulsion to stick with it to the bitter end, to find out whether or not the blue rodents from Jupiter's Rings *do* get Monique Van Vooren pregnant or if the Fish Sticks from Formalhaut will succumb to the Electrostatic Thermonator. Let's face it—you have to see how the damned thing comes out.

Now, however, thanks to me, you can do just that, and without wasting another moment, by employing my remarkable Science Fiction Horror Movie Pocket Computer, a copy of which you will find reproduced here. Properly used, the Science Fiction Horror Movie Pocket Computer can save you hours of unhealthy exposure to the dangerous radiations of your home set and cut short your stay in seedy cinemas. How does it work?

Well, take it through a test run and see.


Burns up or freezes or falls into the sun
and everybody dies (The End)
and almost everybody dies (The End)
Earth
Scientists
invent
tiny
giant
discover
tiny
giant
is attacked by
tiny
giant
Martian, Moon, Betelgeusian or Extragalactic
bug(s)
reptile(s)
mechanical device(s)
super persons
icky things
take a few and leave (The End)
which (who)
and eat us (The End)
want our women
are friendly (The End)
are friendly but misunderstood
misunderstand us
understand us too well
look upon us only as a source of nourishment
and are
radioactive
not radioactive
and
is struck by a giant comet and
destroyed (The End)
saved (The End)
not destroyed but
everyone dies (The End)
almost everyone dies (The End)

can be killed by
a crowd of peasants with torches (The End)
the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and/or Coast Guard (The End)
the atomic bomb (The End)
but
they die from catching chicken pox (The End)
so they kill us (The End)
so they put us under a benign dictatorship (The End)
so they eat us (The End)
cannot be killed by
a crowd of peasants with torches
the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and/or Coast Guard
the atomic bomb
but
so scientists invent a weapon
which fails
which kills them (The End)
which turns them into disgusting lumps (The End)
a cute little kid convinces them people are O.K.
and they die (The End)
a priest talks to them of God
and they leave (The End)
They fall in love with this beautiful girl
and they turn into disgusting lumps (The End)
and they get married and live happily forever after (The End)

THE HUNTER AT HIS EASE

BRIAN W. ALDISS

We have been washing our world down the drain for a long time, while lately we have been accelerating the pace with galloping overpopulation, best termed "population." The following three writers take three different looks at the crumbling world scene, looks as different as only SF writers can be different. First, Brian Aldiss with this numbing appraisal of the irreversible treadmill of technological progress that we all seem strapped to.

On this higher ground, above the rest of the island, the whine of automated machines was nearly inaudible. Their residual sound was defeated by the crunch of Keith Yale's boots, walking across the broken shells that marked one of

the island's prehistoric beaches, now lifted high above the Indian Ocean.

Yale walked slowly, as befitted his advancing years and the noon temperature. His eyes, slitted behind polaroid lenses, regarded the shells of long-dead giant tortoises. There were hundreds of them up here, bleached white. The shells appeared to ripple in the rising heat, like ghost turtles in a phantasmal sea. He choked on the heat. He should have worn his exo-armor, as van Viner had told him. But whatever his physical state, he found relaxation from mental tension up here, away from everyone.

Reaching the shade of a grove of eucalyptus trees, he stumbled on a stone. Turtle doves, nesting on the ground, scattered under his feet and sped with the grace of an unnecessary alarm out beyond the cliffs and over the ocean before circling back to settle again.

"I know very well you are following me!" Yale said loudly.

He looked about but could see nobody. In fact, it was doubtful if the islanders, indolent by nature, would follow him up here. Their hostility was too lukewarm for that.

He sat on a fallen tree-trunk—cautiously, reassuring himself that the ferocious land-crabs, like the natives, would not venture this far.

"Bloody outrageously marvelously *hot*," he said. He was a tall man, spare of build, slightly stooping, with a tension in his face and around his eyes that might have been recognized as characteristic of the beleaguered generation to which he belonged: not a particularly happy man. The redness of his suntan indicated someone who had not spent much time in the tropics.

He hummed to himself unmusically as he mopped sweat from his face. Perhaps the humming—he had self-knowledge enough to realize it—was to conceal from himself the fact that he was listening continuously.

On Amelegla true silence was unknown. As well as the distant howl of rock being annihilated, he could catch the susurration of wave on coral and rock, and the rattle of

palm leaves in a light breeze. High above him, symbols of a greater silence, the frigate birds wheeled in the sky.

He watched the frigate birds. Down in the mangroves by the dead and broken lagoon, booby birds nested in their hundreds. By craning his neck over the side of the cliff, he could make them out from here. The boobies launched themselves over the sea, making accurate descents into it for fish. As soon as they emerged with fish in their beaks, the frigate birds dived on them. The great black birds harried the white ones until the fish was disgorged —whereupon the frigate snapped it up and rose again supremely to the upper air. But the days of the frigates were numbered.

Yale had seen a creole in the settlement snatch a booby out of the air by its legs.

The birds were not what Yale had climbed all this distance to see.

High above the foliage of the hill reared two great lattice structures of metal. From their heads straggled intricate cable-systems, trailing down into the bush. Along some of the cables creepers climbed, giving up long before they reached the top.

Lifting his right wrist, Yale photographed the masts.

Down in the stores, he and van Viner had machines, computer-extensions, that could have gathered far better photographs without effort. Yale had deliberately left them in their racks.

He moved slowly along the edge of the plateau, keeping to the shade where possible, taking picture after picture. A third mast had collapsed to the ground. He climbed through its ribs as through the carcass of a stranded whale. The upper third of the mast had buckled; it now hung down the escarpment, pointing toward the muddle of huts at the water's edge.

Punching one of his personal channels on his microxchange, Yale said, "I'm up by the Omega Navigation relay station. Two of the main masts are still standing. Once the frigate birds have been eliminated, the masts will represent

a considerable hazard to any landing jets, just as I said they would. We should have been warned about this station. It'll mean bringing the raser equipment up here, which ain't going to be too easy."

He hesitated, looking up at the steel girders, looking down at the microxchange on his left arm, keeping the channel open. Finally he said, "When this structure was erected in the seventies, they killed off the last of the giant tortoises for which Amelegla was renowned. Now VFF and the entire Omega system is just an empty shell itself. Progress sometimes looks a process for killing things off."

He thought it. Why not say it? The thought was now back in Naples, in the Wesciv Technological Force Institute, a minute sting in that giant hive of warlike thinking.

The things they were going to have to do to this island before it was a suitable base for speck-bombing the Third World. . . . It would have been simpler to eradicate the place and build a new island entirely. Always this endless destruction to preserve what you believed must be held. . . .

As he turned, sensing movement behind him, he saw a distant figure running toward him, its body chopped by the bars of trees. Nearer—much nearer—right behind him—one of the creoles was swinging a club at him. He had time to raise the arm on which his camera was strapped, but the blow carried through his defense and caught him over the ear. Amid an uproar of pain, he went spinning, seeing undergrowth and stones whip nastily up at him.

An image of white horses staggering and falling over broken volcanic ground, someone laughing, then he came partly back to his wits. Men moved in a pervasive glitter, bodies scythed or saturated by prongs of light. He could neither open nor close his eyes properly.

He knew he had been carried somewhere.

A voice said, "Before we get too much trouble here, you

hurry along and get Sahib van Viner."

Yale stirred and forced his eyelids open. Mister Archipeligo Zadar stood at his side, dismissing another man. Behind them—a ceaseless crop of diamonds from sun on sea. Yale was lying on a straw mat on a veranda of a hut. The hut stood on the beach under palms. It was Mister Archipeligo's hut. Yale sat up.

His microxchange had gone.

Mister Archipeligo came over and squatted by him, looking concerned.

"You okay, Mister Keith? No bones broken, I don't think. Lucky I got along before that crook kill you altogether."

He felt his neck. "Who attacked me?"

"You know who attacked you, no trouble. That young John Hakabele, the big trouble-maker! He cleared off fast. When we shall catch him, we shall tie him up, send him off to Dar-es-Salaam by next boat, to cool off in prison."

He lay down again, his head buzzing. It was not as simple as Mister Archipeligo made it sound. His ego was wounded by the attack.

"I try to love all men, but you can't trust any of them."

"You trust Mister Archipeligo, Mister Keith. You and I talk like two men together, right?"

"Sure, but I'm getting old. I'm hurt."

"My wife bring you drink."

He sat up as Betty brought him a great round coconut, its top freshly sliced. He drank its cool liquid with gratitude.

"My microxchange has gone, Mister Archipeligo."

"Don't worry. We find that no-good Hakabele man, and pretty soon your mate van Viner comes to fetch you in the ACV."

He lay and worried. The glitter from the sea burned among the palms, destroying form. The sun was setting across the broken lagoon. Smoke filled the air. Looking through the cracks between the boards of the veranda, he could see a porker and chickens routing about in the sandy

soil. He liked Amelegla and its inhabitants. They shouldn't have hit him. Life had been full of disappointments, ever since his wife died in that air-raid.

If Mister Archipeligo had come up almost at the moment Yale was attacked, then the attacker—John Hakabele—would not have had time to unstrap the microxchange from Yale's wrist unless Mister Archipeligo had allowed him time. Were they conspiring against him?

Archipeligo and some of the older inhabitants were in favor of the speck-bomb base. It was only the younger men, like the Hakabele brothers, who had enough political consciousness to object to the base on grounds that it would be used to harass their own kind. Mister Archipeligo was simply for progress, in however lethal a shape it came. For that reason, he might be as interested as his younger rivals in retaining an expensive souvenir like a microxchange, which would connect him with World Information Network.

Consciousness faded into a long involved train of thought in which the villagers of Amelegla were communicating with all the rest of the world and jungle was spreading back over Europe. Through it all went indignation that he had been attacked. Someone had hit him, perhaps intending to kill him. Van Viner had warned him . . .

He sat up. News was burning in Mister Archipeligo's hut, an old flat 2D set carrying a signal down from a comsat.

". . . exchange of fire. The Caucasian Nuclear Barrier to the south of the U.S.S.R. was also breached last night from the Turkish side by a Third World suicide force. The attackers were defeated with no losses to the Russians. Reports are coming in of a battle between Australian gunboats and destroyers of the Indonesian-Malayan Navy in the Timor Sea. A communiqué from Darwin says that their ships are armed with death-rays and heavy casualties are not anticipated. Meanwhile, our correspondent at the peace talks in Singapore, now entering their fourth year, suggests

that Lim Kuai That, the Leader of the Third World, may issue a special appeal. . . ."

Mister Archipeligo switched the set off and settled himself beside Yale for the luxury of conversation.

"Lim Kuai That won't get any peace in the world—he knows that. Men are born to make trouble in the world. Isn't it the truth?"

"You could be right." He wasn't interested. He was thinking of his daughter Myrtle on Mars, wishing she were here to look after him. Every once in a while, he realized he was a lonely man.

"Like I mean these Hakabele fellows, born to trouble like sparks. When the Omega station was being built here, their father made trouble all round. He was a Black Muscle and always went around with a bodyguard. My mother used to tell me. He got married to a white woman from Rhodesia and later he got shot up in an ambush and then everyone start to tell that he was a good man. You know the way it goes, Mr. Yale?"

"Sure, sure. . . ." He took another pull on the coconut, staring out to sea. Myrtle suffered from seasickness as a child; she had joked about it when going to Mars, saying that at least Mars was all dry land.

"David Hakabele was not a good man. He was a bad man. He was a crook. A gangster, you'd say. My mother knew all about him. But the boys—they worship him!" Mister Archipeligo made a wide gesture to show how that worship was capable of embracing the universe. "Now their father dead, they do always what they think he want them to do. I tell them, 'Look ahead! Think about progress,' I tell them. 'Don't go around all the time thinking just of revenge, man!' That's what I tell them, Mr. Yale. Ain't that right? You got to think to the future, ain't that right?"

"Sure, sure." He propped himself up, listening forward. He knew that noise, growing dominant above the sound of the ocean.

"They don't think of nothing but the past. That's why

they make so much trouble. I guess the war unsettles them. Their father he certainly set a bad example, yes, he did. . . ."

Now Yale could see the air-cushion vehicle. It was important that his partner, Nike van Viner, should not see him in this position of weakness. Hauling himself up by the rail, he stood and peered over the verandah at the darkening sea.

The ACV was moving round the headland, black against the incandescent bars of sunset. Boats of fishermen and turtle-hunters, out for the evening catch, rocked as it swished past them sending spray over their occupants. Van Viner—he would be impressing the natives—handled the big saucer like a maniac, swinging it toward shore in an arc, narrowly missing the wooden jetty, spilling his craft right up the beach, so that sand showered almost at Yale's feet.

The racket of the engines had hardly died before van Viner was climbing out. He had a nuclear carbine slung over one shoulder and a respirator on his chest: equipped for trouble. He was old, hard, and earth-colored, solid and a self-contained man. He came up the beach fast, like a youngster with the aid of his servo-mech suit.

"Well, Keith—you got yourself in trouble again?"

"Nothing that can't be sorted out. I was up the hill. I was attacked."

Mister Archipeligo came out of his hut and went down to van Viner.

"It's just we have a little bit of trouble with these young Hakabele brothers, Mister Nike. You know they don't like to see Amelegla developed, so they do wrong."

"Couple of days ago, it was sabotaging the machines, or trying to. Now we've got a case of attempted murder. Enough's enough. Mister Archipeligo, you're boss-man here. Round those two guys up and deliver them to me in the morning, okay?"

Mister Archipeligo shook his head doubtfully. "They know they done wrong so they go hide in the caves maybe.

You don't worry—they will cause you no further trouble. I speak to their wives."

Van Viner said, "They're murderers, and I want them arrested, or you're in trouble too."

Coming down off the veranda, carefully holding himself upright, Yale said, "Nobody's been murdered, Nike. I'm going to be okay. Mister Archipeligo is in charge here, so let's leave punishment to him, right?" Turning to Archipeligo, he said, "I know how the young hotheads feel. They think their island is going to be spoiled. It won't be—it'll be developed. This is the worst time. Things'll settle down later. The base will mean a better standard of living for all. You know that. You tell them."

Several villagers had gathered around to find what was going on. Yale spoke so that they could hear. Somewhat to his surprise, a young woman answered him.

"We want to live as we are. We don't want no speck-bomb base or better things. That's all John and Peter Hakabele say—this our place, you people go back home and leave us quiet live as we are!"

Van Viner confronted her, so that she stepped quickly back.

"This is the twenty-first century, whether you like it or not. If the Hakabele brothers aren't handed over to me first thing tomorrow morning, Mister Yale and me will strafe the island with the helicopters. Okay? Savvy? Savvy nerve gas? Come on, Keith, let's get out of this stinking hole!"

As they were climbing into the ACV, Yale staggered and van Viner, in reaching for his arm to steady him, noticed his microxchange had gone.

"You lost that too? You're a fool, Keith. You should never have gone out without a weapon and exo-armor!" He shouted down to Mister Archipeligo, "The microx-set better be handed over with the Hakabele brothers, right, or there will be more trouble!"

At this threat, Mister Archipeligo showed signs of anger. Coming up to the vehicle, he wagged a finger up to van Viner and said, "Okay, I arrest the brothers, but I no know

anything about any microx-set. If John Hakabele get it, he hate machines and throw it right straight into the sea!"

Van Viner opened up the engines. As the ACV rose, sand sprayed outward, plastering Mister Archipeligo and the villagers, who ran back into the shelter of the palms. The vehicle achieved maximum lift, curved forward, and slid out over the water. At that moment, the sun was dipping under the horizon, painting the clouds that piled over the Indian Ocean with crimson and gold, sending out rays and wheels of light. White-eyes and sunbirds swooped home to roost, crying as they went. At the wheel, van Viner said grimly, "These creoles are more trouble than they're worth. There's an autofreighter calling tomorrow—we could evacuate the lot on it, have the whole damned place to ourselves, why not?"

"We'd have to get permission from Naples. . . ."

"No bother. Ship 'em all out to Dar-es-Salaam!"

"And what would they do there? This is their home."

"That's their lookout, isn't it? They've had their chance."

Around the great headland, the main part of the island showed. The shoulder of hill sloped downward, the thicker vegetation died, and the plain began—the plain, once a refuge for thousands of loonies and noddies, which was now being excoriated by the big geodozers. Machine noise came clear over the water, as they worked on their preprogrammed tasks.

Now the ACV had left the shelter of the broken lagoon. The ride was rougher over the ocean swells, but van Viner rode the machine confidently into the pontoon harbor and up a concrete ramp into its shed.

As they climbed out, he said again, grimly, "We'll ship 'em all out to Dar-es-Salaam. They're more trouble than they're worth. The Hakabeles go to jail for theft and attempted murder, and the rest get resettled somewhere along the Tanzanian coast, right?"

"We'll talk about it over supper, Nike."

Trying to regain his strength, Yale clutched his neck and

looked about him. The sun had gone; a sullen bar of brass light marked the western horizon. Most of the island was already in night. Up on the plateau, one of the old Omega masts glinted sternly against darkening sky. The first flying fox was abroad.

"I'm going to get a drink," Yale said. He was beginning to feel chilly.

At eight o'clock, Yale was sitting in his cabin talking to his daughter when the machines outside cut off. The automatic units took a sixty-five-minute break when they returned to their service unit for maintenance, after which they would continue unceasingly throughout the night.

"I'll have to go to eat with Nike now, Myrtle," Yale said into the cube.

"I'm worried, Father. You sound so wretched." She stood about six inches high, wearing a bright red foil-wrap, walking about over his desk top. Tonight, as often, she had chosen to broadcast from outside, so that Yale could see the Martian landscape at the back of her and David's house. Perhaps she hoped to make him homesick.

"I'll be okay, old girl. Like I said, I got a clout over the side of the head. I'll get myself mediscanned if I don't feel better after supper. We eat well here—Amelegla is still alive with wild life, as yet."

"You're worrying about things. I can tell."

He straightened his shoulders, trying to take a more positive stance, seeing the tiny facsimile of himself that Myrtle had stood on the heat pump in her yard. "I got to sort things out with Nike, then things will be okay. And with the natives. . . ."

"Life's too complicated with all those different races on Earth, Dad. Come on back to Mars and live with David and me. You know you can go out hunting in the hills as you used to."

He had been watching their camels in the background, moving slowly as David herded them in. They were gama-camels—Genetically Auto-Manipulated and Adapted

strains—which could survive in the harsh hinterlands of the colony planet: which harsh hinterlands were now studded with gama-plants of all kinds, from the gama-cacti at the poles to the gama-wheatlands of the equator, the wheat ripening by satellite reflector systems.

Certainly Yale had lived there, had hunted wild gama-pig in the uplands of Eridania. That was after Rosie was killed. He had been glad enough of the break in life. But it was not for him. Both Myrtle and David were gamas; their genetic constitution had been shaped before birth, fitting them for the colony world; neither could tolerate life on Earth—this phantom walk in effigy on his desk top marked the extent of Myrtle's terrestrial adaptation. He had been glad to come back to Earth, despite the war. Although the grand obnubilated silences of Mars still haunted him, he knew he could never return to them.

"We'll let you live the way you want to."

That was another thing. Here on Amelegla—not that he would be allowed to stay on Amelegla forever—he could have a girl from the village every evening. Seyilli was her name, a nice little girl, clean and affectionate. On Mars, there were no Seyillis, no spare women, and a chilly puritanical code that accorded with the external climate.

Besides, Myrtle would never have understood or approved. She lived back in the past, and expected him to do so too.

But the past, with all its innocence and simplicity, was gone, as extinct as diesel trains. . . .

A tiny spring broke in him.

"I'm an exile wherever I go, lass," he said. He cut the connection. The laser-light-link, burning at a frequency of trillions of cycles per second, ceased to operate between two worlds.

"Come back. . . ." In mid-sentence, mid-gesture, his daughter died and the landscape behind her. Only the dull cube of the holocoder confronted him. He turned away. There was only one desolation; all interpersonal relationships were frail illusory things. . . .

They generally ate their evening meal while the machines were silent. Their Singhalese cook had prepared a curry from the blue pigeons that abounded in the trees of Amelegla. Many of the trees had been dozed down, but the pigeons still seemed plentiful this season.

Van Viner was drinking beer. As if to avoid the subject of how they were to handle the Hakabele affair, he started a long reminiscence about his young brother Herman, killed in the early stages of the war. He needed no excuse to talk about Herman.

"Yes, he was born a hunter, my brother Herman. He served two years down in Antarctic waters—I must have told you."

"You told me."

"He captured a submarine-full of volunteers, and he was only twenty-five. He was a big feller—bigger than me. Six foot four, tough as they come. We always got on well. I'll never forgive the bastards for killing him."

Yale flicked through the pile of photographs just received back from Naples, not listening to the rest of the tale. Masts, canting this way and that. Sunshine catching their girders. Trailing cable, writhing this way, writhing that. The outriders of the jungle, creepers, dragging them down. Frigate birds. In one shot, a bird appeared to be trapped between the bars. Glimpses of shaggy hilltop. His morning's work, before John Hakabele had clobbered him.

"I'll indent for another microxchange tomorrow, Nike," he said, breaking in on the other's monologue. "You're right, I asked for trouble going up on the hill without exo-armor."

The pigeon curry came in. As they seated themselves, van Viner said, "They clobbered you, right? They must be taught they can't do that to a white man and get away with it."

"You can't expect them to want us here. We're not only wrecking their island, we're building an installation to be used against their kind on the mainland."

"Let's go hunting the Hakabeles! Use nerve gas—we've got plenty of it. Give everyone a scare!"

"Mister Archipeligo will persuade them to hand themselves over to us."

"They're all the lousy same! I'd kill the lot! Archipeligo told them to attack you, crafty black sod!"

"Aren't you forgetting he's half-Irish—a product of the last white invasion here in the eighties?"

"Wipe the lot off the face of the map! World Government's too scared. If my brother was alive—did I ever tell you Herman killed the last blue whale in existence? Down in the Antarctic, that was. It's extinct now. The Aussies put a price on Herman's head, but you think that bothered my brother? He'd have killed an Aussie soon as look at him!" He burst into laughter and opened another beer, washing down forks full of curry between his shouts of mirth. "He was a right one, my brother Herman—wouldn't stand nonsense from any man!"

"To get back to the subject—Archipeligo is head of the village. We must give him till morning to hand over the culprits, as arranged."

Van Viner scowled across the table. "Shut your gob! You're scared of these bastards, aren't you?"

"You'll never understand this, Nike, but I happen to like and respect Mister Archipeligo."

"Jee . . . zus!" He rolled his eyes toward the polystypline ceiling, and devoured the rest of his meal in heavy silence.

Later, in the cube, streets swam, buildings loomed and died, human faces yielded up their secret landscapes and were gone, as Yale watched the nightly Wesciv newsurvey. Sicily was being evacuated again; palaces smoldered and a small boy staggered by with a smaller boy on his back. This was the third evacuation of Sicily. Neither side could agree on the island's remaining neutral ground.

The usual topsy-turvy deals were being made by politicians of both sides, smiling and ducking into their blowcars. Once the scene of bitter fighting, the Cape Verde

Islands were being ceded by United African States to Uni-Europe in exchange for Jupiter-class spacers which would probably be used to bomb Uni-Europe. South Africa was giving aid for research to the nations she was fighting. Argentina had introduced economic sanctions against Uruguay, although both states were nominally at war with Brazil. Brazil was importing wheat from one part of Canada and selling back at a profit to another part of Canada. Scandinavian hospitals were being built in African famine centers.

As a band marched out into the hut and vanished with its flaring brass, Yale turned away from the cube. It wasn't one color against another, or rich against poor, or one class against another; it was man fighting himself. Increasing industrialization, world automation, was powerless to ameliorate that inner war. The five-digited clever simian hand that built palaces as willingly destroyed them.

Staring into the night, he thought of Mars. The neotechnical civilization was peaceful there; but there were so few people on Mars as yet, and the forces of nature, stacked against them, gave them a common bond. The animosities of Earth would blossom when the desert did. Some craters had already been taken over by robber gangs.

When he could bear van Viner's company no longer, Yale retired to his own hut. Even there, he was restless. Finally he went to stand outside, savoring the warm night air. A light shower swept across the island and was gone as silently as it came. Only close to nature did man's life seem to have reason and purpose.

The peace of the night was suddenly destroyed. Swaths of light cut the air, immense engines awoke. The task of leveling out the terrain was again in process, and would continue throughout the night.

He looked up. The helicopter was rising from its pad beyond a line of tamarisks. Perhaps van Viner had waited until the earth-moving machines were going again, hoping their noise would cover the sound of his departure. Remembering his threat to spray the village with nerve gas,

Yale pulled a wry face. There was going to be big trouble here sooner or later. He wished he did not hate his companion so much—but the two men were here merely by the luck of a lottery ticket; they had been unable to pull together from the start.

The helicopter, black against the dark blue of the sky, swung out to sea, moved in again, disappeared around the shoulder of mountain.

Over his bunk in the hut was his gun. He hesitated about going to get it. Well, van Viner was away now. He went to look at the sea instead.

Beyond its margin of foam, the sea was entirely dark, with the fine stars overhead uninterrupted by cloud. The moon would be up shortly. For this sort of evening alone, it was worth getting away from the cities of Wesciv. Through the palms, on the water, he could see one light floating—a pirogue from the village. There would be fresh fish again for breakfast.

He longed for someone to talk to—even Seyilli, whose English was rudimentary. He longed to tell someone how he loved this place, loved the birds sitting in the clumps of feathery casuarinas watching the water, loved the shade of indigo that stole over the surface of ocean as sunset approached.

A figure sprang from the darkness at his feet. Yale shouted in surprise, struggled—and found his hands pinned firmly behind his back. Fury filled him, fury with himself for having been so unwary. He kicked and fought. There were two men beside him, perhaps more. No. Two!

"Let go! I'll kill you! I know who you are—you're the Hakabele brothers. There will be trouble if you don't let me go!"

"Keep quiet, boss, and you won't get hurt!" He had a resounding blow over the side of his skull to reinforce this message.

They frog-marched him back to the camp and into his hut. One of them switched the light on and locked the door.

The two brothers were dressed alike, in shorts and plim-

sols, but looked nothing alike. John, the elder, was big and rugged, with a small mustache; Peter was short and thin and clean-shaven. John was pale-skinned, Peter of an almost Dravidian darkness. Peter had a long knife tucked in his belt.

"Now, boss, we want to talk with you," John said quietly. "Sit down."

"I'm prepared to talk at any time. You know that—yet this is the second time you have attacked me today! You aren't going to get away with this! Mister Archipeligo will chuck you out if I don't!"

"Nobody's going to chuck us out," Peter said. "We have lots of backing—not on Amelegla maybe, but other places. They help us! We chuck you out and van Viner and Mister Archipeligo all in one go!"

"What for? While we are here, and the speck-base, you earn good money."

"Money! We don't want to have money! Why should you come here, boss, and build your base just to hit other poor fellers like us in other places of the world? We won't let you."

Yale nodded. "So the Populists have been talking to you. Listen, and I'll tell you a few home truths. I love Amelegla. It's the most wonderful place I've ever experienced. But its way of life is doomed. Savvy doomed? Change has overtaken it, and you can't do anything about it. It's no good getting rid of van Viner and me—the machines are here."

"We soon get rid of the machines!" said John.

"Right. Then more machines come. They eradicate your settlement and then they build the base. You know it's true. I don't happen to like it personally but it's true. You two men are obsolete! You know that all sea-going Wesciv vessels are now navigated from satellites. Only a few years back, that system caused the junking of the Omega system. But the Omega system was the height of sophistication when you were lads. Everything has its day. Your way of life has had its day, as surely as the giant tortoises. Look!"

He took the pile of photographs of the old Omega

installation from the side table and passed it to the brothers. By instinct, they reached and began to shuffle through the pile.

"And I've another thing to show you," Yale said, turning to the locker above his bunk. "This! Stand back against the door! Quick!"

Before the distended snout of the gun, they could only obey. Peter flung the photographs on to the floor.

"We may be obsolete, boss, but you daren't shoot us!"

"If you make a move, I'll shoot you. I'll be sorry, but I'll shoot."

"We weren't going to harm you."

He found himself unexpectedly fighting a craving for murder. He longed to shoot them down, firing bolts into their defenseless bodies. In his mind, they writhed and twisted, cried, bled, rolled in their blood, waved useless hands and fingers at him and died, died before him in all his unassailable power. His face distorted—he saw them cower against the door. They believed he would shoot. Their display of fear heightened the rage in his veins.

A face appeared outside one of the windows. He fired.

In the intolerable noise he released, glass burst in every direction, the window fell out, the face vanished.

Dear God, it must have been Seyilli. . . .

The lust died at once, leaving him drained. He felt his pallor, and sank back onto the bed. But the Hakabele brothers, equally shaken, made no move. Peter picked abstractedly at one shoulder, bleeding where fragments of glass had lacerated it.

"You must understand I'm trapped in the world-setup just as you are. Men are pawns now—perhaps they always have been, perhaps the individual never meant anything. Individual consciousness may be an evolutionary error, a malfunction of the neocortex. No other creature has to suffer from it and the loneliness it entails. You want to put the clock back—we all want to put the clock back, to return to the simpler world of our childhood, but change sweeps us on . . . We all carry around totems of the past like cripples with crutches . . ."

Afterward, he could not remember what his neurotic outpouring had been about. When the words began to make more sense to him, they were already attaining a greater coherence.

". . . Automation in Wesciv has brought everyone up against the greatest problem. What do men do with infinite leisure? There's no work. You're lucky here. Your lives are natural. You have to fend for food . . . We have everything supplied. What aims are there left in life? That's how the present system has built up. The war is not meant to reinforce the gulf between West and East—it is meant to lessen it. By declaring war on the poor countries, the rich hope to make them accelerate their mechanization and industrial processes which alone can solve their poverty problems—and the statistically minimal proportion of people killed by war-engines also helps to that end. The war's a new kind of war, fought *for* rather than against the other side . . . We could wipe out half the globe without any trouble, but that's not our aim. There's no hate. No hate, only . . ."

He found he could not go on. He put the gun down and hid his face in his hands.

Shakily, John Hakabele said, "A fine warrior you are!"

"Let's get out of this," Peter said to his brother.

"Wait! Let's have no more trouble! Give me back my microxchange and then I'll call van Viner off the warpath!"

"We threw that machine in the ocean! So why not shoot us and make us all rich, eh?" John at least had recovered from the shock of the sudden firing.

Yale stood up, leaving the gun where it was. "I don't wish to shoot you. I'm no soldier. Try and picture what it's like in Europe. With infinite leisure, man has to fill in with his ancient pursuits. He was a warrior. Now he can be a warrior again. It's atavistic, I know, but we have a few centuries yet to go before we're grown up. I'm a part-time soldier. The war is run by amateurs, the whole thing. There's nothing else to do, unless you're in the arts or entertainments. This is a holiday to me, but I don't want . . ."

His voice tailed off. They had already ceased to hear his

words. The helicopter was roaring overhead. It sounded as if it was about to crash into the hut. Yale's thought was that van Viner had gone mad.

Soft explosions mingled with the roar of the engines. As the machine bucketed overhead, it was so close that the blinds blew inward and the scattered photographs on the floor fluttered up. As the noise lessened, an odor rather like raw meat infiltrated the room.

"It's nerve gas! The bloody fool—"

Already he could feel heat accumulating in his body, a jarring in his fingers, hands, arms, as electrical discharges built up in his cells. He flung himself against the door, somehow pushed it open, staggered out, gulped the poisoned air, saw the jungle tipping, heard the helicopter zoom round, saw as he reeled the body of Mister Archipeligo sprawled on the ground, hands up to its shattered head . . . and fell twitching over it.

For a long while, reality seemed nothing more than shadows playing over a wall of a cave. From the stellar distance of his bunk, he watched van Viner going about this and that, unable and unwilling to take in what he was doing.

The Singhalese came occasionally and brought food. Sometimes Seyilli was there, mopping his face, trying to get him to eat and drink, smiling her timid smile.

The feeling grew on him that he ought to do something.

There came a time—before that, time seemed to have disappeared down some undiscovered energy-sink in the universe—when van Viner walked over and spoke to him.

He failed to register until the sentence had been repeated.

"You'd better get up and attend Archipeligo's funeral with me."

With returning memory came returning life. He sat up. With Seyilli's aid, he got dressed and was helped into the ACV.

They sped around the headland. Still in a state of detachment, the aftereffect of the gas, he walked among the

villagers to the burial place. The way was steep, a narrow path curling against the cliff. In his weakness, he steadied himself against the wall of the cliff, feeling in it the shells of billions of extinct molluscs. He was having trouble with his time-scales: it felt like a matter of minutes since the nerve gas had overcome him, yet van Viner said it was two days. He was getting old; death had been close to him.

Their path widened into the burial place. Crosses of wood, some with rudimentary carving, some created from the spars of forgotten ships, stood among a grove of trees. Stones and the tomb-like carapaces of giant turtles had been cleared, forming an ineffectual wall at one end of the cemetery.

Four men of the settlement came forward, carrying the shrouded body of Mister Archipeligo above their heads. They set it down under the trees, looking at van Viner and Yale as they straightened. The presence of the white men appeared to be a consolation to them, although they remained uneasy.

All the women, with the exception of Betty, Mister Archipeligo's widow, clustered in the rear, standing among the trees, subdued but talking to each other. From where Yale stood, their voices were drowned by the endless argument of the sea, a few feet below.

When all the villagers were present, the priest raised his hand and gave a prayer. Most of his words also were lost to the ocean.

Van Viner stepped forward and gave a short oration, resting his arm in paternal fashion on Betty's shoulder. He pitched his voice so that everyone could hear.

"We all know he was a good man. He stood for progress and a better life. Let's all hope he's found a better life right now, right? We'll miss him. I had a brother once, you might say he was very dear to me, who stood for those same things, so I know how you all feel. When Mister Archipeligo tried to arrest the Hakabele brothers, they killed him in cold blood. They were no good. Bad men. Fortunately, my friend Keith Yale and I were able to deal with

them. They have been shot and their bodies cast into the sea. They aren't going to bother us any more.

"You can now all go back to your ordinary lives as best you can. Let's have no more trouble in case someone else gets shot. Mister Archipeligo Zadar's death as well as his life must be an object lesson to us all."

They were drinking beer in Betty's shack, young men were dancing outside, Yale recovered enough to say to his partner, "You shot the brothers then?"

"Keep your voice down. Of course I shot them. It was no trouble. They were paralyzed, same as you. With them gone, we'll have no further bother."

"You told a pack of lies, Nike!"

"Jesus, man, what else was I supposed to say? Not the truth? The old boy was hunting down the brothers on his own—was I supposed to tell everyone you shot him? Drink up your beer and think yourself lucky they didn't knock you off!"

He did as he was told. It was useless to hate van Viner. The man was merely following the way the world went. The hunter at his ease never counted the bodies that lay behind him.

He choked on his beer. As soon as he could, he made his excuses and broke away from the funeral feast. Some of the villagers were singing. He walked past them, heading up the steep slope inland. He wanted to get to the top of the headland, among the eucalyptus groves, away from the noises of machines and their attendants, to where the frigate birds defended their domain.

THE COHEN DOG EXCLUSION ACT

STEVEN SCHRADER

New York City shares with Los Angeles the dubious role of being the great ecological despoiler. With good reason, as inhabitants and visitors to these cities know. From that staid and important anthology Eco-Fiction *comes this slightly mad but still important glimpse at a much neglected problem.*

The doctors at the institute are pleased with my progress. The medication has calmed me. They're talking of letting me go home weekends. Only I have no place to go. Which is disgraceful. You'd think the city would have paid

my rent or would at least find me a place to live now that I'm ready to be released. After all, I've done great service for them, been personally responsible for vast improvements. Perhaps I overdid certain aspects of my plan, but, looking back, I see no way to have effected change without radical, even bizarre acts. I sacrificed my freedom in a worthy cause. The administration, of course, is not interested in such heroism. They are internationalists. Speak of overpopulation or ecology and they will immediately hold a dinner for your cause; apply for a permit for a peace demonstration and you will receive one before you complete your application. But try something closer to home, try to improve the quality of city life, and see how quickly obstacles are placed before you, how soon politics enters. Such is democracy. Heads of state, like everyone else, are interested in their own welfare. The people can go to hell.

Well, great ideas like mine are simple and become obvious after their fulfillment. But if you are the first to follow an idea through you know perfectly well what happens. You will be called dangerous, thrown in jail, or, like I was, locked up in Long Island like a madman. But at least I have my achievement to comfort me—the Cohen Dog Exclusion Act passed by the City Council. My only regret is that it was not called the Seymour Cohen Dog Exclusion Act. For I am sure other Cohens are right now pretending they are responsible, scrambling for the honor, assuming the credit, while I rot in Long Island unable to set the record straight.

The dogs were disturbing me greatly. I wrote letters to all the heads of departments. From some I received replies. Thank you for your interest. We will look into the matter you have complained about and let you know if anything definite comes of our investigation or if you can be of further help to us. Please do not contact us again unless we request you to. Official city business requires so much time and effort that second letters on unsolicited matters assume an untenable burden on our limited staff. Sincerely yours, Commissioner Plotz.

Conditions grew worse. Wherever you looked there was dog shit. In the morning young ladies who had moved to the renovated brownstones on my block walked their German shepherds on the sidewalk, in the curb, and the center of the street. Some of the dogs were unleashed, all of them sniffing away, peeing and shitting. The owners gossiped to one another, and some men, I'm sure, bought dogs for the sole purpose of meeting girls. I thought of it myself, could imagine smooth conversations with them while our dogs took craps at our feet. But I'm not a hypocrite. I can't hide my feelings. I don't understand how people can chat casually while their dogs shit all around them.

The block began to have an odor, perhaps a city-wide odor—the collective smell of dog shit—but it seemed that my block had its own particular smell, that our dogs ate one brand of dog food or suffered from one type of anxiety which resulted in a sweet, cloying, musty odor.

I approached people on the block. First, Woofer, the psychiatrist, who was dragged in his gray, baggy, innocuous suit up the middle of the block every morning by his German shepherd.

"How can you stand it?" I asked. "Your dog shitting away. Turds all over. Isn't it disgusting? Suppose I were to do that?"

"You've got a shit hang-up," he said. "Anal oriented. Relax. Give away your coin collection. Accept your own shit and the shit of animals."

"Never. There must be an alternate solution. A place to take them. Up on a roof. Toilets. A dog pissoir."

Woofer laughed. He was carried away by his brute.

I approached several of the girl owners, but they blushed and refused to answer. One in a yellow sweater and leather skirt, thin with pointy boobs, set her beast on me.

"Attack, Ringo," she ordered and I dashed up the street, just managing to close the door on him.

Every day I stepped in dog shit. I dreamed of it. At work I was preoccupied by it. One morning as the coffee break was over and I was on my way to the bathroom to delay the

boredom of work a little longer I thought of the solution. I would piss on the floor like a dog. I pictured everyone doing it. We'd need an attendant with a mop and pail.

"Here, boy," we'd shout, and a man in a white uniform and hat would come running.

I finally did go to the bathroom. The office wasn't the place. The street was better, more dramatic. Everyone would see. I thought of stickers and buttons. A huge campaign. Rallies in Madison Square Garden.

The next morning I went out at eight, the height of dog activity. They were promenading, shitting, pissing, barking, frolicking, chasing balls and sticks. I went to a tree in the middle of the block, loosened my pants, let them fall with my underwear, and squatted. A girl nearby gasped.

"Come away, Fang," she called.

Heads poked out of windows, shouting, "Stop it, pervert."

I took my time, squatting above the earth.

A squad car turned down the block, arriving as quickly as if I had shot a policeman. Both officers jumped out of the car. The girl who'd seen me first sobbingly told what had happened. Woofer was there, too. "Anal neurosis," he told the police and shook his head.

The cops walked over. I was just tucking my shirt in. They both had mustaches and long sideburns. I could tell they'd taken human relations courses.

"Did you do that?" one cop asked politely, his hand indicating my shit.

"I don't deny it."

"Uh-huh. Well, it's against the law, mister. I'm going to write out a summons." He looked at his partner. "What should I put down? Littering, causing a public disturbance, obscenity?"

"Put 'em all down," the other cop said.

He filled out the ticket and handed it to me.

"Don't do it again. You'll get in trouble."

At court I passed out Xeroxed statements explaining my position. I had prepared it secretly on my job. IF DOGS WHY NOT MEN?

The courtroom was packed. The judge looked like Woofer, but more impressive in robes. Underneath, though, I knew his suit was baggy.

"Seymour, you have committed an outrage on the people," he said.

I handed him a Xeroxed sheet.

"Damn it, you're mad. You're going to be locked up next time."

He fined me and banged the gavel.

Spectators began shouting and fighting. Outside on the steps people came up to me.

"We're with you," they shouted. They elected me chairman.

The next morning my street was filled with newspaper reporters and television cameramen. A dozen of my group stationed themselves at trees, squatted, and began shitting. Squad cars pulled up from all over. Flashbulbs popped.

"Get Cohen," the captain said. They handcuffed me and pushed me into a squad car. At Bellevue Woofer filled out the papers.

"You can't stop us," I shouted. "It's out of control."

"Anal paranoid," he yelled back.

I read about it at the hospital library in the back issues of the *Times*. Two days after my arrest the *Times* did an exposé of dog shit, pointing to a high correlation with cancer, asthma, and crime. A Central Park Shit-In drew four thousand participants. Civil strife grew. Both sides wore buttons. One showed a man shitting. The other the silhouette of a Scotty.

The movement to outlaw dogs was gaining, and the Mayor came to see me in the hospital. He resembled Woofer, though he was taller and more handsome. His suit fit well, but there was still something baggy about it.

"My career's at stake," he said. "You're the only one who can save me, Cohen. Recant and I won't have to take a stand. I'll appoint you to the U.N. Anything."

I barked at him, pulled up my hospital gown, and started to shit.

He resigned before the bill was passed.

The police are rounding up dogs as best they can. A thousand trainees have been added to the force. Of course it's an impossible task. Dogs will always be hidden by addict owners. But at least they will remain indoors. Dog shit in the city is at an end. I can't wait to get out and see for myself.

GANTLET

RICHARD E. PECK

The city is nameless; it could lie in the future of any large city we know. The fact that the story is set in the future is a small measure of cheer for us today, particularly the millions of battling commuters who might be able to extract a bit of comfort from this description of how it could *get worse.*

Jack Brens thumbed the ID sensor and waited for the sealed car doors to open. He had stayed too long in his office, hoping to avoid any conversation with the other commuters, and had been forced to trot through the fetid sta-

tion. The doors split open; he put his head in and sucked gratefully at the cool air inside, then scrubbed his moist palms along his thighs and stepped quickly into the car. Rivulets of sweat ran down the small of his back. He stretched his lips into the parody of a confident smile.

Most of the passengers sat strapped in, a few feigning sleep, others trying to concentrate on the stiff-dried fac-sheets which rattled in their hands. Lances of light fell diagonally through the gloom; some of the boiler plate welded over the windows had apparently cracked under the twice-daily barrage.

Brens bit the tip of his tongue to remind himself to call Co-op Maintenance when he got home. Today the train was his responsibility—one day out of one hundred; one day out of twenty work weeks. If he didn't correct the flaws he noticed, he might suffer because of them tomorrow, though the responsibility would by then have shifted to someone else. To whom? Karras. Tomorrow Karras had window seat.

Brens nodded to several of the gray-haired passengers who greeted him.

"Hey, Brens. How's it going?"

"Hello, Mr. Brens."

"Go get 'em, Jack."

He strode down the aisle through the aura of acrid fear rising from the ninety-odd men huddled in their seats. A few of the commuters had already pulled their individual smoking bells down from the overhead rack. Although the rules forbade smoking till the train got underway, Brens understood their feelings too well to make a point of it.

Only Karras sat at the front. The seats beside and behind him were empty.

"Thought you weren't coming and I might have to take her out myself," Karras said. "But my turn tomorrow."

Brens nodded and slipped into the engineer's seat. While he familiarized himself with the instrument console, he felt Karras peering avidly past him at the window. Lights in the station tunnel faded and the darkness outside made the

window a temporary mirror. Brens glanced at it once to see the split image of Karras reflected in the inner and outer layers of the bulletproof glass: four bulging eyes, a pair of glistening bald scalps wobbling in and out of focus.

The start buzzer sounded.

He checked the interior mirror. Only two empty seats, at the front of course. He'd heard of no resignations from the Co-op and therefore assumed that the men who should have occupied those seats were ill; it took something serious to make a man miss his scheduled car and incur the fine of a full day's salary.

The train thrummed to life. Lights flared, the fans whined toward full thrust, and the car danced unsteadily forward as it climbed onto its cushion of air. Brens concentrated on keeping his hovering hands near the throttle override.

"You really sweat this thing, don't you?" Karras said. "Relax. You've got nothing to do but enjoy the view, unless you think you're really playing engineer."

Brens tried to ignore him. It was true that the train was almost totally automatic. Yet the man who drew window seat did have certain responsibilities, functions to perform, and no time to waste. No time until the train was safely beyond the third circle—past Cityend, past Opensky, past Workring. And after that, an easy thirty miles home.

Brens pictured the city above them as the train bored its way through the subterranean darkness, pushing it back with a fan of brilliant light. City stretched for thirty blocks from center in this direction and then met the wall of defenses separating it from Opensky. The whole area of City was unified now, finally—buildings joined and sealed against the filth of the air outside that massive, nearly self-sufficient hive. Escalators up and down, beltways back and forth, interior temperature and pollution kept at an acceptable level—it was all rather pleasant.

It was heaven, compared to Opensky. Surrounding and continually threatening City lay the ring of Opensky and its incredible masses of people. Brens hadn't been there for

years, not since driving through on his way to work had become impossibly time-consuming and dangerous. Twenty years ago he had been one of the last lucky ones, picked out by Welfare Control as "salvageable"; these days, no one left Opensky. For that matter, no one with any common sense entered.

He could vaguely recall seeing single-family dwellings there, whether his wife, Hazel, believed that claim or not, and more vividly the single-family room he had shared with his parents and grandfather. He could even remember the first O-peddlers to appear on Sheridan Street. Huge, brawny men with green O-tanks strapped to their backs, they joked with the clamoring children who tugged at their sleeves and tried to beg a lungful of straight O for the high it was rumored to induce. But the peddlers dealt at first only with asthmatics and early-stage emphysemics who gathered on muggy afternoons to suck their metered dollar's worth from the grimy rubber face mask looped over the peddler's arm. All that was before each family had a private bubble hooked directly to the City metering system.

He had no idea what life in Opensky was like now, except what he could gather from the statistics that crossed his desk in Welfare Control. Those figures meant little enough: so many schools to maintain, dole centers to keep stocked and guarded, restraint aides needed for various playgrounds—he merely converted City budget figures to percentages corresponding to the requests of fieldmen in Opensky. And he hadn't spoken to a fieldman in nearly a year. But he assumed it couldn't be pleasant there. Welfare Control had recently disbanded and reassigned to wall duty all Riot Suppression teams; the object now was not to suppress, but to contain. What went on in Opensky was the skyers' own business, so long as they didn't try to enter City.

So. Six miles through Opensky to Workring, three miles of Workring itself, where the skyers kept the furnaces bellowing and City industry alive. But that part of the trip

wouldn't be too bad. Only responsible skyers were allowed to enter Workring, and most stuck to their jobs for fear of having their thumbprints erased from the sensors at each Opensky exit gate. Such strict control had seemed harsh, at first, but Brens now knew it to be necessary. Rampant sabotage in Workring had made it so. The skyers who chose to work had nearly free access to and from Workring. And those who chose not to work—well, that was their choice. They could occupy themselves somehow. Each year Welfare Control authorized more and more playgrounds in Opensky, and the public schools were open to anyone under fifty with no worse than a moderate arrest record.

Beyond Workring lay the commuter residential area. A few miles of high-rise suburbs, for secretaries and apprentice managerial staff, merging suddenly with the sprawling redevelopment apartment blocks, and then real country. To Brens the commuter line seemed a barometer of social responsibility: the greater one's worth to City, the farther away he could afford to live. Brens and his wife had moved for the last time only a year ago, to the end of the trainpad, thirty miles out. They had a small square of yellowed grass and two dwarf apple trees that would not bear. It was . . .

He shook off his daydreaming and tried to focus on the darkness rushing toward them. As their speed increased, he paradoxically lost the sense of motion conveyed by the lurching start and lumbering underground passage. Greater speed increased the amount of compression below as air entered the train's howling scoops and whooshed through the ducts down the car sides. Cityend lay moments ahead.

Brens concentrated on one of the few tasks not yet automated: at Cityend, and on the train's emergence from the tunnel, his real duty would begin. Three times in the past month skyers had sought to breach City defenses through the tunnel itself.

"Hey! You didn't check defense systems," Karras said.

"Thanks," Brens muttered through clenched teeth. "But they're okay." Then, because he knew Karras was right, he flipped the arming switch for the roof-mounted fifties and checked diverted-power availability for the nose lasers. The dials read in the green, as always.

Only Karras, who now sat hunched forward in anticipation, would have noticed the omission. Because Karras was sick. The man actually seemed to look forward to his turn in window seat, not only for the sights all the other commuters in the Co-op tried to avoid, but also for the possible opportunity of turning loose the train's newly installed firepower.

"One of these days they're going to make a big try. They'd all give an arm to break into City, just to camp in the corridors. Now, if it was me out there, I'd be figuring a way to get out into Suburbs. But them? All they know is destroy. Besides, you think they'll take it lying down that we raised the O-tax? Forget it! They're out there waiting, and we both know it. That's why you ought to check all the gear we've got. Never know when . . ."

"Later, Karras! There it is." Brens felt his chest tighten as the distant circle of light swept toward them—tunnel exit, Cityend. His forearms tensed and he glared at the instruments, waiting for the possibility that he might have to override the controls and slam the train to a stop. But a green light flashed; ahead, the circle of sky brightened as the approaching train tripped the switch that cut off the spray of mist at the tunnel exit. And with that mist fading, the barrier of twenty thousand volts which ordinarily crackled between the exit uprights faded also. For the next few moments, while the train snaked its way into Opensky, City was potentially vulnerable.

Brens stared even harder at the opening. but saw nothing. The car flashed out into gray twilight, and he relaxed. But instinct, or a random impulse, drew his eyes to the train's exterior mirrors. And then he saw them: a shapeless huddle of bodies pouring into the tunnel back toward City. He hit a series of studs on the console and braced himself for the jolt.

There it was.

A murmur swept the crowded car behind him, but he ignored it and stared straight ahead.

"What the hell was it?" Karras asked. "I didn't see a thing."

"Skyers. They were waiting, I guess till the first car passed. They must have figured no one would see them that way."

"I don't mean who, I mean, what did you use? I didn't hear the fifties."

"For a man who's taking the run tomorrow, you don't keep up very well. Nothing fancy, none of the noise and flash some people get their kicks from. I just popped speedbreaks on the last three cars."

"In the tunnel? My God! Must have wiped them all the way out the tunnel walls, like a squeegee. Who figured that one?"

"This morning's Co-op bulletin suggested it, remember?"

Karras sulked. "I've got better things to do than pay attention to every word those guys put out. They must spend all day dictating memos. We got a real bunch of clods running things this quarter."

"Why don't you volunteer?"

"I give them my four days' pay a month. Who needs that mishmash?"

Brens silently agreed. No one enjoyed keeping the Co-op alive. No one really knew how. And that was one of the major problems associated with having amateurs in charge: it's a hell of a way to run a railroad. But the only way, since the line itself had declared bankruptcy, and both city and state governments refused to take over. If it hadn't been for the Co-op, City would have died, a festering ulcer in the midst of the cancer of Opensky.

Opensky whirled past them now. Along the embankment on both sides, legs dangled a decorative fringe. People sat atop the pilings and hurled debris at the speeding stainless steel cars. Their accuracy had always amazed Brens. Even as he willed himself rigid, he flinched at the eggs, rocks,

bottles, and assorted garbage that clattered and smeared across the window.

"Look at those sonsabitches throw, would you? You ever try and figure what kind of lead time you need to hit something moving as fast as we are?"

Brens shook his head. "I guess they're used to it."

"Why not? What else they got to do but practice?"

Behind them, gunfire crackled and bullets pattered along the boiler plate. Many of the commuters ducked at the opening burst.

"Look at them back there," Karras pointed down the aisle. "Scared blue, every one of them. I know this psychologist who's got a way to calm things down, he says. He had this idea to paint bull's-eyes on the sides of the cars, below the window. Did I tell you about it? He figures it'll work two or three ways. One, if the snipers hit the bull's-eyes, there's less chance of somebody getting tagged through a crack in the boiler plate. Two, maybe they'll quit firing at all, when they see we don't give a suck of sky about it. Or three, he says, even if they keep it up, it gives them something to do, sort of channels their aggression. If they take it out on the trains, maybe they'll ease up on City. What do you think?"

"Wouldn't it make more sense to put up shooting galleries in all the playgrounds? Or figure a way to get new cars for the trains? We can't keep patching and jury-rigging these old crates forever. The last thing we need right now is to make us more of a target than we already are."

"Okay. Have it your way. Only, I was thinking . . ."

Brens tuned him out and squinted at the last molten sliver of setting sun. Its rays smeared rainbows through the streaked eggs washing slowly across the window in the slipstream. The mess coagulated and darkened as airblown particles of ash settled in it and crusted over. When he could stand it no longer, Brens flipped on the wipers and watched the clotted slime smear across the glass, as he had known it would. But some of it scrubbed loose to flip back alongside the speeding train.

The people were still out there. If he looked carefully straight ahead, their presence became a mere shadow at the edges of the channel through which he watched the train-pad reeling toward him. Though he doubted any eye would catch his long enough to matter, he avoided the faces. There was always the slight chance that he might recognize one of them. Twenty years wasn't so long a time. Twenty years ago he had watched the trains from an embankment like these.

Now the train swooped upward to ride its cushion of air along the raised pad, level with second-story windows on each side. Blurred faces stared from those windows, here disembodied, there resting on a cupped hand and arm propped on a window ledge. The exterior mirrors showed him faces ducking away from the gust of wind fanning out behind the train and from the debris lifted whirling in the grimy evening air. He tried to picture the pattern left by the train's passage—dust settling out of the whirlwind like the lines of polarization around a magnet tip. A few of the faces wore respirators or simple, and relatively useless, cotton masks. Many didn't bother to draw back but hung exposed to the breeze that the train was stirring up. And now, as on each of his previous rare turns at the window seat, Brens had the impulse to slow the train, to let the wind die down and diminish behind them, out of what he himself considered misplaced and maudlin sympathy for the skyers who seemed to enjoy the excitement of the train's glistening passage. It tempered the boredom of their day.

". . . right about here the six-thirty had the explosion. Five months ago. Remember?"

"What?"

"Explosion. Some kids must have got hold of detonator caps and strung them on wires swinging from a tree. When the train hit them, they cracked the window all to hell. Nearly hurt somebody. But the crews came out and burned down all the trees along the right-of-way. Little bastards won't pull *that* one again."

Brens nodded. There was one of the armored repair vans

ahead, on a siding under the protective stone lip of the embankment.

The train rose even higher to cross the river which marked the Opensky-Workring boundary. They were riding securely in the concave shell of the bridge. On the river below, a cat, or dog—it was hard to tell at this distance—picked its cautious way across the crusted algae which nearly covered the stream. The center of the turgid river steamed a molten beige; and upriver a short way, brilliant patches of green marked the mouth of the main Workring spillway.

At the far end of the bridge, a group of children scrambled out of the trough of the trainbed to hang over the side.

"Hey! Hit the lasers. Singe their butts for them." Karras bounced in his seat.

"Shut up for a minute, can't you? They're out of the way."

"Now what's that for? Can't you take a joke? Besides, you know they're sneaking into Workring to steal something. You saying we ought to let them get away with it?"

"I'm just telling you to shut up. I'm tired, that's all. Leave it at that."

"Sure. Big deal. Tired! But tomorrow the window seat's mine. So don't come sucking around for a look then, understand?"

"It's a promise."

Sulfurous clouds hung in the air, and Brens checked the car's interior pollution level. It was a safe 18, as he might have guessed. But the sight of buildings tarnished green, of bricks flaking and molting on every factory wall, always depressed him. The ride home was worse than the trip into City. Permissive hours ran from five to eight, when pollution controls were lifted. He knew the theory: evening air was more susceptible to condensation because of the temperature drop, and dumping pollutants into the night sky might actually bring on a cleansing rain. He also knew the practical considerations involved: twenty-four-hour control would almost certainly drive industry away. Com-

promise was essential, if City was to survive.

It would be good to get home.

The train swung into its gently curving descent toward Workring exit, and Brens instinctively clasped the seat arms as the seat pivoted on its gimbals. At the foot of the curve he saw the barricade. Something piled on the pad.

Not for an instant did he doubt what he saw. He lunged at the power override, but stopped himself in time. Dropping to the pad now, in mid-curve, might tip the train or let it slide off the pad onto the potholed and eroded right of way where the uneven terrain offered no stable lift base for getting underway again.

"Ahead of you! On the tracks!" Karras reached for the controls, but Brens caught him with a straight-arm and slammed him to the floor. He concentrated on the roadbed flashing toward them. At the last instant, as the curve modified and tilted toward level, he popped all speedbreaks and snatched the main circuit breaker loose.

From the sides of the cars vertical panels hissed out on their hydraulic pushrods to form baffles against the slipstream, and the train slammed to the pad. Tractor gear whined in protest, the shriek nearly drowning out the dying whir of compressor fans, and the train shuddered to a stop.

Inside, lights dimmed and flickered. Voices rose in the darkness amid the noise of men struggling to their feet.

Brens depressed the circuit breaker and hit the emergency call switch overhead. "Hold it!" he shouted. "Quiet down, please! There's something on the pad, and I had to stop. Just keep calm. I've signaled for the work crews, and they'll be here any minute."

Then he ignored the passengers and focused his attention on the window. The barricade lay no more than twenty feet ahead, rusted castings and discarded mold shells heaped on the roadbed. The jumbled pile seemed ablaze in the flickering red light from the emergency beacons rotating atop the train cars. Behind the barricade and along the right of way, faceless huddled forms rose erect in the demonic light and stood motionless, simply staring at the

train. The stroboscopic light sweeping over them made each face a swarm of moving, melting shadows. Brens fired a preliminary burst from the fifties atop the first car, then quickly switched them to automatic, but the watching forms stood like statues.

"They must know," Karras said. He stood beside Brens and massaged his bruised shoulder. "Look. None of them moving."

Then one of the watchers broke and charged toward the car, waving a club. He managed two strides before the fifties homed on his movement and opened up. A quick chatter from overhead and the man collapsed. He hurled the club as he dropped and the fifties efficiently followed its arc through the air with homed fire that made it dance in a shower of flashing sparks. It splintered to shreds before it hit the ground.

The other watchers stood motionless.

Brens stared at them a long moment before he could define what puzzled him about their appearance: none of them wore respirators. Were they trying to commit suicide? And why this useless attack? His eyes had grown accustomed to the flickering light and he scanned the mob. Young faces and old, mostly men but a few women scattered among them, all shades of color, united in appearance only by their clothing. Workring skyers in leather aprons, thick-soled shoes, probably escapees from a nearby factory. He flinched as one of them nodded slightly—surely they couldn't see him through the window. The nod grew more violent, and then he realized that the man was coughing. Paroxysms seized the man as he threw his hands to his mouth and bent forward helplessly. It was enough. The fifties chattered once more, and he fell.

"But what do they get out of it?" He turned his bewilderment to Karras.

"Who can tell? They're nuts, all of them. Malcontents, or anarchists. Mainly stupid, I'd say. Like the way they try and break into City. Even if they threw us out, they wouldn't know what to do next. Picture one of them sitting

in your office. At your desk."

"I don't mean that. If they stop us from getting through, who takes care of them? I mean, we feed them, run their schools, bury them. I don't understand what they think all this will accomplish."

"Listen! The crew's coming. They'll take care of them."

A siren keened its rise and fall from the dimming twilight ahead, but still the watchers stood frozen. When the siren changed to a blatting klaxon, Brens switched the fifties back on manual to safeguard the approaching repair car. The mob melted away at the same signal. They were there, and then they were gone. They dropped from sight along the pad edge and blended into the shadows.

The work crew's crane hoisted the castings off the pad and dropped them on the right of way. In a few minutes they had finished. Green lights flashed at Brens, and the repair van sped away again.

Passing the Workring exit guards, Brens made a mental note to warn the Co-op. If the skyers were growing bold enough to show open rebellion within the security of Workring, the exit guards had better be augmented. Even Suburbs might not be safe any longer. At thirty miles distance, he wasn't really concerned for his own home, but some of the commuters lived dangerously close to Workring.

He watched in the exterior mirror. The rear car detached itself and swung out onto a siding where it dropped to a halt while the body of the train went on. Every two miles, the scene repeated itself. Cars dropped off singly to await morning reassembly. Brens had often felt a strange sort of envy for the commuters who lived closer in: they never had the lead window seat on the way out of City. Responsibility for the whole train devolved on them only for short stretches, only on the way in.

But that was fair, he reminded himself. He lived the farthest out. With privilege go obligations. And he was through, for another twenty weeks, his obligations met.

At the station, he telexed his report to the Co-op office

and trotted outside to meet Hazel. The other wives had driven away. Only his carryall sat idling at the platform edge. He knew he ought to look forward to relaxing at home, but the trip itself still preyed on his mind unaccountably. He felt irritation at his inability to put the skyers out of his thoughts. His whole day was spent working for their benefit; his evenings ought to be his own.

He looked back toward City, but saw nothing in the smog-covered bowl at the foot of the hills that stretched away to the east. If it rained tonight, it might clear the air.

Hazel smiled and waved.

He grinned in answer. He could predict her reaction when she heard what he'd been through: a touch of wifely fear and concern for him, and that always made her more affectionate. Almost a hero's welcome. After all, he had acquitted himself rather well. A safe arrival, only a few minutes late, no injuries or major problems. And he wouldn't draw window seat for another several months. It was good to be home.

THREE POEMS

Only once before, in Best SF: 1969, *were we able to find SF poetry for this anthology. Matters now appear to be changing for the better. Kingsley Amis, well known for his critical look at science fiction* New Maps of Hell, *opens this group of three with a poem that might very well be the outline for an SF novel. Almost. Sail and Baxter follow, chillingly, with the poet's verbal knife that cuts deep.*

REPORT

KINGSLEY AMIS

From: His Highness the Inspector-General
To: Lord Secretary of the Defense Chamber
Subject: Pre-training Environment S3

Telepanesthetic probes in depth
Augment Monitoring Center records:
The above Environment is the most conduceful
Of all visitationed on our Tour.
Adverse conditions intensity 9
—Physical, psychical and mental—
Leave pre-trainees' morale undecreased,
Even enhanced. With such an affect-pattern,
Nothing in Arcturan capability
Can impedite them in oppugnancy-zones.
(Self-destruct index .07 only.)

Prescribed: 1. Soonest mobilization
(With advertence to the state of the war)
Into Commando and Marine units.
2. Creating suppletory Environments,
S3 adhibited as paradigm.

Note for Linguistic Section: Subjects
Refer (in their most widespread symbology)
To the duration of their pre-training as "Life"
And to their Environment as "Earth."

FISHERMAN

LAWRENCE SAIL

Out past the twinkling land there rides a craft,
Hove to and steeply rocking in the sea.

One barely glimpsed, at paying out the nets
Which all his life have been his life, reflects
How many nights like this one have washed aft
As silently as tides flood in and flee.

But as he reaches to clear the tarry strands
He sees the water, black beyond his hands
And pauses. Rough hands grasping at his own
Pull steadily, not inwards now but down.

THE IDEAL POLICE STATE

CHARLES BAXTER

The day arrives
when each citizen is deputized

and sirens warble
from every car. All badges

are alike, and officers
complain of rape

committed by other officers.
Bills are paid

with the hard cash
of terror. Lest anyone

forget, lions are set
loose on the streets

and enforce the laws
of nature by devouring

the quick, the unobservant
and the faint of heart.

THE PAGAN RABBI

CYNTHIA OZICK

Cynthia Ozick is a virtuoso of language whose first novel, Trust, *won instant acclaim. That she is a short story writer of great strength as well can instantly be seen here in this utterly real look at the question "What if the old gods had and still* have *a real existence?" Are there perhaps other forms of life living close by us that we are not aware of?*

Rabbi Jacob said: "He who is walking along
and studying, but then breaks off to remark,
'How lovely is that tree!' or 'How beautiful is that
fallow field!'—Scripture regards such a one
as having hurt his own being."
—from *The Ethics of the Fathers*

When I heard that Isaac Kornfeld, a man of piety and brains, had hanged himself in the public park, I put a token in the subway stile and journeyed out to see the tree.

We had been classmates in the rabbinical seminary. Our fathers were both rabbis. They were also friends, but only in a loose way of speaking: in actuality our fathers were enemies. They vied with one another in demonstrations of charitableness, in the captious glitter of their scholia, in the number of their adherents. Of the two, Isaac's father was the milder. I was afraid of my father; he had a certain disease of the larynx, and if he even uttered something so trivial as "Bring the tea" to my mother, it came out splintered, clamorous, and vindictive.

Neither man was philosophical in the slightest. It was the one thing they agreed on. "Philosophy is an abomination," Isaac's father used to say. "The Greeks were philosophers, but they remained children playing with their dolls. Even Socrates, a monotheist, nevertheless sent money down to the temple to pay for incense to their doll."

"Idolatry is the abomination," Isaac argued, "not philosophy."

"The latter is the corridor to the former," his father said.

My own father claimed that if not for philosophy I would never have been brought to the atheism which finally led me to withdraw, in my second year, from the seminary. The trouble was not philosophy—I had none of Isaac's talent: his teachers later said of him that his imagination was so remarkable he could concoct holiness out of the fine line of a serif. On the day of his funeral the president of his college was criticized for having commented that although a suicide could not be buried in consecrated earth, whatever earth enclosed Isaac Kornfeld was ipso facto consecrated. It should be noted that Isaac hanged himself several weeks short of his thirty-sixth birthday; he was then at the peak of his renown; and the president, of course, did not know the whole story. He judged

by Isaac's reputation, which was at no time more impressive than just before his death.

I judged by the same, and marveled that all that holy genius and intellectual surprise should in the end be raised no higher than the next-to-lowest limb of a delicate young oak, with burly roots like the toes of a gryphon exposed in the wet ground.

The tree was almost alone in a long rough meadow, which sloped down to a bay filled with sickly clams and a bad smell. The place was called Trilham's Inlet, and I knew what the smell meant: that cold brown water covered half the city's turds.

On the day I came to see the tree the air was bleary with fog. The weather was well into autumn and, though it was Sunday, the walks were empty. There was something historical about the park just then, with its rusting grasses and deserted monuments. In front of a soldiers' cenotaph a plastic wreath left behind months before by some civic parade stood propped against a stone frieze of identical marchers in the costume of an old war. A banner across the wreath's belly explained that the purpose of war is peace. At the margins of the park they were building a gigantic highway. I felt I was making my way across a battlefield silenced by the victory of the peace machines. The bulldozers had bitten far into the park, and the rolled carcasses of the sacrificed trees were already cut up into logs. There were dozens of felled maples, elms, and oaks. Their moist inner wheels breathed out a fragrance of barns, countryside, decay.

In the bottommost meadow fringing the water I recognized the tree which had caused Isaac to sin against his own life. It looked curiously like a photograph—not only like that newspaper photograph I carried warmly in my pocket, which showed the field and its markers—the drinking-fountain a few yards off, the ruined brick wall of an old estate behind. The caption-writer had particularly remarked on the "rope." But the rope was no longer there; the widow had claimed it. It was his own prayer shawl that

Isaac, a short man, had thrown over the comely neck of the next-to-lowest limb. A Jew is buried in his prayer shawl; the police had handed it over to Sheindel. I observed that the bark was rubbed at that spot. The tree lay back against the sky like a licked postage stamp. Rain began to beat it flatter yet. A stench of sewage came up like a veil in the nostril. It seemed to me I was a man in a photograph standing next to a gray blur of tree. I would stand through eternity beside Isaac's guilt if I did not run, so I ran that night to Sheindel herself.

I loved her at once. I am speaking now of the first time I saw her, though I don't exclude the last. The last—the last together with Isaac—was soon after my divorce; at one stroke I left my wife and my cousin's fur business to the small upstate city in which both had repined. Suddenly Isaac and Sheindel and two babies appeared in the lobby of my hotel—they were passing through: Isaac had a lecture engagement in Canada. We sat under scarlet neon and Isaac told how my father could now not speak at all.

"He keeps his vow," I said.

"No, no, he's a sick man," Isaac said. "An obstruction in the throat."

"I'm the obstruction. You know what he said when I left the seminary. He meant it, never mind how many years it is. He's never addressed a word to me since."

"We were reading together. He blamed the reading, who can blame *him?* Fathers like ours don't know how to love. They live too much indoors."

It was an odd remark, though I was too much preoccupied with my own resentments to notice. "It wasn't what we read," I objected. "Torah tells that an illustrious man doesn't have an illustrious son. Otherwise he wouldn't be humble like other people. This much scholarly stuffing I retain. Well, so my father always believed he was more illustrious than anybody, especially more than your father. *There*fore," I delivered in Talmudic cadence, "what chance did I have? A nincompoop and no *sitzfleish.* Now you, you could answer questions that weren't even invented yet. Then you invented them."

"Torah isn't a spade," Isaac said. "A man should have a livelihood. You had yours."

"The pelt of a dead animal isn't a living either, it's an indecency."

All the while Sheindel was sitting perfectly still; the babies, female infants in long stockings, were asleep in her arms. She wore a dark thick woolen hat—it was July—that covered every part of her hair. But I had once seen it in all its streaming black shine.

"And Jane?" Isaac asked finally.

"Speaking of dead animals. Tell my father—he won't answer a letter, he won't come to the telephone—that in the matter of marriage he was right, but for the wrong reason. If you share a bed with a Puritan you'll come into it cold and you'll go out of it cold. Listen, Isaac, my father calls me an atheist, but between the conjugal sheets every Jew is a believer in miracles, even the lapsed."

He said nothing then. He knew I envied him his Sheindel and his luck. Unlike our fathers, Isaac had never condemned me for my marriage, which his father regarded as his private triumph over my father, and which my father, in his public defeat, took as an occasion for declaring me as one dead. He rent his clothing and sat on a stool for eight days, while Isaac's father came to watch him mourn, secretly satisfied, though aloud he grieved for all apostates. Isaac did not like my wife. He called her a tall yellow straw. After we were married he never said a word against her, but he kept away.

I went with my wife to his wedding. We took the early train down especially, but when we arrived the feast was well under way, and the guests far into the dancing.

"Look, look, they don't dance together," Jane said.

"Who?"

"The men and the women. The bride and the groom."

"Count the babies," I advised. "The Jews are also Puritans, but only in public."

The bride was enclosed all by herself on a straight chair in the center of a spinning ring of young men. The floor heaved under their whirl. They stamped, the chandeliers

shuddered, the guests cried out, the young men with linked arms spiraled and their skullcaps came flying off like centrifugal balloons. Isaac, a mist of black suit, a stamping foot, was lost in the planet's wake of black suits and emphatic feet. The dancing young men shouted bridal songs, the floor leaned like a plate, the whole room teetered.

Isaac had told me something of Sheindel. Before now I had never seen her. Her birth was in a concentration camp, and they were about to throw her against the electrified fence when an army mobbed the gate; the current vanished from the terrible wires, and she had nothing to show for it afterward but a mark on her cheek like an asterisk, cut by a barb. The asterisk pointed to certain dry footnotes: she had no mother to show, she had no father to show, but she had, extraordinarily, God to show—she was known to be, for her age and sex, astonishingly learned. She was only seventeen.

"What pretty hair she has," Jane said.

Now Sheindel was dancing with Isaac's mother. All the ladies made a fence, and the bride, twirling with her mother-in-law, lost a shoe and fell against the long laughing row. The ladies lifted their glistering breasts in their lacy dresses and laughed; the young men, stamping two by two, went on shouting their wedding songs. Sheindel danced without her shoe, and the black river of her hair followed her.

"After today she'll have to hide it all," I explained.

Jane asked why.

"So as not to be a temptation to men," I told her, and covertly looked for my father. There he was, in a shadow, apart. My eyes discovered his eyes. He turned his back and gripped his throat.

"It's a very anthropological experience," Jane said.

"A wedding is a wedding," I answered her. "among us even more so."

"Is that your father over there, that little scowly man?"

To Jane all Jews were little. "My father the man of the cloth. Yes."

"A wedding is not a wedding," said Jane: we had had only a license and a judge with bad breath.

"Everybody marries for the same reason."

"No," said my wife. "Some for love and some for spite."

"And everybody for bed."

"Some for spite," she insisted.

"I was never cut out for a man of the cloth," I said. "My poor father doesn't see that."

"He doesn't speak to you."

"A technicality. He's losing his voice."

"Well, he's not like you. He doesn't do it for spite," Jane said.

"You don't know him," I said.

He lost it altogether the very week Isaac published his first remarkable collection of responsa. Isaac's father crowed like a passionate rooster, and packed his wife and himself off to the Holy Land to boast on the holy soil. Isaac was a little relieved; he had just been made Professor of Mishnaic History, and his father's whims and pretenses and foolish rivalries were an embarrassment. It is easy to honor a father from afar, but bitter to honor one who is dead. A surgeon cut out my father's voice, and he died without a word.

Isaac and I no longer met. Our ways were too disparate. Isaac was famous, if not in the world, certainly in the kingdom of jurists and scholars. By this time I had acquired a partnership in a small book store in a basement. My partner sold me his share, and I put a new sign: "The Book Cellar"; for reasons more obscure than filial (all the same I wished my father could have seen it) I established a department devoted especially to not-quite-rare theological works, chiefly in Hebrew and Aramaic, though I carried some Latin and Greek. When Isaac's second volume reached my shelves (I had now expanded to street level), I wrote him to congratulate him, and after that we corresponded, not with any regularity. He took to ordering all his books from me, and we exchanged awkward little jokes. "I'm still in the jacket business," I told him,

"but now I feel I'm where I belong. Last time I went too fur." "Sheindel is well, and Naomi, Esther, and Miriam have a sister." And still later: "Naomi, Esther, Miriam, and Ophra have a sister." It went on until there were seven girls. "There's nothing in Torah that prevents an illustrious man from having illustrious daughters," I wrote him when he said he had given up hope of another rabbi in the family. "But where do you find seven illustrious husbands?" he asked. Every order brought another quip, and we bantered back and forth in this way for some years.

I noticed that he read everything. Long ago he had inflamed my taste, but I could never keep up. No sooner did I catch his joy in Saadia Gaon than he had already sprung ahead to Yehudah Halevi. One day he was weeping with Dostoyevski and the next leaping in the air over Thomas Mann. He introduced me to Hegel and Nietzsche while our fathers wailed. His mature reading was no more peaceable than those frenzies of his youth, when I would come upon him in an abandoned classroom at dusk, his stocking feet on the windowsill, the light already washed from the lowest city clouds, wearing the look of a man half-sotted with print.

But when the widow asked me—covering a certain excess of alertness or irritation—whether to my knowledge Isaac had lately been ordering any books on horticulture, I was astonished.

"He bought so much," I demurred.

"Yes, yes, yes," she said. "How could you remember?"

She poured the tea and then, with a discreetness of gesture, lifted my dripping raincoat from the chair where I had thrown it and took it out of the room. It was a crowded apartment, not very neat, far from slovenly, cluttered with dolls and tiny dishes and an army of tricycles. The dining table was as large as a desert. An old-fashioned crocheted lace runner divided it into two nations, and on the end of this, in the neutral zone, so to speak, Sheindel had placed my cup. There was no physical relic of Isaac: not even a book.

She returned. "My girls are all asleep, we can talk. What an ordeal for you, weather like this and going out so far to that place."

It was impossible to tell whether she was angry or not. I had rushed in on her like the rainfall itself, scattering drops, my shoes stuck all over with leaves.

"I comprehend exactly why you went out there. The impulse of a detective," she said. Her voice contained an irony that surprised me. It was brilliantly and unmistakably accented, and because of this jaggedly precise. It was as if every word emitted a quick white thread of great purity, like hard silk, which she was then obliged to bite cleanly off. "You went to find something? An atmosphere? The sadness itself?"

"There was nothing to see," I said, and thought I was lunatic to have put myself in her way.

"Did you dig in the ground? He might have buried a note for goodbye."

"Was there a note?" I asked, startled.

"He left nothing behind for ordinary humanity like yourself."

I saw she was playing with me. "Rebbetzin Kornfeld," I said, standing up, "forgive me. My coat, please, and I'll go."

"Sit," she commanded. "Isaac read less lately, did you notice that?"

I gave her a civil smile. "All the same he was buying more and more."

"Think," she said. "I depend on you. You're just the one who might know. I had forgotten this. God sent you perhaps."

"Rebbetzin Kornfeld, I'm only a bookseller."

"God in his judgment sent me a bookseller. For such a long time Isaac never read at home. Think! Agronomy?"

"I don't remember anything like that. What would a Professor of Mishnaic History want with agronomy?"

"If he had a new book under his arm he would take it straight to the seminary and hide it in his office."

"I mailed to his office. If you like I can look up some of the titles—"

"You were in the park and you saw nothing?"

"Nothing." Then I was ashamed. "I saw the tree."

"And what is that? A tree is nothing."

"Rebbetzin Kornfeld," I pleaded, "it's a stupidity that I came here. I don't know myself why I came, I beg your pardon, I had no idea—"

"You came to learn why Isaac took his life. Botany? Or even, please listen, even mycology? He never asked you to send something on mushrooms? Or having to do with herbs? Manure? Flowers? A certain kind of agricultural poetry? A book about gardening? Forestry? Vegetables? Cereal growing?"

"Nothing, nothing like that," I said excitedly. "Rebbetzin Kornfeld, your husband was a rabbi!"

"I know what my husband was. Something to do with vines? Arbors? Rice? Think, think, think! Anything to do with land—meadows—goats—a farm, hay—anything at all, anything rustic or lunar—"

"Lunar! My God! Was he a teacher or a nurseryman? Goats! Was he a furrier? Sheindel, are you crazy? *I* was the furrier! What do you want from the dead?"

Without a word she replenished my cup, though it was more than half full, and sat down opposite me, on the other side of the lace boundary line. She leaned her face into her palms, but I saw her eyes. She kept them wide.

"Rebbetzin Kornfeld." I said, collecting myself, "with a tragedy like this—"

"You imagine I blame the books. I don't blame the books, whatever they were. If he had been faithful to his books he would have lived."

"He lived," I cried, "in books, what else?"

"No," said the widow.

"A scholar. A rabbi. A remarkable Jew!"

At this she spilled a furious laugh. "Tell me, I have always been very interested and shy to inquire. Tell me about your wife."

I intervened: "I haven't had a wife in years."

"What are they like, those people?"

"They're exactly like us, if you can think what we would be if we were like them."

"We are not like them. Their bodies are more to them than ours are to us. Our books are holy, to them their bodies are holy."

"Jane's was so holy she hardly ever let me get near it," I muttered to myself.

"Isaac used to run in the park, but he lost his breath too quickly. Instead he read in a book about runners with hats made of leaves."

"Sheindel, Sheindel, what did you expect of him? He was a student, he sat and he thought, he was a Jew."

She thrust her hands flat. "He was not."

I could not reply. I looked at her merely. She was thinner now than in her early young-womanhood, and her face had an in-between cast, poignant still at the mouth and jaw, beginning to grow coarse on either side of the nose.

"I think he was never a Jew," she said.

I wondered whether Isaac's suicide had unbalanced her.

"I'll tell you a story," she resumed. "A story about stories. These were the bedtime stories Isaac told Naomi and Esther: about mice that danced and children who laughed. When Miriam came he invented a speaking cloud. With Ophra it was a turtle that married a blade of withered grass. By Leah's time the stones had tears for their leglessness. Rebecca cried because of a tree that turned into a girl and could never grow colors again in autumn. Shiphrah, the littlest, believes that a pig has a soul."

"My own father used to drill me every night in sacred recitation. It was a terrible childhood."

"He insisted on picnics. Each time we went farther and farther into the country. It was a madness. Isaac never troubled to learn to drive a car, and there was always a clumsiness of baskets to carry and a clutter of buses and trains and seven exhausted wild girls. And he would look for special places—we couldn't settle just here or there,

there had to be a brook or such-and such a slope or else a little grove. And then, though he said it was all for the children's pleasure, he would leave them and go off alone and never come back until sunset, when everything was spilled and the air freezing and the babies crying."

"I was a grown man before I had the chance to go on a picnic," I admitted.

"I'm speaking of the beginning," said the widow. "Like you, wasn't I fooled? I was fooled, I was charmed. Going home with our baskets of berries and flowers, we were a romantic huddle. Isaac's stories on those nights were full of dark invention. May God preserve me, I even begged him to write them down. Then suddenly he joined a club, and Sunday mornings he was up and away before dawn."

"A club? So early? What library opens at that hour?" I said, stunned that a man like Isaac should ally himself with anything so doubtful.

"Ah, you don't follow, you don't follow. It was a hiking club, they met under the moon. I thought it was a pity, the whole week Isaac was so inward, he needed air for the mind. He used to come home too fatigued to stand. He said he went for the landscape. I was like you, I took what I heard, I heard it all and never followed. He resigned from the hikers finally, and I believed all that strangeness was finished. He told me it was absurd to walk at such a pace, he was a teacher and not an athlete. Then he began to write."

"But he always wrote," I objected.

"Not this way. What he wrote was only fairy tales. He kept at it and for a while he neglected everything else. It was the strangeness in another form. The stories surprised me, they were so poor and dull. They were a little like the ideas he used to scare the girls with, but choked all over with notes, appendices, prefaces. It struck me then he didn't seem to understand he was only doing fairy tales. Yet they were really very ordinary—full of sprites, nymphs, gods, everything ordinary and old."

"Will you let me see them?"

"Burned, all burned."

"Isaac burned them?"

"You don't think I did! I see what you think."

It was true that I was marveling at her hatred. I supposed she was one of those born to dread imagination. I was overtaken by a coldness for her, though the sight of her small hands with their tremulous staves of fingers turning and turning in front of her face like a gate on a hinge reminded me of where she was born and who she was. She was an orphan and had been saved by magic and had a terror of it. The coldness fled. "Why should you be bothered by little stories?" I inquired. "It wasn't the stories that killed him."

"No, no, not the stories," she said. "Stupid corrupt things. I was glad when he gave them up. He piled them in the bathtub and lit them with a match. Then he put a notebook in his coat pocket and said he would walk in the park. Week after week he tried all the parks in the city. I didn't dream what he could be after. One day he took the subway and rode to the end of the line, and this was the right park at last. He went every day after class. An hour going, an hour back. Two, three in the morning he came home. 'Is it exercise?' I said. I thought he might be running again. He used to shiver with the chill of night and the dew. 'No, I sit quite still,' he said. 'Is it more stories you do out there?' 'No, I only jot down what I think.' 'A man should meditate in his own house, not by night near bad water,' I said. Six, seven in the morning he came home. I asked him if he meant to find his grave in that place."

She broke off with a cough, half artifice and half resignation, so loud that it made her crane toward the bedrooms to see if she had awakened a child. "I don't sleep any more," she told me. "Look around you. Look, look everywhere, look on the windowsills. Do you see any plants, any common house plants? I went down one evening and gave them to the garbage collector. I couldn't sleep in the same space with plants. They are like little trees. Am I deranged? Take Isaac's notebook and bring it back when you can."

I obeyed. In my own room, a sparse place, with no ornaments but a few pretty stalks in pots, I did not delay and seized the notebook. It was a tiny affair, three inches by five, with ruled pages that opened on a coiled wire. I read searchingly, hoping for something not easily evident. Sheindel by her melancholy innuendo had made me believe that in these few sheets Isaac had revealed the reason for his suicide. But it was all a disappointment. There was not a word of any importance. After a while I concluded that, whatever her motives, Sheindel was playing with me again. She meant to punish me for asking the unaskable. My inquisitiveness offended her; she had given me Isaac's notebook not to enlighten but to rebuke. The handwriting was recognizable, yet oddly formed, shaky and even senile, like that of a man outdoors and deskless who scribbles in his palm or on his lifted knee or leaning on a bit of bark; and there was no doubt that the wrinkled leaves, with their ragged corners, had been in and out of someone's pocket. So I did not mistrust Sheindel's mad anecdote; this much was true: a park, Isaac, a notebook, all at once, but signifying no more than that a professor with a literary turn of mind had gone for a walk. There was even a green stain straight across one of the quotations, as if the pad had slipped grassward and been trod on.

I have forgotten to mention that the notebook, though scantily filled, was in three languages. The Greek I could not read at all, but it had the shape of verse. The Hebrew was simply a miscellany, drawn mostly from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Among these I found the following extracts, transcribed not quite verbatim:

> Ye shall utterly destroy all the places of the gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree.

> And the soul that turneth after familiar spirits to go a-whoring after them, I will cut him off from among his people.

These, of course, were ordinary unadorned notes, such as any classroom lecturer might commonly make to remind himself of the text, with a phrase cut out here and there for the sake of speeding his hand. Or I thought it possible that Isaac might at that time have been preparing a paper on the Talmudic commentaries for these passages. Whatever the case, the remaining quotations, chiefly from English poetry, interested me only slightly more. They were the elegiac favorites of a closeted Romantic. I was repelled by Isaac's Nature: it wore a capital letter, and smelled like my own Book Cellar. It was plain to me that he had lately grown painfully academic: he could not see a weed's tassel without finding a classical reference for it. He had put down a snatch of Byron, a smudge of Keats (like his Scriptural copyings, these too were quick and fragmented), a pair of truncated lines from Tennyson, and this unmarked and clumsy quatrain:

> And yet all is not taken. Still one Dryad
> Flits through the wood, one Oread skims the hill;
> White in the whispering stream still gleams a Naiad;
> The beauty of the earth is haunted still.

All of this was so cloying and mooning and ridiculous, and so pedantic besides, that I felt ashamed for him. And yet there was almost nothing else, nothing to redeem him and nothing personal, only a sentence or two in his rigid self-controlled scholar's style, not unlike the starched little jokes of our correspondence. "I am writing at dusk sitting on a stone in Trilham's Inlet Park, within sight of Trilham's Inlet, a bay to the north of the city, and within two yards of a slender tree. *Quercus velutina,* the age of which, should one desire to measure it, can be ascertained by (God forbid) cutting the bole and counting the rings. The man writing is thirty-five years old and aging too rapidly, which may be ascertained by counting the rings under his poor myopic eyes." Below this, deliberate and

readily more legible than the rest, appeared three curious words:

Great Pan lives.

That was all. In a day or so I returned the notebook to Sheindel. I told myself that she had seven orphans to worry over, and repressed my anger at having been cheated.

She was waiting for me. "I am so sorry, there was a letter in the notebook, it had fallen out. I found it on the carpet after you left."

"Thank you, no," I said. "I've read enough out of Isaac's pockets."

"Then why did you come to see me to begin with?"

"I came," I said, "just to see you."

"You came for Isaac." But she was more mocking than distraught. "I gave you everything you needed to see what happened and still you don't follow. Here." She held out a large law-sized paper. "Read the letter."

"I've read his notebook. If everything I need to fathom Isaac is in the notebook I don't need the letter."

"It's a letter he wrote to explain himself," she persisted.

"You told me Isaac left you no notes."

"It was not written to me."

I sat down on one of the dining room chairs and Sheindel put the page before me on the table. It lay face up on the lace divider. I did not look at it.

"It's a love letter," Sheindel whispered. "When they cut him down they found the notebook in one pocket and the letter in the other."

I did not know what to say.

"The police gave me everything," Sheindel said. "Everything to keep."

"A love letter?" I repeated.

"That is what such letters are commonly called."

"And the police—they gave it to you, and that was the first you realized what"—I floundered after the inconceivable—"what could be occupying him?"

"What could be occupying him," she mimicked. "Yes. Not until they took the letter and the notebook out of his pocket."

"My God. His habit of life, his mind . . . I can't imagine it. You never guessed?"

"No."

"These trips to the park—"

"He had become aberrant in many ways. I have described them to you."

"But the park! Going off like that, alone—you didn't think he might be meeting a woman?"

"It was not a woman."

Disgust like a powder clotted my nose. "Sheindel, you're crazy."

"I'm crazy, is that it? Read his confession! Read it! How long can I be the only one to know this thing? Do you want my brain to melt? Be my confidant," she entreated so unexpectedly that I held my breath.

"You've said nothing to anyone?"

"Would they have recited such eulogies if I had? Read the letter!"

"I have no interest in the abnormal," I said coldly.

She raised her eyes and watched me for the smallest space. Without any change in the posture of her suppliant head her laughter began; I have never since heard sounds like those—almost mouselike in density for fear of waking her sleeping daughters, but so rational in intent that it was like listening to astonished sanity rendered into a cackling fugue. She kept it up for a minute and then calmed herself. "Please sit where you are. Please pay attention. I will read the letter to you myself."

She plucked the page from the table with an orderly gesture. I saw that this letter had been scrupulously prepared; it was closely written. Her tone was cleansed by scorn.

" 'My ancestors were led out of Egypt by the hand of God,' " she read.

"Is this how a love letter starts out?"

She moved on resolutely. " 'We were guilty of so-called abominations well-described elsewhere. Other peoples have been nourished on their mythologies. For aeons we have been weaned from all traces of the same.' "

I felt myself becoming impatient. The fact was I had returned with a single idea: I meant to marry Isaac's widow when enough time had passed to make it seemly. It was my intention to court her with great subtlety at first, so that I would not appear to be presuming on her sorrow. But she was possessed. "Sheindel, why do you want to inflict this treatise on me? Give it to the seminary, contribute it to a symposium of professors."

"I would sooner die."

At this I began to attend in earnest.

" 'I will leave aside the wholly plausible position of so-called animism within the concept of the One God. I will omit a historical illumination of its continuous but covert expression even within the Fence of the Law. Creature, I leave these aside—' "

"What?" I yelped.

" 'Creature,' " she repeated, spreading her nostrils. " 'What is human history? What is our philosophy? What is our religion? None of these teaches us poor human ones that we are alone in the universe, and even without them we would know that we are not. At a very young age I understood that a foolish man would not believe in a fish had he not had one enter his experience. Innumerable forms exist and have come to our eyes, and to the still deeper eye of the lens of our instruments; from this minute perception of what already is, it is easy to conclude that further forms are possible, that all forms are probable. God created the world not for Himself alone, or I would not now possess this consciousness with which I am enabled to address thee, Loveliness.' "

"Thee," I echoed, and swallowed a sad bewilderment.

"You must let me go on," Sheindel said, and grimly went on. " 'It is false history, false philosophy, and false religion which declare to us human ones that we live among Things.

The arts of physics and chemistry begin to teach us differently, but their way of compassion is new, and finds few to carry fidelity to its logical and beautiful end. The molecules dance inside all forms, and within the molecules dance the atoms, and within the atoms dance still profounder sources of divine vitality. There is nothing that is Dead. There is no Non-life. Holy life subsists even in the stone, even in the bones of dead dogs and dead men. Hence in God's fecundating Creation there is no possibility of Idolatry, and therefore no possibility of committing this so-called abomination.' "

"My God, my God," I wailed. "Enough, Sheindel, it's more than enough, no more—"

"There is more," she said.

"I don't want to hear it."

"He stains his character for you? A spot, do you think? You will hear." She took up in a voice which all at once reminded me of my father's: it was unforgiving. " 'Creature, I rehearse these matters though all our language is as breath to thee; as baubles for the juggler. Where we struggle to understand from day to day, and contemplate the grave for its riddle, the other breeds are born fulfilled in wisdom. Animal races conduct themselves without self-investigations; instinct is a higher and not a lower thing. Alas that we human ones—but for certain pitifully primitive approximations in those few reflexes and involuntary actions left to our bodies—are born bare of instinct! All that we unfortunates must resort to through science, art, philosophy, religion, all our imaginings and tormented strivings, all our meditations and vain questionings, all!—are expressed naturally and rightly in the beasts, the plants, the rivers, the stones. The reason is simple, it is our tragedy: our soul is included in us, it inhabits us, we contain it, when we seek our soul we must seek in ourselves. To *see* the soul, to confront it—that is divine wisdom. Yet how can we see into our dark selves? With the other races of being it is differently ordered. The soul of the plant does not reside in the chlorophyll, it may roam if

it wishes, it may choose whatever form or shape it pleases. Hence the other breeds, being largely free of their soul and able to witness it, can live in peace. To see one's soul is to know all, to know all is to own the peace our philosophies futilely envisage. Earth displays two categories of soul: the free and the indwelling. We human ones are cursed with the indwelling—' "

"Stop!" I cried.

"I will not," said the widow.

"Please, you told me he burned his fairy tales."

"Did I lie to you? Will you say I lied?"

"Then for Isaac's sake why didn't you? If this isn't a fairy tale what do you want me to think it could be?"

"Think what you like."

"Sheindel," I said, "I beg you, don't destroy a dead man's honor. Don't look at this thing again, tear it to pieces, don't continue with it."

"I don't destroy his honor. He had none."

"Please! Listen to yourself! My God, who was the man? Rabbi Isaac Kornfeld! Talk of honor! Wasn't he a teacher? Wasn't he a scholar?"

"He was a pagan."

Her eyes returned without hesitation to their task. She commenced: " 'All these truths I learned only gradually, against my will and desire. Our teacher Moses did not speak of them; much may be said under this head. It was not out of ignorance that Moses failed to teach about those souls that are free. If I have learned what Moses knew, is this not because we are both men? He was a man, but God addressed him; it was God's will that our ancestors should no longer be slaves. Yet our ancestors, being stiff-necked, would not have abandoned their slavery in Egypt had they been taught of the free souls. They would have said: "Let us stay, our bodies will remain enslaved in Egypt, but our souls will wander at their pleasure in Zion. If the cactus-plant stays rooted while its soul roams, why not also a man?" And if Moses had replied that only the world of Nature has the gift of the free soul, while man is chained to

his, and that a man, to free his soul, must also free the body that is its vessel, they would have scoffed. "How is it that men, and men alone, are different from the world of Nature? If this is so, then the condition of men is evil and unjust, and if this condition of ours is evil and unjust in general, what does it matter whether we are slaves in Egypt or citizens in Zion?" And they would not have done God's will and abandoned their slavery. Therefore Moses never spoke to them of the free souls, lest the people not do God's will and go out from Egypt.' "

In an instant a sensation broke in me—it was entirely obscure, there was nothing I could compare it with, and yet I was certain I recognized it. And then I did. It hurtled me into childhood—it was the crisis of insight one experiences when one has just read out, for the first time, that conglomeration of figurines which makes a word. In that moment I penetrated beyond Isaac's alphabet into his language. I saw that he was on the side of possibility: he was both sane and inspired. His intention was not to accumulate mystery but to dispel it.

"All that part is brilliant," I burst out.

Sheindel meanwhile had gone to the sideboard to take a sip of cold tea that was standing there. "In a minute," she said, and pursued her thirst. "I have heard of drawings surpassing Rembrandt daubed by madmen who when released from the fit couldn't hold the chalk. What follows is beautiful, I warn you."

"The man was a genius."

"Yes."

"Go on," I urged.

She produced for me her clownish jeering smile. She read: " 'Sometimes in the desert journey on the way they would come to a watering place, and some quick spry boy would happen to glimpse the soul of the spring (which the wild Greeks afterward called naiad), but not knowing of the existence of the free souls he would suppose only that the moon had cast a momentary beam across the water. Loveliness, with the same innocence of accident I

discovered thee. Loveliness, Loveliness.' "

She stopped.

"Is that all?"

"There is more."

"Read it."

"The rest is the love letter."

"Is it hard for you?" But I asked with more eagerness than pity.

"I was that man's wife, he scaled the Fence of the Law. For this God preserved me from the electric fence. Read it for yourself."

Incontinently I snatched the crowded page.

" 'Loveliness, in thee the joy, substantiation, and supernal succor of my theorem. How many hours through how many years I walked over the cilia-forests of our enormous aspirating vegetable-star, this light rootless seed that crawls in its single furrow, this shaggy mazy unimplanted cabbage-head of our earth!—never, all that time, all those days of unfulfillment, a white space like a desert thirst, never, never to grasp. I thought myself abandoned to the intrigue of my folly. At dawn, on a hillock, what seemed the very shape and seizing of the mound's nature—what was it? Only the haze of the sunball growing great through hoarfrost. The oread slipped from me, leaving her illusion; or was never there at all; or was there but for an instant, and ran away. What sly ones the free souls are! They have a comedy we human ones cannot dream: the laughing drunkard feels in himself the shadow of the shadow of the shadow of their wit, and only because he has made himself a vessel, as the two banks and the bed of a rivulet are the naiad's vessel. A naiad I may indeed have viewed whole: all seven of my daughters were once wading in a stream in a compact but beautiful park, of which I had much hope. The youngest being not yet two, and fretful, the older ones were told to keep her always by the hand, but they did not obey. I, having passed some way into the woods behind, all at once heard a scream and noise of splashes, and caught sight of a tiny body flying down into the water. Running

back through the trees I could see the others bunched together, afraid, as the baby dived helplessly, all these little girls frozen in a garland—when suddenly one of them (it was too quick a movement for me to recognize which) darted to the struggler, who was now underwater, and pulled her up, and put an arm around her to soothe her. The arm was blue—blue. As blue as a lake. And fiercely, from my spot on the bank, panting, I began to count the little girls. I counted eight, thought myself not mad but delivered, again counted, counted seven, knew I had counted well before, knew I counted well even now. A blue-armed girl had come to wade among them. Which is to say the shape of a girl. I questioned my daughters: each in her fright believed one of the others had gone to pluck up the tiresome baby. None wore a dress with blue sleeves.' "

"Proofs," said the widow. "Isaac was meticulous, he used to account for all his proofs always."

"How?" My hand in tremor rustled Isaac's letter; the paper bleated as though whipped.

"By eventually finding a principle to cover them," she finished maliciously. "Well, don't rest even for me, you don't oblige me. You have a long story to go, long enough to make a fever."

"Tea," I said hoarsely.

She brought me her own cup from the sideboard, and I believed as I drank that I swallowed some of her mockery and gall.

"Sheindel, for a woman so pious you're a great skeptic." And now the tremor had command of my throat.

"An atheist's statement," she rejoined. "The more piety, the more skepticism. A religious man comprehends this. Superfluity, excess of custom, and superstition would climb like a choking vine on the Fence of the Law if skepticism did not continually hack them away to make freedom for purity."

I then thought her fully worthy of Isaac. Whether I was worthy of her I evaded putting to myself; instead I gargled

some tea and returned to the letter.

" 'It pains me to confess,' " I read, " 'how after that I moved from clarity to doubt and back again. I had no trust in my conclusions because all my experiences were evanescent. Everything certain I attributed to some other cause less certain. Every voice out of the moss I blamed on rabbits and squirrels. Every motion among leaves I called a bird, though there positively was no bird. My first sight of the Little People struck me as no more than a shudder of literary delusion, and I determined they could only be an instantaneous crop of mushrooms. But one night, a little after ten o'clock at the crux of summer—the sky still showed strings of light—I was wandering in this place, this place where they will find my corpse—' "

"Not for my sake," said Sheindel when I hesitated.

"It's terrible," I croaked, "terrible."

"Withered like a shell," she said, as though speaking of the cosmos; and I understood from her manner that she had a fanatic's acquaintance with this letter, and knew it nearly by heart. She appeared to be thinking the words faster than I could bring them out, and for some reason I was constrained to hurry the pace of my reading.

" '—where they will find my corpse withered like the shell of an insect,' " I rushed on. " 'The smell of putrefaction lifted clearly from the bay. I began to speculate about my own body after I was dead—whether the soul would be set free immediately after the departure of life; or whether only gradually, as decomposition proceeded and more and more of the indwelling soul was released to freedom. But when I considered how a man's body is no better than a clay pot, a fact which none of our sages has ever contradicted, it seemed to me then that an indwelling soul by its own nature would be obliged to cling to its bit of pottery until the last crumb and grain had vanished into earth. I walked through the ditches of that black meadow grieving and swollen with self-pity. It came to me that while my poor bones went on decaying at their ease, my soul would have to linger inside them, waiting, despairing,

longing to join the free ones. I cursed it for its gravity-despoiled, slow, interminably languishing purse of flesh; better to be encased in a vapor, in wind, in a hair of a coconut! Who knows how long it takes the body of a man to shrink into gravel, and the gravel into sand, and the sand into vitamin? A hundred years? Two hundred, three hundred? A thousand perhaps! Is it not true that bones nearly intact are constantly being dug up by the paleontologists two million years after burial?'—Sheindel," I interrupted, "this is death, not love. Where's the love letter to be afraid of here? I don't find it."

"Continue," she ordered. And then: "You see I'm not afraid."

"Not of love?"

"No. But you recite much too slowly. Your mouth is shaking. Are you afraid of death?"

I did not reply.

"Continue," she said again. "Go rapidly. The next sentence begins with an extraordinary thought."

" 'An extraordinary thought emerged in me. It was luminous, profound, and practical. More than that, it had innumerable precedents; the mythologies had documented it a dozen dozen times over. I recalled all those mortals reputed to have coupled with gods (a collective word, showing much common sense, signifying what our philosophies more abstrusely call Shekhina), and all that poignant miscegenation represented by centaurs, satyrs, mermaids, fauns, and so forth, not to speak of that even more famous mingling in Genesis, whereby the sons of God took the daughters of men for brides, producing giants and possibly also those abortions, leviathan and behemoth, of which we read in Job, along with unicorns and other chimeras and monsters abundant in Scripture, hence far from fanciful. There existed also the example of the succubus Lilith, who was often known to couple in the medieval ghetto even with pre-pubescent boys. By all these evidences I was emboldened in my confidence that I was surely not the first man to conceive such a desire in the

history of our earth. Creature, the thought that took hold of me was this: if only I could couple with one of the free souls, the strength of the connection would likely wrest my own soul from my body—seize it, as if by a tongs, draw it out, so to say, to its own freedom. The intensity and force of my desire to capture one of these beings now became prodigious. I avoided my wife—' "

Here the widow heard me falter.

"Please," she commanded, and I saw creeping in her face the completed turn of a sneer.

" '—lest I be depleted of potency at that moment (which might occur in any interval, even, I assumed, in my own bedroom) when I should encounter one of the free souls. I was borne back again and again to the fetid viscosities of the Inlet, borne there as if on the rising stink of my own enduring and tedious putrefaction, the idea of which I could no longer shake off—I envisaged my soul as trapped in my last granule, and that last granule itself perhaps petrified, never to dissolve, and my soul condemned to minister to it throughout eternity! It seemed to me my soul must be released at once or be lost to sweet air forever. In a gleamless dark, struggling with this singular panic, I stumbled from ditch to ditch, strained like a blind dog for the support of solid verticality; and smacked my palm against bark. I looked up and in the black could not fathom the size of the tree—my head lolled forward, my brow met the trunk with all its gravings. I busied my fingers in the interstices of the bark's cuneiform. Then with forehead flat on the tree, I embraced it with both arms to measure it. My hands united on the other side. It was a young narrow weed, I did not know of what family. I reached to the lowest branch and plucked a leaf and made my tongue travel meditatively along its periphery to assess its shape: oak. The taste was sticky and exaltingly bitter. A jubilation lightly carpeted my groin. I then placed one hand (the other I kept around the tree's waist, as it were) in the bifurcation (disgustingly termed crotch) of that lowest limb and the elegant and devoutly firm torso, and caressed that

miraculous juncture with a certain languor, which gradually changed to vigor. I was all at once savagely alert and deeply daring: I chose that single tree together with the ground near it for an enemy which in two senses would not yield: it would neither give nor give in. "Come, come," I called aloud to Nature. A wind blew out a braid of excremental malodor into the heated air. "Come," I called, "couple with me, as thou didst with Cadmus, Rhoecus, Tithonus, Endymion, and that king Numa Pompilius to whom thou didst give secrets. As Lilith comes without a sign, so come thou. As the sons of God came to copulate with women, so now let a daughter of Shekhina the Emanation reveal herself to me. Nymph, come now, come now."

" 'Without warning I was flung to the ground. My face smashed into earth, and a flaky clump of dirt lodged in my open mouth. For the rest, I was on my knees, pressing down on my hands, with the fingernails clutching dirt. A superb ache lined my haunch. I began to weep because I was certain I had been ravished by some sinewy animal. I vomited the earth I had swallowed and believed I was defiled, as it is written: "Neither shalt thou lie with any beast." I lay sunk in the grass, afraid to lift my head to see if the animal still lurked. Through some curious means I had been fully positioned and aroused and exquisitely sated, all in half a second, in a fashion impossible to explain, in which, though I performed as with my own wife, I felt as if a preternatural rapine had been committed upon me. I continued prone, listening for the animal's breathing. Meanwhile, though every tissue of my flesh was gratified in its inmost awareness, a marvelous voluptuousness did not leave my body; sensual exultations of a wholly supreme and paradisal order, unlike anything our poets have ever defined, both flared and were intensely satisfied in the same moment. This salubrious and delightful perceptiveness excited my being for some time: a conjoining not dissimilar (in metaphor only; in actuality it cannot be described) from the magical contradiction of the tree and its issuance-of-branch at the point of bifurcation. In me

were linked, *in the same instant*, appetite and fulfillment, delicacy and power, mastery and submissiveness, and other paradoxes of entirely remarkable emotional import.

" 'Then I heard what I took to be the animal treading through the grass quite near my head, all cunningly; it withheld its breathing, then snored it out in a cautious and wisplike whirr that resembled a light wind through rushes. With a huge energy (my muscular force seemed to have increased) I leaped up in fear of my life; I had nothing to use for a weapon but—oh, laughable!—the pen I had been writing with in a little notebook I always carried about with me in those days (and still keep on my person as a self-shaming souvenir of my insipidness, my bookishness, my pitiable conjecture and wishfulness in a time when, not yet knowing thee, I knew nothing). What I saw was not an animal but a girl no older than my oldest daughter, who was then fourteen. Her skin was as perfect as an eggplant's and nearly of that color. In height she was half as tall as I was. The second and third fingers of her hands—this I noticed at once—were peculiarly fused, one slotted into the other, like the ligula of a leaf. She was entirely bald and had no ears but rather a type of gill or envelope, one only, on the left side. Her toes displayed the same oddity I had observed in her fingers. She was neither naked nor clothed—that is to say, even though a part of her body, from hip to just below the breasts (each of which appeared to be a kind of velvety colorless pear, suspended from a very short, almost invisible stem), was luxuriantly covered with a flossy or spore-like material, this was a natural efflorescence in the manner of, with us, hair. All her sexual portion was wholly visible, as in any field flower. Aside from these express deviations, she was commandingly human in aspect, if unmistakably flowerlike. She was, in fact, the reverse of our hackneyed euphuism, as when we say a young girl blooms like a flower—she, on the contrary, seemed a flower transfigured into the shape of the most stupendously lovely child I had ever

seen. Under the smallest push of wind she bent at her superlative waist; this, I recognized, and not the exhalations of some lecherous beast, was the breathlike sound that had alarmed me at her approach: these motions of hers made the blades of grass collide. (She herself, having no lungs, did not "breathe.") She stood bobbing joyfully before me, with a face as tender as a morning-glory, strangely phosphorescent: she shed her own light, in effect, and I had no difficulty in confronting her beauty.

" 'Moreover, by experiment I soon learned that she was not only capable of language, but that she delighted in playing with it. This she literally could do—if I had distinguished her hands before anything else, it was because she had held them out to catch my first cry of awe. She either caught my words like balls or let them roll, or caught them and then darted off to throw them into the Inlet. I discovered that whenever I spoke I more or less pelted her; but she liked this, and told me ordinary human spech only tickled and amused, whereas laughter, being highly plosive, was something of an assault. I then took care to pretend much solemnity, though I was lightheaded with rapture. Her own "voice" I apprehended rather than heard—which she, unable to imagine how we human ones are prisoned in sensory perception, found hard to conceive. Her sentences came to me not as a series of differentiated frequencies but (impossible to develop this idea in language) as a diffused cloud of field fragrance; yet to say that I assimilated her thought through the olfactory nerve would be a pedestrian distortion. All the same it was clear that whatever she said reached me in a shimmer of pellucid perfumes, and I understood her meaning with an immediacy of glee and with none of the ambiguities and suspiciousness of motive that surround our human communication.

" 'Through this medium she explained that she was a dryad and that her name was Iripomonoéià (as nearly as I can render it in our narrowly limited orthography, and in this dunce's alphabet of ours which is notoriously im-

pervious to odoriferous categories). She told me what I had already seized: that she had given me her love in response to my call.

" ' "Wilt thou come to any man who calls?" I asked.

" ' "All men call, whether realizing it or not. I and my sisters sometimes come to those who do not realize. Almost never, unless for sport, do we come to that man who calls knowingly—he wishes only to inhabit us out of perversity or boastfulness or to indulge a dreamed-of disgust."

" ' "Scripture does not forbid sodomy with the plants," I exclaimed, but she did not comprehend any of this and lowered her hands so that my words would fly past her uncaught. "I too called thee knowingly, not for perversity but for love of Nature."

" ' "I have caught men's words before as they talked of Nature, you are not the first. It is not Nature they love so much as Death they fear. So Corylylyb my cousin received it in a season not long ago coupling in a harbor with one of your kind, one called Spinoza, one that had catarrh of the lung. I am of Nature and immortal and so I cannot pity your deaths. But return tomorrow and say Iripomonoéià." Then she chased my last word to where she had kicked it, behind the tree. She did not come back. I ran to the tree and circled it diligently but she was lost for that night.

" 'Loveliness, all the foregoing, telling of my life and meditations until now, I have never before recounted to thee or any other. The rest is beyond mean telling: those rejoicings from midnight to dawn, when the greater phosphorescence of the whole shouting sky frightened thee home! How in a trance of happiness we coupled in the ditches, in the long grasses, behind a fountain, under a broken wall, once recklessly on the very pavement, with a bench for roof and trellis! How I was taught by natural arts to influence certain chemistries engendering explicit marvels, blisses, and transports no man has slaked himself with since Father Adam pressed out the forbidden chlorophyll of Eden! Loveliness, Loveliness, none like thee.

No brow so sleek, no elbow-crook so fine, no eye so green, no waist so pliant, no limbs so pleasant and acute. None like immortal Iripomonoéài.

" 'Creature, the moon filled and starved twice, and there was still no end to the glorious archaic newness of Iripomonoéià.

" 'Then last night. Last night! I will record all with simplicity.

" 'We entered a shallow ditch. In a sweet-smelling voice of extraordinary redolence—so intense in its sweetness that even the barbaric stinks and wind-lifted farts of the Inlet were overpowered by it—Iripomonéià inquired of me how I felt without my soul. I replied that I did not know this was my condition. "Oh, yes, your body is now an empty packet, that is why it is so light. Spring." I sprang in air and rose effortlessly. "You have spoiled yourself, spoiled yourself with confusions," she complained, "now by morning your body will be crumpled and withered and ugly, like a leaf in its sere hour, and never again after tonight will this place see you." "Nymph!" I roared, amazed by levitation. "Oh, oh, that damaged," she cried, "you hit my eye with that noise," and she wafted a deeper aroma, a leeklike mist, one that stung the mucous membranes. A white bruise disfigured her petally lid. I was repentant and sighed terribly for her injury. "Beauty marred is for our kind what physical hurt is for yours," she reproved me. "Where you have pain, we have ugliness. Where you profane yourselves by immorality, we are profaned by ugliness. Your soul has taken leave of you and spoils our pretty game." "Nymph!" I whispered, "heart, treasure, if my soul is separated how is it I am unaware?"

" ' "Poor man," she answered, "you have only to look and you will see the thing." Her speech had now turned as acrid as an herb, and all that place reeked bitterly. "You know I am a spirit. You know I must flash and dart. All my sisters flash and dart. Of all races we are the quickest. Our very religion is all-of-a-sudden. No one can hinder us, no

one may delay us. But yesterday you undertook to detain me in your embrace, you stretched your kisses into years, you called me your treasure and your heart endlessly, your soul in its slow greed kept me close and captive, all the while knowing well how a spirit cannot stay and will not be fixed. I made to leap from you, but your obstinate soul held on until it was snatched straight from your frame and escaped with me. I saw it hurled out onto the pavement, the blue beginning of day was already seeping down, so I ran away and could say nothing until this moment."

" ' "My soul is free? Free entirely? And can be seen?"

" ' "Free. If I could pity any living thing under the sky I would pity you for the sight of your soul. I do not like it, it conjures against me."

" ' "My soul loves thee," I urged in all my triumph, "it is freed from the thousand-year grave!" I jumped out of the ditch like a frog, my legs had no weight; but the dryad sulked in the ground, stroking her ugly violated eye. "Iripomonoéià my soul will follow thee with thankfulness into eternity."

" ' "I would sooner be followed by the dirty fog. I do not like that soul of yours. It conjures against me. It denies me, it denies every spirit and all my sisters and every nereid of the harbor, it denies all our multiplicity, and all gods diversiform, it spites even Lord Pan, it is an enemy, and you, poor man, do not know your own soul. Go, look at it, there it is on the road."

" 'I scudded back and forth under the moon.

" ' "Nothing, only a dusty old man trudging up there."

" ' "A quite ugly old man?"

" ' "Yes, that is all. My soul is not there."

" ' "With a matted beard and great fierce eyebrows?"

" ' "Yes, yes, one like that is walking on the road. He is half bent over under the burden of a dusty old bag. The bag is stuffed with books—I can see their raveled bindings sticking out."

" ' "And he reads as he goes?"

" ' "Yes, he reads as he goes."

" ' "What is it he reads?"

" ' "Some huge and terrifying volume, heavy as a stone." I peered forward in the moonlight. "A Tractate. A Tractate of the Mishnah. Its leaves are so worn they break as he turns them, but he does not turn them often because there is much matter on a single page. He is so sad! Such antique weariness broods in his face! His throat is striped from the whip. His cheeks are folded like ancient flags, he reads the Law and breathes the dust."

" ' "And are there flowers on either side of the road?"

" ' "Incredible flowers! Of every color! And noble shrubs like mounds of green moss! And the cricket crackling in the field. He passes indifferent through the beauty of the field. His nostrils sniff his book as if flowers lay on the clotted page, but the flowers lick his feet. His feet are bandaged, his notched toenails gore the path. His prayer shawl droops on his studious back. He reads the Law and breathes the dust and doesn't see the flowers and won't heed the cricket spitting in the field."

" ' "That," said the dryad, "is your soul." And was gone with all her odors.

" 'My body sailed up to the road in a single hop. I alighted near the shape of the old man and demanded whether he were indeed the soul of Rabbi Isaac Kornfeld. He trembled but confessed. I asked if he intended to go with his books through the whole future without change, always with his Tractate in his hand, and he answered that he could do nothing else.

" ' "Nothing else! You, who I thought yearned for the earth! You, an immortal, free, and caring only to be bound to the Law!"

" 'He held a dry arm fearfully before his face, and with the other arm hitched up his merciless bag on his shoulder. "Sir," he said, still quavering, "didn't you wish to see me with your own eyes?"

" ' "I know your figure!" I shrieked. "Haven't I seen that figure a hundred times before? On a hundred roads? It is not mine! I will not have it be mine!"

" ' "If you had not contrived to be rid of me, I would have stayed with you till the end. The dryad, who does not exist, lies. It was not I who clung to her but you, my body. Sir, all that has no real existence lies. In your grave beside you I would have sung you David's songs, I would have moaned Solomon's voice to your last grain of bone. But you expelled me, your ribs exile me from their fate, and I will walk here alone always, in my garden"—he scratched on his page—"with my precious birds"—he scratched at the letters—"and my darling trees"—he scratched at the tall side-column of commentary.

" 'He was so impudent in his bravery—for I was all fleshliness and he all floppy wraith—that I seized him by the collar and shook him up and down, while the books on his back made a vast rubbing one on the other, and bits of shredding leather flew out like a rain.

" ' "The sound of the Law," he said, "is more beautiful than the crickets. The smell of the Law is more radiant than the moss. The taste of the Law exceeds clear water."

" 'At this nervy provocation—he more than any other knew my despair—I grabbed his prayer shawl by its tassels and whirled around him once or twice until I had unwrapped it from him altogether, and wound it on my own neck and in one bound came to the tree.

" ' "Nymph!" I called to it. "Spirit and saint! Iripomonoéià come! None like thee, no brow so sleek, no elbow-crook so fine, no eye so green, no waist so pliant, no limbs so pleasant and acute. For pity of me, come, come."

" 'But she does not come.

" ' "Loveliness, come."

" 'She does not come.

" 'Creature, see how I am coiled in the snail of this shawl as if in a leaf. I crouch to write my words. Let soul call thee lie, but body . . .

" '. . . body . . .

" '. . . fingers twist, knuckles dark as wood, tongue dries like grass, deeper now into silk . . .

" '. . . silk of pod of shawl, knees wilt, knuckles wither, neck . . .' "

Here the letter suddenly ended.

"You see? A pagan!" said Sheindel, and kept her spiteful smile. It was thick with audacity.

"You don't pity him," I said, watching the contempt that glittered in her teeth.

"Even now you don't see? You can't follow?"

"Pity him," I said.

"He who takes his own life does an abomination."

For a long moment I considered her. "You don't pity him? You don't pity him at all?"

"Let the world pity me."

"Good-bye," I said to the widow.

"You won't come back?"

I gave what amounted to a little bow of regret.

"I told you you came just for Isaac! But Isaac"—I was in terror of her cough, which was unmistakably laughter—"Isaac disappoints. 'A scholar. A rabbi. A remarkable Jew!' Ha! He disappoints you?"

"He was always an astonishing man."

"But not what you thought," she insisted. "An illusion."

"Only the pitiless are illusory. Go back to that park, Rebbetzin," I advised her.

"And what would you like me to do there? Dance around a tree and call Greek names to the weeds?"

"Your husband's soul is in that park. Consult it." But her low derisive cough accompanied me home: whereupon I remembered her earlier words and dropped three green house plants down the toilet; after a journey of some miles through conduits they straightway entered Trilham's Inlet, where they decayed amid the civic excrement.

(UNTITLED)

TOMMASO LANDOLFI

This story is a tantilizer, a mere nibble at the vast works of Landolfi, who is a writer of fantastic fiction in a truly Italian manner—though you feel that he must be well aware of that other European, Franz Kafka. Nibble at this so you will work up an appetite to go on to consume the entire work from which this is taken, Cancerqueen.

Dear, oh dear. These breasts of mine aren't a woman's breasts, they're too tiny, too tender, I don't know. . . . And the tips, they're just like a little girl's. . . .

—Oh, come now, they're beautiful!

—And what about my hips? I don't have any, almost; you might say I'm nearly square from here down. Oh dear, oh dear, it's hopeless.

—What are you talking about? You look fine. Don't get such ideas into your head. Stop fussing.

—Why, just look at this face; I've even got a kind of mustache. And my hair, it's so bushy. . . .

—Now, listen, why don't you cut it out? Just relax, for God's sake. You're making me nervous, too.

—Sure, it's easy for you to talk, you're as hard as a pearl. . . . And my thighs are a little hairy, too. Oh dear, dear, there's no hope, none.

—Say, you down there! Why don't you start getting undressed?

—Sir, please . . . how far ahead are they?

—Well, they're going pretty fast. It'll soon be your turn.

—Are we supposed to line up here?

—Yes, stand on this side—and as soon as you're called . . . In fact, there's one coming out right now.

—Miss, miss, how did it go? Are they very strict?

—No, not really. I mean, they are strict, but anyway I got through. Don't be so scared and above all try to act natural. Lots of luck.

—Well, get moving. Actually, it isn't your turn yet, but since these women over there keep dawdling . . . Go ahead. Hey, not both though, just one.

—So, kiss me good-bye.

—Yes, yes, I'll kiss you good-bye, but what about me? . . . Don't leave me here all by myself.

—Don't act like a child: a nice way to encourage me.

—Yes, you're right, I'm sorry. Lots of luck, but you've got nothing to worry about. . . . Oh dear, dear. Sir, am I next?

—Yes.

—Oh dear, dear. Sir, sir . . . tell me, what do they do if . . . if you don't get through?

—Why think about that now? Forget it.

—No, no, tell me. Please. I think I won't be as scared if

you tell me. First of all, where?

—Why . . . here in this courtyard. No, don't try, you can't see anything from these windows.

—And . . . how?

—Well . . . it doesn't hurt. You'd think God knows what, but it doesn't hurt at all.

—Oh, now you might as well tell me everything; afterwards I'll be less upset.

—Well, it's like a big wheel, that is, half of a wheel, made of steel, it's very sharp and it turns: the girl lies on a board, naked, and . . . I'm telling you, it doesn't hurt at all. . . . Oh, there's your girl friend coming out.

—Oh, you're back, my dear. Well?

—Let's not waste any time: they're waiting.

—But let her at least tell me. . . .

—Come, come, that's enough now, go on in. IT'S YOUR TURN.

AN UNEVEN EVENING

STEVE HERBST

Herbst, who is just twenty, speaks with a quiet understatement that is far more effective than the shrill cries that too many of his age project. The voice is heard clearly in this story of a man who is not necessarily an all-time loser—he is just having a bad day.

Peter's back had been bothering him again; when he reached for the newspaper on a nearby table, he stiffened. There was no crick of pain this time. I am swiftly becoming an old man, he told himself.

"Peter, how's your back feeling?"

"It's all right."

Nancy read her *McCall*'s on the sofa, ignoring the television set, which she had turned on to play the early evening news. She seemed content to keep her body still and move only her eyes. The magazine's pastel advertisements held her attention completely.

My wife is a boring woman, Peter thought. See how her fat face never alters its expression. See how her body rests slackly against the cushions and how her arms lie at her sides. See how the magazine on her lap is her evening plaything. See how I am left to fill a chair silently and become boring also.

And how boring I feel, he thought. What an incapable person I am. A dead weight suited to living-room chairs. On Wednesday nights I hit pool halls and drink beer, for of that am I capable. That is, when I ride in the car with Teague and Marvin Sapello. With Marvin and Teague I am a functioning organism, but when I am home I fill chairs.

Peter filled his chair and read his paper until the doorbell rang, to his great relief. Teague and Marvin came into the living room after wiping their feet on the floor mat.

"You look bored, old buddy," said Marvin jovially and lowered himself into a chair.

"Hey, hey," Teague said at the same time, sagging against a wall and hanging his jaw. "Ready to go?"

My evening of boredom, Peter thought, is giving way to one of virile entertainment. I now reject studied inactivity and uneasy introspection for the security of my friends, old games, and a more forceful and satisfying social role. An escape from air-conditioned purgatory into culturally competitive paradise.

"Mellow," he said. He hit Teague in the arm. "Let's get out of here."

They were in Teague's small Plymouth, Teague and Peter in front and Marvin in the back. Peter looked out the window. He kept his lips pressed tightly together as usual, betraying a minimum of emotion.

"How many games we gonna play tonight, eh?" Teague smiled, looking straight ahead into traffic.

"We can play until the owner throws us out," Marvin answered, his cheeks bulging when he talked. "Wear us out a pool table, ain't that right?"

"Yup," said Peter.

Teague drove impatiently, barely avoiding the night people in the streets, watching his headlight beams play on storefronts when he turned corners. His big arms rested fully on the steering wheel most of the time; he seemed to be embracing the car and the power it gave him.

"I told Willie Amberay and Sam Orr I'd pick them up. We're gonna fill the car tonight, hey," said Teague.

So he pulled up at Sam Orr's house and ran up to ring the doorbell. Sam and Willie were outside immediately, loping down the stairs side by side. They got into the back seat, craning their necks and darting their eyes about.

"Hi, Pete. Marvin."

"What's up?" said Peter.

Sam pulled the door closed and Teague pulled away abruptly. Willie lit a cigarette, scenting the inside of the car.

"*Hey,* Teague, guess what we found out today," Sam began.

"Yeah?"

"Get this, there's a new torming hall just opened on East Andrew Street, they got twenty-five tubes and strong alignment. What do you think of *that?*"

"Twenty-five, huh? Pretty neat, y'know?"

"Listen, Teague, if you and everybody wants to go there tonight instead of the same old pool game? Huh?"

Peter wasn't at all sure that he had heard that exchange correctly. What was Sam talking about, "torming"? What kind of term was that?

But Teague seemed to know.

"That's fine with me," Marvin said. "I haven't shot rings in, oh, a long time. Are they full-sized fields, do you know?"

"Yeah, right," said Willie. "Ten rings, oh, maybe sixty degrees up and down. That's what I heard."

"Man," said Sam. "It's been so long. So long. Get the old form back, long dives, everything. Jesus!" He waved his arms in the air, grinning. "Jesus, such a long time."

Peter began to worry. What in hell was torming? He con-

sidered asking and admitting his stupidity.

"Hey, Pete," called Teague. "A good torm okay with you? We'll let the pool go tonight."

Peter decided to play it cool. "Yeah, great. How far is the place?"

"Oh, a few blocks down Andrew. I think fourteen hundred east."

Peter nodded and turned his gaze back out the window. He was just the least bit worried.

The outside of the torming hall was a storefront with a small sign—"Torming/25 Tubes"—printed in neon. Then an unobtrusive doorway, and then a long escalator going down. Peter and his friends filed in neatly and descended to the front lobby.

The lobby was surprisingly big and modern. Gleaming metal arches spaced every twenty feet around the ellipsoidal room soared upward to a ceiling maybe fifty feet high. Carpeting on the floor and on walls between the arches was light-green and very thick. The pattern of metal and green was unbroken on all sides, except for washroom portals and a food concession at one end of the ellipse, and a counter set in the wall at the other end. The carpeting helped to absorb the noise made by the hall's patrons and by a powerful air-conditioning system. A fragrant odor filled the place, and bright fluorescents overhead illuminated every square inch evenly.

Peter and his friends were standing in front of a long, polished desk in the center of the room behind which were banks of tiny lights, knob controls, and two receptionists. Teague murmured, "I've gotta use the john; get us a tube, okay?" Teague and Sam left.

Peter tried to hang back, hoping that either Marvin or Willie would take care of any arrangements. But, unfortunately, he found himself up against the desk, and one of the receptionists asked him, "Yes?"

He thought fast. If this place was anything like a bowling alley, then he was supposed to reserve a lane. Or, in this case, a *tube.*

"A tube?" he said casually, and the receptionist handed

him a bulky plastic key with number 5 embossed on it. Peter wasn't sure whether there was anything else to ask for, but the girl said, "Get belts over there," and she pointed with her arm toward the opposite end of the lobby.

Belts?

Marvin and Willie were already at the belts counter, and Peter watched the man behind the counter select their sizes and hand them belts. So he went to the man and asked for a belt, got a belt, and put the belt around his waist.

The belt was heavy plastic half a foot wide and it had weights built into it. Three weights, evenly spaced around him.

What could the belt be for? A handicap of some sort? A thing to hold equipment? Peter walked as easily as possible under the added weight, trying to look as if nothing was new to him.

"What number, Pete?" asked Marvin.

Peter announced the number and said, "Where do you suppose that would be, eh?"

Marvin pointed toward the back side of the lobby and said, "Over there, probably."

At least Marvin didn't know everything for sure.

When they had walked behind the lobby, what Peter saw completely took his breath from him.

"Oh, no. Oh, no."

They were standing on a balcony. In front of them the floor dropped a hundred and fifty feet in a long, slow curve. Fluorescent lights at the top of the huge torming room illuminated the smoke-filled air and set off dramatically the distance between balcony and floor, between balcony and opposite wall. Along this distance, down a seventy-three-degree angle, stretched the tubes.

"What was that, Pete?"

"Oh, uh, they're small, that's what. Don't you think?"

"Regulation size, I dunno," said Willie.

The tubes were rows of ten soft plastic hoops about six feet across, and looking through them, one could see the far diagonal end of the chamber. The tubes were a couple of hundred feet long.

But that wasn't the worst of it, Peter saw.

People were torming in the tubes.

All down the line, men, women, children were leaping with abandon head first into the upper ends of the tubes and with their arms pressed against their sides, they were falling through the hoops. As they fell they collided with the hoops and glanced off. On and on, fast, ricocheting down and disappearing at the bottom.

"Did you get an egg, Pete?" Willie said, examining knob controls by the side of tube number 5.

Peter looked wildly about the room, back into the lobby, to find a place to get eggs. He couldn't see any counter besides the one for belts, nor anything that should be called an egg. What was an egg?

"Here, these guys have one," said Marvin, and he walked over to the tube numbered 7 where three small children and their parents were torming. The children jumped into the rings fearlessly, touched several times, and disappeared at the bottom of the tubes, while a conspicuous green display registered a number from zero to ten beside the topmost ring.

The "egg" was resting on the floor behind them. Marvin asked the father of the family, and then he stooped to pick up the egg. The egg was a light, foot-long metal ellipsoid, perfectly featureless except for a hole in one end. After turning the tube on with the numbered key, Willie took the egg and centered it in the topmost ring; a magnetic field drew it to the exact center and held it there. When Willie reversed a switch, the egg dropped slickly down the tube.

"A little too far to the left, I think," said Willie.

"Aligned pretty well, I'd say. Just a touch off."

"Too far to the left," Peter said with conviction.

So Willie played with two knobs until the path of the egg satisfied him. Then he said quickly, "Who wants to go first?"

Peter nearly panicked when he thought about jumping into the rings and practically free-falling two hundred feet head down. Very nearly panicked. He couldn't see what was down at the bottom of the huge room, but he did see

the tormers come up each time through doors in the floor. He tried to assure himself that if he were to jump into the tube, he too would come up through a door in the floor.

"Wait for Teague and Sam," he said.

"Is it aligned?" Teague asked when he came back.

"Fairly well," said Willie.

"Well then, go ahead."

Willie stepped up to the tube without a word, tossed his watch and car keys to Teague, and leaped gracefully down the tube. He touched four times and then they lost sight of him. The exhibition took a little under two seconds. Then it was Marvin's turn.

Marvin slicked back his hair, waved his meaty arms, and dove in. He collided right away with the third ring, which event threw him off-balance and caused him to touch five more times on the way down. At this point Willie came up through the floor.

Now it was Peter's turn.

My friends are unafraid, thought Peter. That, at least, has been proved to my satisfaction. Also, this is a fancy establishment. I think it is amazingly strange, but definitely fancy. Also there are children falling down the tubes, and none of them is getting hurt, and no one is worrying about them. Therefore, in all probability, I am perfectly safe.

What I must be concerned with, then, is being skillful. The score is based on the number of rings touched, that much is clear. If a person's aim is accurate initially, he will touch fewer rings. If his corrections are adequate when he touches a ring, he will touch fewer rings afterward. What I must do is . . .

"Go, Pete," said Sam. "It looks to be aligned all right from the way Willie went."

Skill, Peter realized, should not concern him in the least until he had satisfied himself about the matter of safety. He realized also that he wasn't satisfied. He was still scared to death.

"Don't you want to take your watch off?"

He took off his watch.

He held his breath involuntarily and jumped into the tube.

The dive was a bad one. He hit the second ring at the top of its curve, solidly, and it bounced him off and sent him spinning. The tube's magnetic field swung him around and he found himself soaring up into space, outside the rings. He flew straight up, head over heels, terror-stricken, until a secondary field caught him and fastened him on the ceiling.

"No!" he cried, trying to sound as annoyed as possible instead of scared. He looked down dizzily at the floor below.

"Grab a hand rail!" Sam called. Teague was coming up through the floor and when he saw Peter on the ceiling, he burst out laughing.

"Hey, that's pretty neat," he chuckled.

Peter found a railing and pulled himself back to the balcony. He dropped down to the carpeted floor. "Yeah," he smiled, checking his heavy breathing. His miscalculation had been an honest one, he realized, one for which he would not be ostracized.

"Try again, man."

No, not again, he thought. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah." He grinned.

No, no. He hopped in more gingerly this time, plummeted into the third ring, and clung to it for dear life. Below him seven more rings hovered vertiginously against the pale-green background of carpet a hundred feet down. He crawled along the rim of the ring, then, to face toward the middle. Stretching his hands in front of him and letting go with his feet, he fell, and hit every remaining ring on the way down.

A long curved ramp and a magnetic field stopped him at the bottom. As he lay sprawled on the wide, smooth floor, he saw a series of conveyors curving upward and disappearing into the walls. He stepped onto one. The ride was quick. At the top, a trap door opened and he was lifted onto the main-floor balcony in time to see Teague drop off into a three-touch fall.

"You okay, Pete?"

"Yeah, Marvin. What's wrong?"

"An eight-point!" said Sam. "Outa practice, huh?"

"Yeah, maybe," he answered. "Field isn't, uh, very strong is it?"

"Strongest field I've been in, myself."

"Yeah."

Peter made a seven-touch the next time and flew around the outside of two rings on the way. He came up through the door in the floor and wrote "7" on his score sheet. Willie caught his error and explained to him: "You went outside on the way down, Pete. Twice."

"Yeah, right."

"That's an extra two points, you know. Tryin' to cheat yourself?"

Peter made the correction, and Willie asked, "You ever do a torm before, Pete? Honest now."

"You think I'm trying to impress somebody or something?" He grinned, slapping Willie on the back.

"I know," said Willie in a low voice, "that you tend to do that."

Peter lined up his next jump carefully, sighting all the way down and then listing forward in what he thought was a professional-looking posture. He swung his arms to take off, and a muscle went in his back.

He went tense from the momentary cramp, stiffened from head to foot, and fell seven rings without touching.

When he hit bottom he turned over once and stopped short on his knees, still tensed. An older man lay near him on the floor, and before he could get up the man called to him.

"Are you hurt?"

"No, I'm all right." Peter smiled coolly.

"Well *I'm* hurt," the man said, and propped himself up on one knee.

Peter helped the man to the up conveyor while the man explained. "I've got a trick knee, see, and I got it locked up on the way down. No fault of the equipment, understand.

The equipment's perfectly safe."

Peter remembered that afterward. The equipment's perfectly safe.

The man thanked him when they reached the torming balcony above and a place to sit down. Peter said, "It's all right," and left to get his wristwatch from tube 5's scoring desk.

I am a very misdirected person, he thought. I waste my energies. I find no joy in social paradise.

He said good night to all his friends, gave them some money for the torming, returned his belt, and took the bus home.

He found his wife still reading *McCall*'s on the sofa. The television was still on, and the late evening news was playing. He waited for a greeting from her; anything, but she ignored him and continued to read the magazine.

Finally, he volunteered: "It was okay, we had fun."

She turned a page and continued to read.

"Nan?"

"Yes, Peter?" She looked up.

"Are you watching television? I'm going to shut it off."

"Go right ahead, I'm not watching." She returned to the page.

Peter watched her in the silent room for a long time, thinking about boring evenings and dull purgatories and culturally competitive paradises and wives.

And then his face brightened up all at once. He went over to Nancy on the sofa, bent over her from behind with his hands on her shoulders and his face close to hers.

He said, "Hey, honey, tomorrow night I'm going to take you torming."

She looked up this time.

"Oh. Great," she said. "Strong alignment?"

ORNITHANTHROPUS

B. ALAN BURHOE

Burhoe is a Maritime Canadian who lives a lot closer to the realities of environment than most of us, finding solitary pleasure in showshoeing through the white winter. A student of North American mythology, the Indian and Innuit stories and legends, he has produced here his own legend of an interaction between nature and man that has yet to be.

Schadow was awakened by his woman.

He sat up from the blankets of marsh cotton, stretching his wings above his head until they touched the low ceiling of woven reeds.

"The skyhunter is dying," she said. "We must leave."

His heart twisted. "Dying? Are you sure?"

"See for yourself." She turned to gather their meager possessions in her thin arms.

He left their cabin and knew the truth of her words even before he had reached the forward opening. He felt the skyhunter's fading life in the uneasy quivering that shook the wood framework of the gondola. He cursed. Anger flared, turning to rage, fading to a sinking feeling of impotence.

A pale yellow tentacle curled through the opening. The amber eye at its tip regarded him.

"Ah, my ponderous friend. What is the matter?" Schadow asked soothingly.

The tentacle wrapped about his waist, reassuring, sad.

On reaching the opening, he looked out and up. The hydrogen-filled balloon-bladder that kept the skyhunter airborne had turned from a healthy crimson to a dusky brown, run with streaks of copper. The airpaddles were clenched as if in pain. The cartilage ribs to which the framework of the gondola was fastened sagged, hardly capable of holding it or the hundred and seven human members of the Seacliff Clan. The sixty green and crimson fishing tentacles hung lifeless toward the glittering sea a half-kilometer below. The single foretentacle that had greeted him snaked away and moved listlessly in the air. He wanted to say something, to reassure the animal, the living dirigible that had been his home and friend and protector all his life, to let his calm voice—

"Schadow."

He turned, recognized the old man who stood behind him. "Grandfather?"

"There is little time. You must move fast."

"And you?"

"You know my duty. We have lived as one, the skybeast and I—we will die as one. You are now Clan Elder. You know what you must do."

Schadow nodded. For a moment they clasped hands,

Schadow studying the patriarch's tired, rawhide face. Then he went back to his cabin. Behind him, Grandfather jumped into the air and fluttered up to the head of the skyhunter. It tried to push him away but the ancient one found power in his wings and stayed close, patting the head and talking softly of yesteryear.

Schadow gathered the clan at the aft opening and, when he was sure that he had missed no one, ordered his people into the sky. One by one they jumped, arms tightly grasping children or belongings. Their wings flapped until they hit an upcurrent; then they glided into formation, armed men taking the vulnerable positions. Last to leave was Schadow. He threw himself from the gondola, falling toward the distant water, stretched his wings, flew.

Together, silent, they headed toward the land until Schadow judged they had reached a safe distance.

He looked back at the skyhunter.

The bladder was now almost totally copper. The three hydrogen bags were scarcely visible through the once transparent hide. As the wind pivoted the derelict sky beast Schadow saw Grandfather flying close to its head. He saw the creature give one last attempt to push the old man away with its tentacle, saw it fail, saw them grasp one another one last time, enemies once, now brothers.

"It's going to suicide," said one warrior.

Before he had spoken the last word a spark flared in the depths of the bladder. The skyhunter was enveloped in a savage burst of fire that reflected softly off the wispy clouds above and more fiercely off the sea below. Man, beast and gondola became a single inferno that twisted in the air and tumbled into the waves.

The thunder struck at the Seacliff Clan, enveloped and passed it.

For a few moments the fliers were given increased lift. They took advantage of it and glided in silence toward the granite shore.

A pack of winged amphibians, like tiny pale dragons, soared out from the cliffs to meet them, screaming their

challenge and bravado, voicing them all the louder when they were ignored.

"Where do we go now?" asked his woman as Schadow glided in next to her.

"Give me my harness," he said, partly answering her query.

He took the harness of leather straps and silver buckles and dressed himself in midair, fitting the fastenings around his chest and placing the scabbard along his spine. He pulled out the sword of strong white bone and tested its edges, honed over the years to razor sharpness.

"You must go to Starport," he called to his people. "Wait there for five days. If I have not returned by that time you will know that I have failed to tame a skyhunter and that you must choose a new Clan Elder from among you."

He said nothing more. Nothing else was left to say.

They flew away, a few lifting their spirits from the depths of the tragedy enough to wish him luck. He watched them until they seemed no larger than insects against the brightening blue of the post-dawn horizon. Then he banked, caught the thermal that swept up from the coastal cliffs, dropped into an easy glide to conserve his energy for the ordeal ahead.

They had called the colony world Pishkun, from an ancient Sioux word that meant cliff, for indeed it was a land of cliffs as well as rift valleys, crevices and faults—a granite world of eternal upheaval where the thunder of earthquakes was as common as the roar of the ocean. When the colonists had first reached and named Pishkun they had taken its unfriendly nature as a challenge. Thus, after a million years of frustrated dreams that had begun when early man had first looked at the eagle and felt envy. Ornithanthropus had finally been born, for only in the air could life be sustained with any permanency on this world.

Esthetics had played a greater part in the design of the birdfolk than functional engineering. The wings had been

placed at the shoulder blades and were powered by a complex system of muscles that started at the keel-like breastbone, joined the trapezius and ran up the lower part of each wing. The bones were hollow for lightness and the lower eyelids, which were transparent, could cover the eyes to protect them from windblast. To a basicform human, the birdfolk were the symbol of beauty in motion.

Schadow, who was of the fiftieth generation of his kind, cared little for the history of his people. He knew it—the basicforms at Starport had told it to him when he had visited that antigrav trading station in his adolescence —but he had found the story only of peripheral interest. Only life, health, the sky, his woman and the skyhunter he must tame meant anything to him.

The day passed into early afternoon without tiring him as he skimmed along the updrafts and climbed for a wider view. Over the sea almost a kilometer away he saw a young skyhunter, shining like a blood jewel over the silver-streaked greenness of the waves. But it was already fishing. It would be too strong for him to outlast. He looked inland.

The nostrils of his knife-blade nose flared. The muscles in his sunken cheeks tightened like braided rawhide. His eyes slitted and the greasy black hair lifted from his scalp. Unsteadily he moved the sword in his hands. What he saw was barely a dot on the horizon but every instinct in him identified it. It was a skyhunter heading for the sea and therefore hungry, therefore weakened.

For a scant moment he debated falling toward the land and foraging for something to eat, then tossed the idea aside. The beast would know by his smell whether or not he had a full belly and it had best sense that he was as hungry as it, unarmed except for the sword, naked except for the harness—equal with it in all respects including courage.

He studied every facet of the land and air around him. The ground was a tumbled mess of bare rock, strewn boulders, cascades, bogs and patches of brown and green where

simple land plants had eked out a living despite the endless assaults upon them by the planet's ever-changing crust. He looked away from the tortured land. With a sense ingrained into him through generations of running upon the winds he looked at the air mass around him and mapped every current in his mind. He saw the draft that swept up from the sea cliffs below him like a sun-warmed glass curtain to touch the inversion layer four kilometers above; saw a large thermal off to his right, marked where it started on the ground near a dust devil, a huge cylinder of moving bubbles of heated air that rose to reach the cumulus clouds that dotted the sky; saw a second curtainlike current rise from cliffs of red granite to his left, but this one bent and rushed dangerously across the jagged top; saw the bulk of dead air that sat ahead of him, shimmering now and then in the form of a seaward breeze.

He couldn't have picked a better place to meet the sky-beast, he told himself.

It would not retreat inland or go to the left because of the cliffs. It could only attempt to go over him or to his right—or through him.

It came on without evidencing the slightest concern. As it drew closer Schadow was awed at its size—it was bigger than any he had ever seen.

The massive bladder, shining dull crimson in the sunlight, must have been fully forty meters across and almost a hundred long. The three hydrogen sacs inside fluttered larger and smaller as it adjusted its buoyancy in the weak on-sea winds. Sixteen airpaddles, eight along each side, swept forward like closed fists, opened to reveal strong black membranes, pushed back to provide thrust. Fishing tentacles were coiled close to the cartilage ribbing that protected two-thirds of its underside from leaping sea carnivores. The poison-celled foretentacle that flipped about the bladder to watch for predators or parasites was set just behind the head which took up the other third. And its eyes—they looked across at him—were twin pools of molten amber, the black pupils expanding and contracting

to the best of the aerial supercoelenterate's savage life systems. They revealed a brooding intelligence that at once terrified and exhilarated Schadow.

He hovered as best he could in the skyhunter's path.

The creature slowed, watching him. Schadow gave challenge.

"Ho! Skyhunter! I have come to tame you, to form the bond of brotherhood between us for the good of my people—or die trying."

The eyes burned into his.

The foretentacle streaked for him.

Schadow swung his sword as he had practiced since he had first taken to wing as a boy, slashing the air in front of him in a series of hissing sweeps. He wanted the beast to know that he could cut the tentacle in two if it threatened him but that he didn't want to.

The tentacle retreated. The eyes studied him, their look now unreadable. For an instant something flashed in those eyes. Then the creature was moving.

At first he thought it was retreating and the concept shocked him, for every skyhunter he had ever known or heard of would rather have suicided than run from an attacker, especially such a little attacker as a man. Then a gulping sound came to his ears. He smiled. It was increasing its buoyancy. It was going to attempt to go over him.

Schadow pushed at the almost still air with his wings and began to climb. The skybeast, airpaddles sweeping lazily to maintain equilibrium, began to ascend in front of him.

They went up and up until the clouds seemed to disappear as they melded into them and ice crystals danced about them, flickering brilliantly as they caught and broke the sunlight. Schadow's exhaled breath began to form into puffs of frost. The tentacle again darted toward him and again he created a protective shield around him with his sword.

"Ho! You will have to do better than that, great one."

He watched the tentacle retreat and snap in the air as if in anger.

With a mutter the coelenterate began to descend, its hydrogen already cooling and decreasing its lift. Schadow paralleled it.

The clouds re-formed above. The atmosphere became warmer.

Schadow flexed his wings to spoil his descent and was amazed to discover that this adversary was picking up downward speed. He allowed himself to fall with it until he was forced to brake.

Surely the thing wasn't going to dash itself into the ground! He felt himself go cold in a way the high frost couldn't have affected him.

It was indeed throwing itself at the twisted rock country. Shaken, the birdman watched it drop until it was falling away from him like a plummeting boulder. It hit the earth, narrowly missing a jagged outcropping. Dust billowed from the impact site. The crimson bladder shook, flattened, appeared to burst. Then it was rebounding back up at him.

Schadow would have laughed in relief and admiration for the creature if it had not been lofting directly at him with tremendous speed. He wheeled, pushing the air in desperation. It rushed past him. The foretentacle narrowly missed him and one of the fishing tentacles touched his left leg. He cried out in pain.

Stubbornly he wheeled again and chased it until it leveled off at four hundred meters.

He checked his leg. A thin welt was forming across his calf. Luckily he hadn't been hooked on one of the barbs or touched by a poison capsule.

"Ho-eee!" he shouted, making the traditional sign of admiration for one's enemy in the air with his sword. In turn, the skyhunter whipped its tentacle about in a remarkable mimicry of the sign.

They settled down to eyeing one another again.

Now perhaps the skybeast realized that it and Schadow must face each other, that each must prove to the other his courage and powers of endurance. And while they strained

to endure the ordeal perhaps a bond would form between them.

The huge eyes suddenly shifted and focused behind his right shoulder.

Schadow looked around.

Seven armed men stared at him.

Their wings fluttered feebly, their weight being supported by antigrav units strapped to their chests. They gripped swords of the best alloy metal. On their bodies they wore glittering collections of useless ornaments and gadgets.

Fangs! Schadow remembered seeing packs of them when he had visited Starbase and he had heard many tales of their bloody raids. While they were adapted forms, the fangs preferred the sanctuary of the floating plastic city, venturing forth only for murder or pillage.

One flew slightly ahead of the others. Setting a dial on his antigrav, he hovered about ten meters from Schadow, alternately watching the lone warrior and the skyhunter.

"I am Garp." he said.

"So?" Schadow hefted his sword and tentatively tested its edge with his thumb. He looked over his shoulder to check the beast. Though he acted calmly, he strained all the while to maintain his hovering position without appearing to tire.

"I am leader of our pack." Garp had an artificially bronzed skin, a fat belly and shining bald head. He reminded Schadow of a Buddha idol—perhaps ancient religions were the latest fashion among the basicforms, whom the fangs always emulated, body sculpture being the dominant art form among the non-adapted men of the Confederacy.

"Then it is up to you to lead your men—if they deserve that title—away. You should know that the ordeal with a skyhunter is a private matter. You have no right here."

Garp laughed.

"But we have come such a long way to find you. Ven

here"—he swept his empty hand toward a thinner version of himself who grinned and bowed awkwardly in the air—"saw your people arrive at the base and overheard them talking about you." Now it was Garp's turn to test his sword edge with his thumb, though Schadow saw sky between flesh and metal. "Having nothing better to do, we decided that we should come out and help you. I mean, all that talk that you people keep giving us about living with nature and not against it to the contrary, we thought that you'd like the power of civilization behind you in this affair." He looked at the beast, briefly meeting its eyes. His voice went softer. "I've never seen a man killed by one of those before." Garp looked at his sword, then shouted. "Ven!"

"Ho?"

"The triplets will stay with me. You take the other two and go behind the thing to keep it from getting away."

"Understood." The three adjusted their antigravs and pushed themselves into position.

Garp looked at Schadow. "You."

Schadow felt his jaw muscles tighten in anger.

"In my wide experience in dealing with men of action, I have usually found that even the bravest need a little push in the right direction on occasion. We watched you fighting the thing and it is our considered opinion that you keep too far from it. Right, men?"

The trio that moved in behind him answered in chorus, "Right.

"So let's give him the courage he needs." Garp waited until the three were even with him before moving slowly toward the warrior, sword held out ahead of him like a lance.

Schadow held his position. Garp had slowed so that two others were the first to reach him. Folding his wings, Schadow fell. He outstretched them again and regained altitude, slashing at one fang who had just set his antigrav to dive and had left the top of his head vulnerable. He felt his sword crack through the skull. The man screamed and

floated away from the contestants.

He slashed at the second man, missing him by millimeters.

Garp screamed in rage. "Kill him," he ordered.

The other two didn't need encouraging. They rushed at Schadow.

He parried the lunging weapon of the first, ducked the second and looked for Garp. The latter proved to be a greater danger than Schadow had guessed. The fang leader held his sword before him, elbow locked, and maneuvered himself by twisting the dials on his antigrav. He flashed in and out with extreme accuracy and Schadow learned respect for the antigrav as he desperately put up a defense. The other two pressed beside him, forcing him to fall back toward the skyhunter.

"Ven," shouted Garp. "Drive the thing this way."

Schadow looked behind him. Ven and his companions were efficiently moving the skybeast toward him. Not that he feared the skyhunter so much—though he knew what his fate would be if it caught him—but he felt concern that the flashing blades would soon cripple the animal. It was battling with a ferocity it had not shown earlier. Its fishing tentacles lashed out as it rocked in the air. Its foretentacle hung poised to strike. Its paddles sent it spinning on an axis, making it harder to predict its next attack or parry. Even so, it didn't have a chance against this pack. The fact that its fiery suicide—when it accepted defeat—would take its tormentors with it was little consolation.

Something nagged at the back of Schadow's mind but the fangs gave him no time to find out what it was. His keel muscles were blazing with pain as he was forced to beat his wings to hold his position. He could feel himself weakening. For the first time in his life he envied the power the antigrav gave a flier, as his attackers pressed themselves more keenly against him. His sword of bloodied bone took the full force of a downward stroke from above and was chipped. He stabbed at Garp, who replied by smashing Schadow's sword with a jarring blow that broke the point.

Cursing, Schadow put his full fury into an offense, momentarily driving the three back. Garp lost his temper and for the first time truly led the attack. They came at him at once.

The wind shimmered and the birdman saw a brief updraft roll up to them like a pearl-gray bubble. He flexed his wings. The warm bubble enveloped them, jostling the fangs and lifting their intended victim above them. Spitting monosyllables, the trio adjusted their antigravs and shot toward him.

Schadow, momentarily relieved from battle and able to rest his burning muscles, was amazed. Had they been so busy that they hadn't seen the thermal? But surely they must have. No matter how involved you were, you always watched the air about you. You had to if you wanted to fly.

Garp and the others were at him again. His weapon rendered useless as a foil, he was forced to slash and chop at them. He scratched Garp's bronze belly, forcing him behind the other two.

He saw a second thermal bubble coming up at them. Winging over, he dived. The fangs fell beside him. When he leveled off, they leveled beside him, prepared to continue the fight. The thermal hit and again he was carried away from them.

They couldn't see! It was a hard fact to understand but there was the proof. Any child of Schadow's clan would have seen that bubble and yet these winged adults had looked right at it without noticing it. Was it possible? He watched them coming up at him, playing with the knobs on their antigravs.

He saw the truth and with it a possibility. These men, adapted for the air though they were, were creatures of the Starbase, where no man ever did what a mechanism could more easily do. Even though they had flown the skies all their lives, they had never really *flown*. Using their wings only as stabilizers, they let their antigravs do their flying for them. Not having the need to know the currents of the atmosphere, they had lost, if they had ever had, the ability

to see them. In a very important way they were blind.

Again Schadow dived. This time he looped low and under the trailing tentacles of the skyhunter. The fangs reset their equipment and gave easy chase.

"Ven—" shouted Garp.

Ven looked down and peeled away from the troubled skyhunter, followed by his comrades.

The six formed a rough flock behind Schadow.

Banking to his left, he put his last dregs of energy into flying for the red cliffs.

As his pursuers closed the distance between them he regarded the bleak cliffs and the wispy blanket of air that rose up and over it. Every instinct cried out to him to veer away.

He reached the outer edge of the blanket and soared upward, the wind brushing his face gently and with no hint of where it would take him if he stayed with it. The pack adjusted and rose behind him. Ven was leading and only five meters below, his teeth showing in a tight grin.

Ven overtook him as they reached the summit and Schadow was carried across the rough top. With one hand on his antigrav Ven threw himself at the birdman.

Schadow met sword with sword. As Ven pulled back to make a second stab, Schadow somersaulted beneath him and slashed upward. Blood spurted past his face. Ven screamed and twisted in the air, held aloft by his device.

The second attacker was luckier. His sword caught Schadow's at an angle, breaking it just above the guard. Schadow tossed the handle into the man's face.

Shouting in victory, Garp moved in ahead of the others for the kill.

"Die, you—" he yelled, raising his weapon. His eyes burned.

The blow never came.

They were past the cliff.

Schadow saw the draftfall as a glimmering mass of air that spilled over the lip of the cliff and tumbled toward the

broken land. He had often seen such sights from afar but this was the first time he had been in one. Like every winged creature on every world, he normally knew better than to fly into the currents on the lee side of a mountain.

The downdraft caught him and Garp in its grip and threw them violently at the rocks. Garp howled, dropping his sword, which spun into a fang below him. Each member of the pack played frantically with his antigrav. But the air tossed them about like wood chips in a raging river. The downfall was too powerful to be beaten by the puny devices of man.

Schadow made no attempt to outfly the draft. Putting his arms next to his body in a swept-back position, straightening his legs, hitching forward at the waist and angling his aching wings close to his sides, he formed his body into an elementary airfoil, skidding through the air at an angle.

He closed his lower lids against the vicious winds and through them saw the fangs, the whole scene faded by the protective tissue so that it seemed that it happened in the depths of a faintly pink sea.

Ven's corpse was first to hit, smashing spread-eagled atop an altar of rock not two meters from the base of the cliff. Two others hit farther out. Silently, explosively they touched the ground, their screams and the crashes coming weakly through the winds after the fact. A fourth hit a shallow pool, sending up a shower of scummed water and insects. A fifth had slowed himself a bit with his antigrav and it seemed to Schadow that his screams must have continued for a second after he had hit.

Garp was a fast learner. On seeing Schadow he had copied the airfoil design, getting added spoiling from his antigrav. But he was too late and too low. The false Buddha smashed into a jagged outcropping of volcanic glass, beheading himself.

The pink-tinted ground was getting dangerously close. Schadow felt the skeletal claws of oblivion drag along his spine.

Then he was out of the draftfall and in a turbulent but

strong wave lift beyond. Extending his wings, he soared into the sky and opened his lids to its eternal blue.

He looked down. Scattered on the ground were the twisted and broken forms of the fangs. Somehow an antigrav unit had been torn loose from a corpse and, free of its weight, clattered along under the force of the draftfall until clear and then shot through the air toward the base, perhaps on a homing signal. Three of the corpses, he noticed, were also beginning to move across the rocks, being pulled by devices that had outlasted their owners.

The skyhunter still floated where he had left it.

Did he dare to hope?

Though he was unarmed, he settled into a straightaway glide toward the beast.

It was obviously as near exhaustion as he but appeared unhurt. There was no reason for it to stay away from its sea hunting—unless it was waiting for him. It could be purposely baiting him, he told himself. Vengeance was not solely a human passion.

He slowed and circled before its massive head.

The amber eyes watched him.

Slowly, carefully the tentacle moved toward him. He stayed in his tight orbit, not moving away. The auxiliary eye at the tip of the tentacle opened—the tentacle itself touched his arm.

No poison cells opened to destroy him. The tentacle remained soft and gentle.

Laughing, Schadow grabbed the tentacle and the skybeast, tender as he remembered another of its kind, grabbed him.

It placed Schadow atop its bladder, where he could sit and rest. He didn't mind the fact that the skin was almost unbearably hot from the sun. He laughed again. The beast moved its tentacle joyfully and the dragon-amphibians that guarded the seacliffs screamed at them as they moved through the sky and over the sea, once-enemies, now-brothers.

NO DIRECTION HOME

NORMAN SPINRAD

If you wanted to chose a literate spokesman for the now generation, Spinrad would be a good choice. His novel Bug Jack Baron *raised blood pressure in many quarters, including the British Parliament, where it was roundly condemned. After a number of stays he knows London as well as Los Angeles and New York and is the only SF writer I know of who has hitchhiked through the Highlands of Scotland. He also knows what is happening in the world as he proves with this uncomfortable look at the future drug scene.*

How does it feel
To be on your own?
With no direction home . . .
Like a complete unknown.
Like a rolling stone.
—Bob Dylan, *Like a Rolling Stone*

"But I once *did* succeed in stuffing it all back in Pandora's box," Richardson said, taking another hit. "You remember Pandora Deutchman, don't you, Will? Everybody in the biochemistry department stuffed it all in Pandora's box at one time or another. I seem to vaguely remember one party when you did it yourself."

"Oh, you're a real comedian, Dave," Goldberg said, stubbing out his roach and jamming a cork into the glass vial which he had been filling from the petcock at the end of the apparatus' run. "Any day now, I expect you to start slipping strychnine into the goods. That'd be pretty good for a yock, too."

"You know, I never thought of that before. Maybe you got something there. Let a few people go out with a smile, satisfaction guaranteed. Christ, Will, we could tell them exactly what it was and still sell some of the stuff."

"That's not funny, man," Goldberg said, handing the vial to Richardson, who carefully snugged it away with the others in the excelsior-packed box. "It's not funny because it's true."

"Hey, you're not getting an attack of morals, are you? Don't move, I'll be right back with some methalin—that oughta get your head straight."

"My head is straight already. Canabinolic acid, our own invention."

"*Canabinolic acid*? Where did you get that, in a drugstore? We haven't bothered with it for three years."

Goldberg placed another empty vial in the rack under the petcock and opened the valve. "Bought it on the street for kicks," he said. "Kids are brewing it in their bathtubs now." He shook his head, almost a random gesture.

"Remember what a bitch the original synthesis was?"

"Science marches on!"

"Too bad we couldn't have patented the stuff," Goldberg said as he contemplated the thin stream of clear green liquid entering the open mouth of the glass vial. "We could've retired off the royalties by now."

"If we had the Mafia to collect for us."

"That might be arranged."

"Yeah, well, maybe I should look into it," Richardson said as Goldberg handed him another full vial. "We shouldn't be pigs about it, though. Just about ten percent off the top at the manufacturing end. I don't believe in stifling private enterprise."

"No really, Dave," Goldberg said, "maybe we made a mistake in not trying to patent the stuff. People *do* patent combo psychedelics, you know."

"You don't mean *people*, man, you mean outfits like American Marijuana and Psychedelics, Inc. They can afford the lawyers and grease. They can work the FDA's head. We can't."

Goldberg opened the petcock valve. "Yeah, well, at least it'll be six months or so before the Dope Industry or anyone else figures out how to synthesize this new crap, and by that time I think I'll have just about licked the decay problem in the cocanol extraction process. We should be one step ahead of the squares for at least another year."

"You know what I think, Will?" Richardson said, patting the side of the half-filled box of vials. "I think we got a holy mission, is what. I think we're servants of the evolutionary process. Every time we come up with a new psychedelic, we're advancing the evolution of human consciousness. We develop the stuff and make our bread off it for a while, and then the Dope Industry comes up with our synthesis and mass produces it, and then we gotta come up with the next drug out so we can still set our tables in style. If it weren't for the Dope Industry and the way the drug laws are set up, we could stand still and become bloated plutocrats just by putting out the same old dope year after

year. This way, we're doing some good in the world, we're doing something to further human evolution."

Goldberg handed him another full vial. "Screw human evolution," he said. "What has human evolution ever done for us?"

"As you know, Dr. Taller, we're having some unforeseen side-effects with eucomorfamine," General Carlyle said, stuffing his favorite Dunhill with rough-cut burley. Taller took out a pack of Golds, extracted a joint, and lit it with a lighter bearing an Air Force rather than a Psychedelics, Inc. insignia. Perhaps this had been a deliberate gesture, perhaps not.

"With a psychedelic as new as eucomorfamine, General," Taller said, "no side-effects can quite be called 'unforeseen.' After all, even Project Groundhog itself is an experiment."

Carlyle lit his pipe and sucked in a mouthful of smoke which was good and carcinogenic; the General believed that a good soldier should cultivate at least one foolhardy minor vice. "No word-games, please, Doctor," he said. "Eucomorfamine is supposed to help our men in the Groundhog moonbase deal with the claustrophobic conditions; it is not supposed to promote faggotry in the ranks. The reports I've been getting indicate that the drug is doing both. The Air Force does not want it to do both. Therefore, by definition, eucomorfamine has an undesirable side-effect. Therefore, your contract is up for review."

"General, General, psychedelics are not uniforms, after all. You can't expect us to tailor them to order. You asked for a drug that would combat claustrophobia without impairing alertness or the sleep cycle or attention-span or initiative. You think this is easy? Eucomorfamine produces claustrophilia without any side-effect but a raising of the level of sexual energy. As such, I consider it one of the minor miracles of psychedelic science."

"That's all very well, Taller, but surely you can see that we simply cannot tolerate violent homosexual behavior

among our men in the moonbase."

Taller smiled, perhaps somewhat fatuously. "But you can't very well tolerate a high rate of claustrophobic breakdown, either," he said. "You have only four obvious alternatives, General Carlyle: continue to use eucomorfamine and accept a certain level of homosexual incidents, discontinue eucomorfamine and accept a very high level of claustrophobic breakdown, or cancel Project Groundhog. *Or . . .*"

It dawned upon the General that he had been the object of a rather sophisticated sales pitch. "Or go to a drug that would cancel out the side-effect of eucomorfamine," he said. "Your company just wouldn't happen to have such a drug in the works, would it?"

Dr. Taller gave him a we're-all-men-of-the-world-grin. "Psychedelics, Inc. *has* been working on a sexual suppressant," he admitted none too grudgingly. "Not an easy psychic spec to fill. The problem is that if you actually decrease sexual energy, you tend to get impaired performance in the higher cerebral centers, which is all very well in penal institutions, but hardly acceptable in Project Groundhog's case. The trick is to channel the excess energy elsewhere. We decided that the only viable alternative was to siphon it off into mystical fugue-states. Once we worked it out, the biochemistry became merely a matter of detail. We're about ready to bring the drug we've developed—trade name nadabrin—into the production stage."

The General's pipe had gone out. He did not bother to relight it. Instead, he took 5 mg. of lebemil, which seemed more to the point at the moment. "This nadabrin," he said very deliberately, "it bleeds off the excess sexuality into *what*? Fugue-states? Trances? We certainly don't need a drug that makes our men psychotic."

"Of course not. About three hundred micrograms of nadabrin will give a man a mystical experience that lasts less than four hours. He won't be much good to you during that time, to be sure, but his sexual energy level will be severely depressed for about a week. Three hundred

micrograms to each man on eucomorfamine, say every five days, to be on the safe side."

General Carlyle relit his pipe and ruminated. Things seemed to be looking up. "Sounds pretty good," he finally admitted. "But what about the content of the mystical experiences? Nothing that would impair devotion to duty?"

Taller snubbed out his roach. "I've taken nadabrin myself," he said. "No problems."

"What was it like?"

Taller once again put on his fatuous smile. "That's the best part of nadabrin," he said. "I don't remember what it was like. You don't retain any memories of what happens to you under nadabrin. Genuine fugue-state. So you can be sure the mystical experiences don't have any undesirable content, can't you? Or at any rate, you can be sure that the experience can't impair a man's military performance."

"What the men don't remember can't hurt them, eh?" Carlyle muttered into his pipestem.

"What was that, General?"

"I said I'd recommend that we give it a try."

They sat together in a corner booth back in the smoke, sizing each other up while the crowd in the joint yammered and swirled around them in some other reality, like a Bavarian merry-go-round.

"What are you on?" he said, noticing that her hair seemed black and seamless like a beetle's carapace, a dark metal helmet framing her pale face in glory. Wow.

"Peyotadrene," she said, her lips moving like incredibly jeweled and articulated metal flower-petals. "Been up for about three hours. What's your trip?"

"Canabinolic acid," he said, the distortion of his mouth's movement casting his face into an ideogramic pattern which was barely decipherable to her perception as a foreshadowing of energy release. Maybe they would make it.

"I haven't tried any of that stuff for months," she said. "I hardly remember what that reality feels like." Her skin

luminesced from within, a translucent white china mask over a yellow candle-flame. She was a magnificent artifact, a creation of jaded and sophisticated gods.

"It feels good," he said, his eyebrows forming a set of curves which, when considered as part of a pattern containing the movement of his lips against his teeth, indicated a clear desire to donate energy to the filling of her void. They *would* make it. "Call me old-fashioned maybe, but I still think canabinolic acid is groovy stuff."

"Do you think you could go on a sex-trip behind it?" she asked. The folds and wrinkles of her ears had been carved with microprecision out of pink ivory.

"Well, I suppose so, in a peculiar kind of way," he said, hunching his shoulders forward in a clear gesture of offering, an alignment with the pattern of her movement through space-time that she could clearly perceive as intersecting her trajectory. "I mean, if you want me to ball you, I think I can make it."

The tiny gold hairs on her face were a microscopic field of wheat shimmering in a shifting summer breeze as she said: "That's the most meaningful thing anyone has said to me in hours."

The convergence of every energy configuration in the entire universe toward complete identity with the standing wave pattern of its maximum ideal structure was brightly mirrored for the world to see in the angle between the curves of his lips as he spoke.

Cardinal McGavin took a peyotadrene-mescamil combo and 5 mg. of metadrene an hour and a half before his meeting with Cardinal Rillo; he had decided to try to deal with Rome on a mystical rather than a political level, and that particular prescription made him feel most deeply Christian. And the Good Lord knew that it could become very difficult to feel deeply Christian when dealing with a representative of the Pope.

Cardinal Rillo arrived punctually at three, just as Cardinal McGavin was approaching his mystical peak; the

man's punctuality was legend. Cardinal McGavin felt pathos in that: the sadness of a Prince of the Church whose major impact on the souls of his fellows lay in his slavery to the hands of a clock. Because the ascetic-looking old man, with his colorless eyes and pencil-thin lips, was so thoroughly unlovable, Cardinal McGavin found himself cherishing the man for this very existential hopelessness. He sent forth a silent prayer that he, or if not he then at least someone, might be chosen as an instrument through which this poor cold creature might be granted a measure of Divine Grace.

Cardinal Rillo accepted the amenities with cold formality, and in the same spirit agreed to share some claret. Cardinal McGavin knew better than to offer a joint; Cardinal Rillo had been in the forefront of the opposition which had caused the Pope to delay his inevitable encyclical on marijuana for long ludicrous years. That the Pope had chosen such an emissary in this matter was not a good sign.

Cardinal Rillo sipped at his wine in sour silence for long moments while Cardinal McGavin was nearly overcome with sorrow at the thought of the loneliness of the soul of this man, who could not even break the solemnity of his persona to share some Vatican gossip over a little wine with a fellow Cardinal. Finally, the Papal emissary cleared his throat—a dry, archaic gesture—and got right to the point.

"The Pontiff has instructed me to convey his concern at the addition of psychedelics to the composition of the communion host in the Archdiocese of New York," he said, the tone of his voice making it perfectly clear that he wished the Holy Father had given him a much less cautious warning to deliver. But if the Pope had learned anything at all from the realities of this schismatic era, it was caution. Especially when dealing with the American hierarchy, whose alliegance to Rome was based on nothing firmer than nostalgia and symbolic convenience. The Pope had been the last to be convinced of his own fallibility, but in

the last few years events seemed to have finally brought the new refinement of Divine Truth home.

"I acknowledge and respect the Holy Father's concern," Cardinal McGavin said. "I shall pray for divine resolution of his doubt."

"I didn't say anything about doubt!" Cardinal Rillo snapped, his lips moving with the crispness of pincers. "How can you impute doubt to the Holy Father?"

Cardinal McGavin's spirit soared over a momentary spark of anger at the man's pigheadedness; he tried to give Cardinal Rillo's soul a portion of peace. "I stand corrected," he said. "I shall pray for the alleviation of the Holy Father's concern."

But Cardinal Rillo was implacable and inconsolable; his face was a membrane of control over a musculature of rage. "You can more easily relieve the Holy Father's concern by removing the peyotadrene from your hosts!" he said.

"Are those the words of the Holy Father?" Cardinal McGavin asked, knowing the answer.

"Those are my words, Cardinal McGavin," Cardinal Rillo said, "and you would do well to heed them. The fate of your immortal soul may be at stake."

A flash of insight, a sudden small satori, rippled through Cardinal McGavin: Rillo was sincere. For him, the question of a chemically augmented host was not a matter of Church politics, as it probably was to the Pope; it touched on an area of deep religious conviction. Cardinal Rillo was indeed concerned for the state of his soul and it behooved him, both as a Cardinal and as a Catholic, to treat the matter seriously on that level. For after all, chemically augmented communion was a matter of deep religious conviction for him as well. He and Cardinal Rillo faced each other across a gap of existentially meaningful theological disagreement.

"Perhaps the fate of yours as well, Cardinal Rillo," he said.

"I didn't come here all the way from Rome to seek spiri-

tual guidance from a man who is skating on the edge of heresy, Cardinal McGavin. I came here to deliver the Holy Father's warning that an encyclical may be issued against your position. Need I remind you that if you disobey such an encyclical, you may be excommunicated?"

"Would you be genuinely sorry to see that happen?" Cardinal McGavin asked, wondering how much of the threat was Rillo's wishful thinking, and how much the instructions of the Pope. "Or would you simply feel that the Church had defended itself properly?"

"Both," Cardinal Rillo said without hesitation.

"I like that answer," Cardinal McGavin said, tossing down the rest of his glass of claret. It was a good answer—sincere on both counts. Cardinal Rillo feared both for the Church and for the soul of the Archbishop of New York, and there was no doubt that he quite properly put the Church first. His sincerity was spiritually refreshing, even though he was thoroughly wrong all round. "But you see, part of the gift of Grace that comes with a scientifically sound chemical augmentation of communion is a certainty that no one, not even the Pope, can do anything to cut you off from communion with God. In psychedelic communion, one experiences the love of God directly. It's always just a host away; faith is no longer even necessary."

Cardinal Rillo grew somber. "It is my duty to report that to the Pope," he said. "I trust you realize that."

"Who am I talking to, Cardinal Rillo, you or the Pope?"

"You are talking to the Catholic Church, Cardinal McGavin," Rillo said. "I am an emissary of the Holy Father." Cardinal McGavin felt an instant pang of guilt: his sharpness had caused Cardinal Rillo to imply an untruth out of anger, for surely his Papal mission was far more limited than he had tried to intimate. The Pope was too much of a realist to make the empty threat of excommunication against a Prince of the Church who believed that his power of excommunication was itself meaningless.

But again, a sudden flash of insight illuminated the Car-

dinal's mind with truth: in the eyes of Cardinal Rillo, in the eyes of an important segment of the Church hierarchy, the threat of excommunication still held real meaning. To accept their position on chemically augmented communion was to accept the notion that the word of the Pope could withdraw a man from Divine Grace. To accept the sanctity and validity of psychedelic communion was to deny the validity of excommunication.

"You know, Cardinal Rillo," he said, "I firmly believe that if I am excommunicated by the Pope, it will threaten my soul not one iota."

"That's merely cheap blasphemy!"

"I'm sorry," Cardinal McGavin said sincerely. "I meant to be neither cheap nor blasphemous. All I was trying to do was explain that excommunication can hardly be meaningful when God through the psychedelic sciences has seen fit to grant us a means of certain direct experience of his countenance. I believe with all my heart that this is true. You believe with all your heart that it is not."

"I believe that what you experience in your psychedelic communion is nothing less than a masterstroke of Satan, Cardinal McGavin. Evil is infinitely subtle; might not it finally masquerade as the ultimate good? The Devil is not known as the Prince of Liars without reason. I believe that you are serving Satan in what you sincerely believe is the service of God. Is there any way that you can be sure that I am wrong?"

"Can you be sure that *I'm* not right?" Cardinal McGavin said. "If I am, you are attempting to stifle the will of God and willfully removing yourself from His Grace."

"We cannot both be right . . ." Cardinal Rillo said.

And the burning glare of a terrible and dark mystical insight filled Cardinal McGavin's soul with terror, a harsh illumination of his existential relationship to the Church and to God: they both couldn't be right, but there was no reason why they both couldn't be wrong. Apart from both God and Satan existed the void.

Dr. Braden gave Johnny a pat-on-the-head smile and handed him a mango-flavored lollypop from the supply of goodies in his lower-left desk drawer. Johnny took the lollypop, unwrapped it quickly, popped it into his mouth, leaned back in his chair, and began to suck the sweet avidly, oblivious to the rest of the world. It was a good sign—a preschooler with a proper reaction to a proper basic prescription should focus strongly and completely on the most interesting element in its environment, should be fond of unusual flavors. In the first four years of its life, a child's sensorium should be tuned to accept the widest possible spectrum of sensual stimulation.

Braden turned his attention to the boy's mother, who sat rather nervously on the edge of her chair smoking a joint. "Now, now. Mrs. Lindstrom, there's nothing to worry about," he said. "Johnny has been responding quite normally to his prescription. His attention-span is suitably short for a child of his age, his sensual range slightly exceeds the optimum norm, his sleep pattern is regular and properly deep. And as you requested, he has been given a constant sense of universal love."

"But then why did the school doctor ask me to have his basic prescription changed, Dr. Braden? He said that Johnny's prescription was giving him the wrong personality pattern for a school-age child."

Dr. Braden was rather annoyed, though of course he would never betray it to the nervous young mother. He knew the sort of failed G.P. who usually occupied a school doctor's position; a faded old fool who knew about as much about psychedelic pediatrics as he did about brain surgery. What he did know was worse than nothing—a smattering of half-assed generalities and pure rubbish that was just enough to convince him that he was an expert. Which entitled him to go around frightening the mothers of other people's patients, no doubt.

"I'm . . . ah, certain you misunderstood what the school doctor said, Mrs. Lindstrom," Dr. Braden said. "At least I hope you did, because if you didn't, then the man is

mistaken. You see, modern psychedelic pediatrics recognizes that the child needs to have his consciousness focused in different areas at different stages of his development, if he is to grow up to be a healthy, maximized individual. A child of Johnny's age is in a transitional stage. In order to prepare him for schooling, I'll simply have to alter his prescription so as to increase his attention-span, lower his sensory intensity a shade, and increase his interest in abstractions. Then he'll do fine in school, Mrs. Lindstrom."

Dr. Braden gave the young woman a moderately stern admonishing frown. "You really should have brought Johnny in for a check-up *before* he started school, you know."

Mrs. Lindstrom puffed nervously on her joint while Johnny continued to suck happily on his lollypop. "Well . . . I was sort of afraid to, Dr. Braden," she admitted. "I know it sounds silly, but I was afraid that if you changed his prescription to what the school wanted, you'd stop the paxum. I didn't want that—I think it's more important for Johnny to continue to feel universal love than increasing his attention-span or any of that stuff. You're not going to stop the paxum, are you?"

"Quite the contrary, Mrs. Lindstrom," Dr. Braden said. "I'm going to increase his dose slightly and give him 10 mg. of orodalamine daily. He'll submit to the necessary authority of his teachers with a sense of trust and love, rather than out of fear."

For the first time during the visit, Mrs. Lindstrom smiled. "Then it all really *is* all right, isn't it?" She radiated happiness born of relief.

Dr. Braden smiled back at her, basking in the sudden surge of good vibrations. This was his peak-experience in pediatrics: feeling the genuine gratitude of a worried mother whose fears he had thoroughly relieved. This was what being a doctor was all about. She trusted him. She put the consciousness of her child in his hands, trusting that those hands would not falter or fail. He was proud and

grateful to be a psychedelic pediatrician. He was maximizing human happiness.

"Yes, Mrs. Lindstrom," he said soothingly, "everything is going to be all right."

In the chair in the corner, Johnny Lindstrom sucked on his lollypop, his face transfigured with boyish bliss.

There were moments when Bill Watney got a soul-deep queasy feeling about psychedelic design, and lately he was getting those bad flashes more and more often. He was glad to have caught Spiegelman alone in the designers' lounge; if anyone could do anything for his head, Lennie was it. "I dunno," he said, washing down 15 mg. of lebemil with a stiff shot of bourbon, "I'm really thinking of getting out of this business."

Leonard Spiegelman lit a Gold with his 14-carat gold lighter—nothing but the best for the best in the business—smiled across the coffee-table at Watney, and said quite genially: "You're out of your mind, Bill."

Watney sat hunched slightly forward in his easy chair, studying Spiegelman, the best artist Psychedelics, Inc. had, and envying the older man. Envying not only his talent, but his attitude toward his work. Lennie Spiegelman was not only certain that what he was doing was right, he enjoyed every minute of it. Watney wished he could be like Spiegelman. Spiegelman was happy; he radiated the contented aura of a man who really did have everything he wanted.

Spiegelman opened his arms in a gesture that seemed to make the whole designers' lounge his personal property. "We're the world's best pampered artists," he said. "We come up with two or three viable drug designs a year, and we can live like kings. And we're practicing the world's ultimate artform: creating realities. We're the luckiest mothers alive! Why would anyone with your talent want out of psychedelic design?"

Watney found it difficult to put into words, which was ridiculous for a psychedelic designer, whose work it was to describe new possibilities in human consciousness well

enough for the biochemists to develop psychedelics which would transform his specs into styles of reality. It was humiliating to be at a loss for words in front of Lennie Spiegelman, a man he both envied and admired. "I'm getting bad flashes lately," he finally said. "Deep flashes that go through every style of consciousness that I try, flashes that tell me I should be ashamed and disgusted about what I'm doing."

Oh, oh, Lennie Spiegelman thought, the kid is coming up with his first case of designer's cafard. He's floundering around with that no direction home syndrome and he thinks it's the end of the world. "I know what's bothering you, Bill," he said. "It happens to all of us at one time or another. You feel that designing psychedelic specs is a solipsistic occupation, right? You think there's something morally wrong about designing new styles of consciousness for other people, that we're playing god, that continually altering people's consciousness in ways only we fully understand is a thing that mere mortals have no right to do, like hubris, eh?"

Watney flashed admiration for Spiegelman—his certainty *wasn't* based on a thick ignorance of the existential doubt of their situation. There was hope in that, too. "How can you understand all that, Lennie," he said, "and still dig psychedelic design the way you do?"

"Because it's a load of crap, that's why," Spiegelman said. "Look kid, we're artists, commercial artists at that. We design psychedelics, styles of reality; we don't tell anyone what to think. If people like the realities we design for them, they buy the drugs, and if they don't like our art, they don't. People aren't going to buy food that tastes lousy, music that makes their ears hurt, or drugs that put them in bummer realities. *Somebody* is going to design styles of consciousness for the human race, if not artists like us, then a lot of crummy politicians and power-freaks."

"But what makes us any better than them? Why do we have any more right to play games with the consciousness

of the human race than they do?"

The kid is really dense, Spiegelman thought. But then he smiled, remembering that he had been on the same stupid trip when he was Watney's age. "Because we're artists, and they're not," he said. "We're not out to control people. We get our kicks from carving something beautiful out of the void. All we want to do is enrich people's lives. We're creating new styles of consciousness that we think are improved realities, but we're not shoving them down people's throats. We're just laying out our wares for the public—right doesn't even enter into it. We have a compulsion to practice our art. Right and wrong are arbitrary concepts that vary with the style of consciousness, so how on earth can you talk about the right and wrong of psychedelic design? The only way you can judge is by an esthetic criterion—are we producing good art or bad?"

"Yeah, but doesn't *that* vary with the style of consciousness too? Who can judge in an absolute sense whether your stuff is artistically pleasing or not?"

"Jesus Christ, Bill, *I* can judge, can't I?" Spiegelman said. "I know when a set of psychedelic specs is a successful work of art. It either pleases me or it doesn't."

It finally dawned on Watney that that was precisely what was eating at him. A psychedelic designer altered his own reality with a wide spectrum of drugs and then designed other psychedelics to alter other people's realities. Where was anyone's anchor?

"But don't you see, Lennie?" he said. "We don't know what the hell we're doing. We're taking the human race on an evolutionary trip, but we don't know where we're going. We're flying blind."

Spiegelman took a big drag on his joint. The kid was starting to get to him; he was whining too much. Watney didn't want anything out of line—just certainty! "You want me to tell you there's a way you can know when a design is right or wrong in some absolute evolutionary framework, right?" he said. "Well, I'm sorry, Bill, there's nothing but us and the void and whatever we carve out of it. We're our

own creations, our realities are our own works of art. We're out here all alone."

Watney was living through one of his flashes of dread, and he saw that Spiegelman's words described its content exactly. "But that's exactly what's eating at me!" he said. "Where in hell is our basic reality?"

"There is no basic reality. I thought they taught that in kindergarten these days."

"But what about the basic state? What about the way our reality was before the art of psychedelic design? What about the consciousness-style that evolved naturally over millions of years? Damn it, that was the basic reality, and we've lost it!"

"The hell it was!" Spiegelman said. "Our pre-psychedelic consciousness evolved on a mindless random basis. What makes that reality superior to any other? Just because it was first? We may be flying blind, but natural evolution was worse—it was an idiot process without an ounce of consciousness behind it."

"Goddamn it, you're right all the way down the line, Lennie!" Watney cried in anguish. "But why do you feel so good about it while I feel so rotten? I want to be able to feel the way you do, but I can't."

"Of course you can, Bill," Spiegelman said. He abstractly remembered that he had felt like Watney years ago, but there was no existential reality behind it. What more could a man want than a random universe that was anything he could make of it and nothing else? Who wouldn't rather have a style of consciousness created by an artist than one that was the result of a lot of stupid evoluntionary accidents?

He says it with such certainty, Watney thought. Christ, how I want him to be right! How I'd like to face the uncertainty of it all, the void, with the courage of Lennie Spiegelman! Spiegelman had been in the business for fifteen years; maybe he *had* finally figured it all out.

"I wish I could believe that," Watney said.

Spiegelman smiled, remembering what a solemn jerk he

had been ten years ago himself. "Ten years ago, I felt just like you feel now," he said. "But I got my head together and now here I am, fat and happy and digging what I'm doing."

"How, Lennie, for chrissakes, *how*?"

"50 mikes of methalin, 40 mg. of lebemil and 20 mg. of peyotadrene daily," Spiegelman said. "It made a new man out of me, and it'll make a new man out of you."

"How do you feel, man?" Kip said, taking the joint out of his mouth and peering intently into Jonesy's eyes. Jonesy looked really weird—pale, manic, maybe a little crazed. Kip was starting to feel glad that Jonesy hadn't talked him into taking the trip with him.

"Oh wow," Jonesy croaked, "I feel strange, I feel *really* strange, and it doesn't feel so good . . ."

The sun was high in the cloudless blue sky; a golden fountain of radiant energy filling Kip's being. The wood-and-bark of the tree against which they sat was an organic reality connecting the skin of his back to the bowels of the earth in an unbroken circuit of protoplasmic electricity. He was a flower of his planet, rooted deep in the rich soil, basking in the cosmic nectar of the sunshine.

But behind Jonesy's eyes was some kind of awful gray vortex. Jonesy looked really bad. Jonesy was definitely floating on the edges of a bummer.

"I don't feel good at all," Jonesy said. "Man, you know the ground is covered with all kinds of hard dead things and the grass is filled with mindless insects and the sun is hot, man, I think I'm burning . . ."

"Take it easy, don't freak, you're on a trip, that's all," Kip said from some asshole superior viewpoint. He just didn't understand, he didn't understand how heavy this trip was, what it felt like to have your head raw and naked out here. Like cut off from every energy flow in the universe—a construction of fragile matter, protoplasmic ooze is all, isolated in an energy-vacuum, existing in relationship to nothing but empty void and horrible mindless matter.

"You don't understand, Kip," he said. "This is reality, the way it really is, and man, it's horrible, just a great big ugly machine made up of lots of other machines, you're a machine, I'm a machine, it's all mechanical clockwork. We're just lumps of dead matter run by machinery, kept alive by chemical and electric processes."

Golden sunlight soaked through Kip's skin and turned the core of his being into a miniature stellar phoenix. The wind, through random blades of grass, made love to the bare soles of his feet. What was all this machinery crap? What the hell was Jonesy gibbering about? Man, who would want to put himself in a bummer reality like that?

"You're just on a bummer, Jonesy," he said. "Take it easy. You're not seeing the universe the way it really is, as if that meant anything. Reality is all in your head. You're just freaking out behind nothing."

"That's it, that's exactly it. I'm freaking out behind nothing. Like zero. Like cipher. Like the void. Nothing is where we're *really* at."

How could he explain it? That reality was really just a lot of empty vacuum that went on to infinity in space and time. The perfect nothingness had minor contaminations of dead matter here and there. A little of this matter had fallen together through a complex series of random accidents to contaminate the universal deadness with trace elements of life, protoplasmic slime, biochemical clockwork. Some of this clockwork was complicated enough to generate thought, consciousness. And that was all there ever was or would ever be anywhere in space and time. Clockwork mechanisms rapidly running down in the cold black void. Everything that wasn't dead matter already would end up that way sooner or later.

"This is the way it really is," Jonesy said. "People used to live in this bummer all the time. It's the way it is, and nothing we can do can change it."

"I can change it," Kip said, taking his pillbox out of a pocket. "Just say the word. Let me know when you've had enough and I'll bring you out of it. Lebemil, peyotadrene, mescamil, you name it."

"You don't understand, man, it's *real*. That's the trip I'm on, I haven't taken anything at all for twelve hours, remember? It's the natural state, it's reality itself, and man, it's awful. It's a horrible bummer. Christ, why did I have to talk myself into this? I don't want to see the universe this way, who needs it?"

Kip was starting to get pissed off—Jonesy was becoming a real bring-down. Why did he have to pick a beautiful day like this to take his stupid nothing trip?

"Then *take* something already," he said, offering Jonesy the pillbox.

Shakily, Jonesy scooped out a cap of peyotadrene and a 15 mg. tab of lebemil and wolfed them down dry. "How did people *live* before psychedelics?" he said. "How could they stand it?"

"Who knows?" Kip said, closing his eyes and staring straight at the sun, diffusing his consciousness into the universe of golden orange light encompassed by his eyelids. "Maybe they had some way of not thinking about it."

AFTERWORD
A DAY IN THE LIFE-STYLE OF . . .

BRIAN W. ALDISS

As usual, the subject here is science fiction; but let's approach it by way of another equally fascinating subject: money.

Our attitude to money is pretty primitive. Either you have it or you don't. The efforts of those who don't have it are directed toward getting it; the efforts of those who have it are directed toward getting more of it. In many cases, these acquisitive efforts can provide the dynamism for a whole life-style. So, as far as we know, it has always been.

Banking and the writing of checks greatly sophisticated money matters. Public banks sprang up where there was international trade. The first public bank was established in

Venice toward the end of the sixteenth century, and the first banknote issued by the Riksbank of Sweden halfway through the next century. (Of course, by saying this one is being provincial, for letters of credit were known in ancient Greece, and the Chinese had a paper currency A.D. 800; but let's keep this thing simple.)

These advances in financial dealings were made when the world was expanding, just when—or just after when, to be accurate—they were first needed. As we know, world finances are again going through a period of transition, when previous arrangements are found not to provide enough fluidity for current international requirements. Hence the IMF, the World Bank, and other rather fictional institutions, like the Eurodollar. Hence, also, 1971's international trouble with the American dollar.

The credit card has been a trend of recent years, and the boom will continue. The percentage of truth in the gag about only the poor using money any longer grows all the time. But credit cards themselves are unsophisticated. The time should not be too far distant when they develop into or are superseded by magnetic money. Each card will possibly contain a magnetic message of high coercivity stating the holder's credit-worthiness, and the message will be computer-compatible. Universal use of such a system could rid the world of several billion tons of dirty paper: its folding money, passed from hand to hand, from pocket to pocket, from till to till, from wallet to wallet, like some extraordinary obscene secret.

If you're reading science fiction, you are aware that such changes are coming, are about us now. To be aware of how science fiction is itself changing is more difficult. Science fiction does not share the wide popularity of money and consequently is not studied as closely.

All the same, part of the changes affecting SF are due to its widening popularity and an increasing study of it. Although the effect of these changes is nebulous, the changes themselves are not at all nebulous and may be summed up in one word: diversification.

Time was, in a simpler world, when a reader could easily read all the SF being published. Such a reader would probably consider that the only SF worthy of the name appeared in pulp magazines, and those were what he would read and collect. The typical fan, now middle-aged, was such a reader and probably maintains some such collection of pulp magazines still—a hoard increasing in financial worth even as the paper decreases in physical viability. Complete collections of all the American SF magazines (ninety-one titles in all) fetch about $8,500 or $9,000 and go to big libraries.

Nowadays a contemporary private SF library is much more likely to contain paperbacks, plus maybe one of the few surviving SF magazines—*Analog*, say, or *F & SF*. Paperbacks now publish much of the field's original material. It is also true to add that, demand being what it is, they publish nearly as much junk as did the old magazines, for the presses must be kept rolling.

Although the best sellers in the field are, naturally enough, old-timers like Robert Heinlein or even past-timers like Edgar Rice Burroughs, there are many new young writers swarming up. Many of these young writers appear only in paperback, and even if the paperback is labeled SF, it may be something that the older generation recognizes only reluctantly as SF. A good example of this phenomenon was published during the year: *Clarion* (Signet), a story from which anthology appears in these pages.

Many of the stories in the *Clarion* anthology are not concerned directly with science. It seems to me that they are often directly concerned with *life-style*, which, like drugs, Jesus, and pollution, has become one of the great or at least trendy topics of our day.

My personal preference, like everyone else's, lies with what I have become accustomed to, so that I am not entirely at home in much Life-Style SF. All the same, I can see that it performs the same valid role as did the gimmick story in the forties, and clearly it helps a younger genera-

tion to explore the peculiar and science-induced pleasures and stresses of our times.

The curious thing is that much Life-style SF is being published all the time and simply not regarded as such. Two examples published this year spring immediately to mind and, since they both have considerable merit, are worth mentioning here.

Both volumes are hardcover. *Russia's Lost Literature of the Absurd* (Cornell University Press) is translated and edited by George Gibian, and contains in the main work by two writers written between 1927 and 1930 in the USSR. It reminds us once more that parallel to SF runs a whole rich absurd tradition which embraces Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books and much of the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. While the majority of people settle for leading monotonous lives—those lives of quiet desperation of which Thoreau spoke—there is always a minority which repudiates such an existence; repudiation can take any form, from revolution and major bloodshed down to satirical laughter and . . . well, Life-Style SF. The writers in George Gibian's volume are full of repudiation. One fragment, being brief, may be quoted entire and perhaps direct some readers to the volume itself.

Here is Danil Kharms' "An Unsuccessful Show":

(Petrakov-Gorbunov comes on the stage, wants to say something, but hiccups. He starts to vomit. He exits. Enter Pritykin.)

PRITYKIN: Petrakov-Gorbunov had to. . . . *(He vomits and runs away.)*

(Makarov enters.)

MAKAROV: Egor. . . . *(He runs away)*

(Serpukhov enters)

SERPUKHOV: So as not to be. . . . *(He vomits and runs away)*

(Kurova comes out)

KUROVA: I should. . . . *(She runs away)*

(A little girl comes out)

LITTLE GIRL: Daddy asked me to tell you that the theatre is closing. We all feel sick.

Curtain

There are times when our roles in life make us want to throw up. For some while now the theory that our roles in society are largely self-chosen, that society itself is merely a vast psychodrama, has been current. One of the year's most amusing and bawdy novels, Luke Rhinehart's *The Dice Man* (William Morrow), comes up with a new angle on the idea.

Luke is a New York alienist who decides in a moment of boredom that he will let dice rule his decisions. He rapes the lady in the flat below, to the pleasure of them both. The dice is a game at first. Luke controls the options; the dice control the decisions—by which Luke abides. He begins to let the dice dictate how he will treat his patients. Then it creates more and more roles for him. He becomes as much a slave to the die as anyone ever was to the I Ching or astrology. He sets about creating Dicepeople, genuinely random men and women. Dice Centers which will allow the individual freedom from identity, security, and stability are set up all over America. Luke gets deeper and deeper into trouble—the world is not ready for his message. When the dice order him to murder, he is in real trouble.

In many ways, this funny and imaginative novel qualifies as excellent SF of the newer Life-Style variety. But it also operates on one of the principles of the older SF, which is to include elaborate and quite telling justifications for its departure from reality. For instance, here is Luke defending randomness: "We all have minority impulses stifled by the normal personality. . . . Every personality is the sum total of accumulated suppressions of these minorities. Each of us has a hundred suppressed potential selves—they prompt us to be multiple, to play many roles. . . . Much energy is expended suppressing these minor selves; the normal personality exists in a state of continual

insurrection. The Die offers freedom; as you use it, more and more personalities emerge."

Supposing *The Dice Man* had been written by one of the stalwarts of the SF field—shall we say Theodore Sturgeon, for the idea of the novel might appeal to him—then doubtless it would have found a wide readership within the field. As it is, I have heard no discussion of it.

All round the perimeters of the field, where definitions grow vague, lies a fertile imaginative world. On television, the long series made by Patrick McGoohan, *The Prisoner*, which has been shown this year both in the States and in the United Kingdom, where it was made, lies on this perimeter. And *The Prisoner* too is about a man who will not accept the life-style thrust upon him, at least in one of its aspects.

This growing creative SF area merely reflects a general interest, shifting from the technical to the individual, which in turn reflects an increasing mistrust of the technological exploitation of our planet.

One of the great clichés of the SF film in the fifties occurred at the end of the movie, when the magic show was over, the dinosaurs slain, the monsters routed, the invaders vanquished, and the good guy leaned on the lab bench and said, wearily, "There are secrets in nature with which man should not meddle"—words that no doubt Faust and Baron Frankenstein wish had occurred to them. Nowadays, scientific progress is seen to be charging on so unabated (or worse, so uncontrolled by all but profit makers) that the joke is no longer so damned funny.

My favorite SF novel this year was written by one of the authors represented in this anthology. It is about one of the secrets in nature with which we surely should not meddle. It is about doomsday, with Satan loose and unchecked on earth, released by man's meddling. And it is also, and remarkably, an extremely funny novel. Or, more accurately, witty. That it did not receive a Hugo or a Nebula is a commentary on the feeble popularity-poll failings of those awards.

James Blish must by now be accounted an old hand at science and one of its established masters. He became generally known through the *Oakies* series in *Astounding*, during the fifties (the first story was published in 1950); these stories are now known collectively as *Cities in Flight*. Blish later wrote the excellent *A Case of Conscience*, which is science fiction with integral theological elements, and the one novel about a highly overpopulated but still functioning world which has literary survival value, *A Torrent of Faces*, with Norman L. Knight. These are the peaks in a curious and interestingly uneven career. Blish is also one of the vanishingly rare number of SF writers whose criticism of the field is worth reading (Damon Knight being another); two volumes of his criticism have appeared from Advent.

Even today, to the puzzlement of his friends, the erudite Mr. Blish turns scripts from the loathsome TV series *Star Trek* (currently an almighty success on British TV screens) into volume form. At the same time, he has published this dark, witty, and magnificent novel, *The Day After Judgment* (Doubleday).

The Day After Judgment relates what happens to a small group of people and a rather larger group of demons after meddling men have unleashed Armageddon on earth and the forces of evil have triumphed. Those who survive go on to live in the peculiar universe that now exists subject to the laws of Hades as well as nature. The infernal city of Dis rises in Death Valley, California, and our globe becomes contiguous with Upper Hell. A missile-launch control site survives under Denver, and here General McKnight prepares to blast the invader out of existence.

Not only is this exciting, but it actively engages the intelligence. For Blish is not of the Dennis Wheatley school, where any prose concerning black magic squishes underfoot like overripe pomegranates; he writes in a dry spare style, using his supernatural events to underscore some central dilemmas of the human condition. Further, he salts his narrative with a pleasant Blishian malice. A somewhat

academic reference to the Venetians and their role in history concludes with the remark that "most of them seemed to regard the now obvious downfall of almost all of human civilization as a plot to divert the tourist trade to some other town. . . ." This kind of crispness is very far from the usual soft fumblings which is all that most SF writers can offer in the way of prose.

As for the storyline, the novel's events are mind-boggling, in the good old "sense of wonder" meaning of that term; but Blish has gone beyond that, investing them with a high cool humour rare in SF, as for instance when the two rival theologies, the Miltonic and the technological, confront each other and become discussable in each other's terms.

An instance. This is part of a conversation between the General and Baines, who started all the trouble, and a couple of Denver scientists, after Dis has undergone nuclear attack. The question is what happened to the devils. Baines asks McKnight:

"Any evidence that you, uh, destroyed any of them?"

"Well, we saw a lot of them going back to the city under their own power—despite very bad design, they seem to fly pretty well—but we don't have any count of how many went up. We didn't see any falling, but that might have been because some of them had been vaporized."

"Not bloody likely. Their bodies may have been vaporized, but the bodies were borrowed in the first place. Like knocking down a radio-controlled aircraft; the craft may be a total loss, but the controlling Intelligence is unharmed, somewhere else, and can send another one against you whenever it likes."

"Excuse me, Doctor Baines, but the analogy is inexact," Buelg said. "We know that because we did get a lot out of the bomb besides simply stirring up a flurry. High-speed movies of the column of the mushroom as it went up show a lot of the creatures trying to reform. One individual we were able to follow went through thirty-two

changes in the first minute. The changes are all incredible and beyond any physical theory or model we can erect to account for them . . ."

Satvje said heavily . . . "I have to remind myself that no spirit has ever been so intensively tested to destruction before. Inside a thermo-nuclear fireball, even the nuclei of hydrogen atoms find it difficult to retain their integrity."

"Atomic nuclei remain matter, and the conservation laws still apply. Demons are neither matter nor energy; they are something else."

"We do not know they are not energy," Satvje said. "They may well be fields, falling somewhere within the electro-magnetico-gravitic triad. . . ."

And so on, beautifully and subtly inventive.

Blish is here dealing with a question that concerns him very closely. Since this question has to do with extremities and supreme catastrophies, it is to some extent a religious question; this extremity is often a kind of interpenetration between two universes, a physical and immaterial (as in *The Day After Judgment*); a real and imaginary (as in "Tomb Tapper," a celebrated short story); a Christian and anti-Christian (as in *Case of Conscience*); a subjective and objective (as in *Common Sense*, a novella); or a dying and a borning universe (as in *A Clash of Cymbals*, last of the *Cities in Flight* series); or between two rival sets of values, either spiritual (as in *Doctor Mirabilis*, the life of Roger Bacon) or physical (as in *Surface Tension*). Whenever this clash of symbols, which some may relate to the male-female principle, occurs, Blish writes at his best, since his faculties are fully engaged.

Although the quality of his writing has fluctuated alarmingly over the years, Blish is a rarity among senior writers in the SF field, in that he shows no tendency to deteriorate into an old hack (*Star Trek* notwithstanding); and this may be not unconnected with the respect and concern he has always shown for the writer's craft.

The Day After Judgment was published by Doubleday. The fact is worth drawing attention to. Like Faber and Gollancz in England, Doubleday is a hardcover firm which consistently and actively publishes science fiction and has done so for a number of years. Like all institutions, it has its failings, but now and then a tribute is due to such constancy in a changing world—and perhaps particularly due in a year in which most of the Doubleday list has been particularly undistinguished. Some of the blame for that must rest with the writers as well as the publishers. The mediocrity arises when a combination of old received themes like telepathy are used for a pallid story, often written—particularly by the British authors involved—in a vapid Georgian quasi-poetical style, full of fake insights and concluding with an uplifting moral note.

I'm thinking of L. P. Davies' *The Alien*, in which the tedious question of whether a certain man is *Homo sapiens* or alien is answered in the way that makes nonsense of novel and title; of John Aiken's *World Well Lost*, with its telepathic hokum served in cute phrases like "In a nocturnal frenzy of mathematics"; of Keith Roberts' *The Inner Wheel*, whose otiose mixture of telepathy and English teashops offers as much intellectual fare as an old macaroon.

It is hard to see how such novels get written but easy to see how they get published. Quite simply, the publisher plays safe. Tried-and-true themes are okay, and anyone who sounds like a reincarnation of John Drinkwater can't be all bad. In a time of economic uncertainty (like now) a tendency to play safe is especially evident. The bravest and jolliest piece of SF publishing this year undoubtedly took place in Norway, where the firm of Gyldendal deserves a special cheer for the format of *Sesam 71*.

Paperback publishing has been around for a while. Now Gyldendal introduces paperbag publishing. Most of the pages of *Sesam 71* are punched, so that you can keep what you want and throw away the rest or rearrange to suit your own tastes.

The idea originates with the authors, Jon Bing and Tor Age Bringsvaerd, those *enfants terribles* of Scandinavian SF. They have produced unorthodox formats before this; here is their most wacky! The contents include a poster, ornamental legends to pin on the wall, short stories, cutout puppets, a science-fantasy strip cartoon, and a card game. You're never bored with a B&B! It's to be hoped that some enterprising American publisher will have some of their writings translated as soon as possible.

That is not just a pious wish. Changes in life-style do lead to changes in publishing. Two Polish writers of fantasy and science fiction are now available in the West. Both Slavomir Mrozek's "The Ugupu Bird" and Stanislaw Lem's "Solaris" have been widely enjoyed in translation.

Life-styles of individuals and nations have been changing with remarkable speed since, say, the Korean War, whereas the technological predicament (the way in which an increasing number of countries become enmeshed in the toils of economic growth targets, for instance) has become rigidified and standardized. It is to be hoped that, whatever else changes, a man's respect for his craft—in many ways his respect for himself—will never die. Publishers and writers are vulnerable to such possibilities.

One of the blocks to a writer's respect for his craft is a lack of two-way communication. He can address an audience through his books, but unless that audience gives some response, he cannot be certain that he is not addressing an illusion. In some measure, his royalties from his publishers are a gauge of response, but money—as someone must have said by now—is not everything. For this reason, many authors are driven to seek a personal response, often by personal appearances. Among them are considerable artists like Charles Dickens, who needed a close rapport with his audience all his life.

New methods bring new means, as Bing and Bringsvaerd's contribution indicates. Books will be with us for a long while yet, despite rigged predictions to the contrary from the enemies of literacy. But there is no

reason why all books should remain the one-way means of communication (author-public) they are now.

If the future of money develops somewhat along the lines we have mentioned earlier, there is no reason why other communication media (which is what money certainly is, as the saying "Money talks" emphasizes) should not develop along the same lines.

Supposing that Editor Harrison is still editing this annual in ten years' time, as we hope he will be. This Afterword may then carry, bonded into its last paragraph, a two-way communication system, to complete the author-public-author circuit. A magnetic message of high coercivity would be imprinted, and the form would be computer-compatible. The reader would then be able to insert the page in his own home-computer-terminal or into his friendly neighborhood drugstore terminal and send his coded answers to the formulated questions back to the publisher direct.

To evaluate the worth of the reader's response, certain loaded questions would be inserted into the bonded message. The quiz might run like this:

// Which of these stories do you like best?
// Which of these stories do you like least?
// Are you conscious that your preferences relate
  // a. to your IQ?
  // b. to your life-style?
  // c. to your political prejudices?
// How much credence should be given to the stated fact that the Chinese had a paper currency A.D. 800?
  // much
  // little
  // none
// Would you like photographs of the editors and authors included in the book?
// Would you purchase an additional copy of this book if you knew
  // a. the proceeds went to charity

// b. the proceeds went to Cuba?
// c. the editor was in desperate financial straits?
// Have you read the following novels by James Blish?
// a. *Earthman Come Home*
// b. *A Torrent of Faces*
// c. *A Case of Conscience*
// d. *The Day After Judgment*
// Do you regard science fiction as
// a. a way of passing time, like chewing gum?
// b. solely for entertainment?
// c. a great way of dressing up sermons?
// d. the twentieth century's answer to Shakespeare?
// e. potentially the most effective way of examining some of the philosophical implications behind the developments of the present day?
// Does the phrase "high coercivity" mean
// a. what it says?
// b. a civet's nest in the top of a sequoia?
// c. that the present writer is an intellectual?
// d. that jargon is ubiquitous?

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