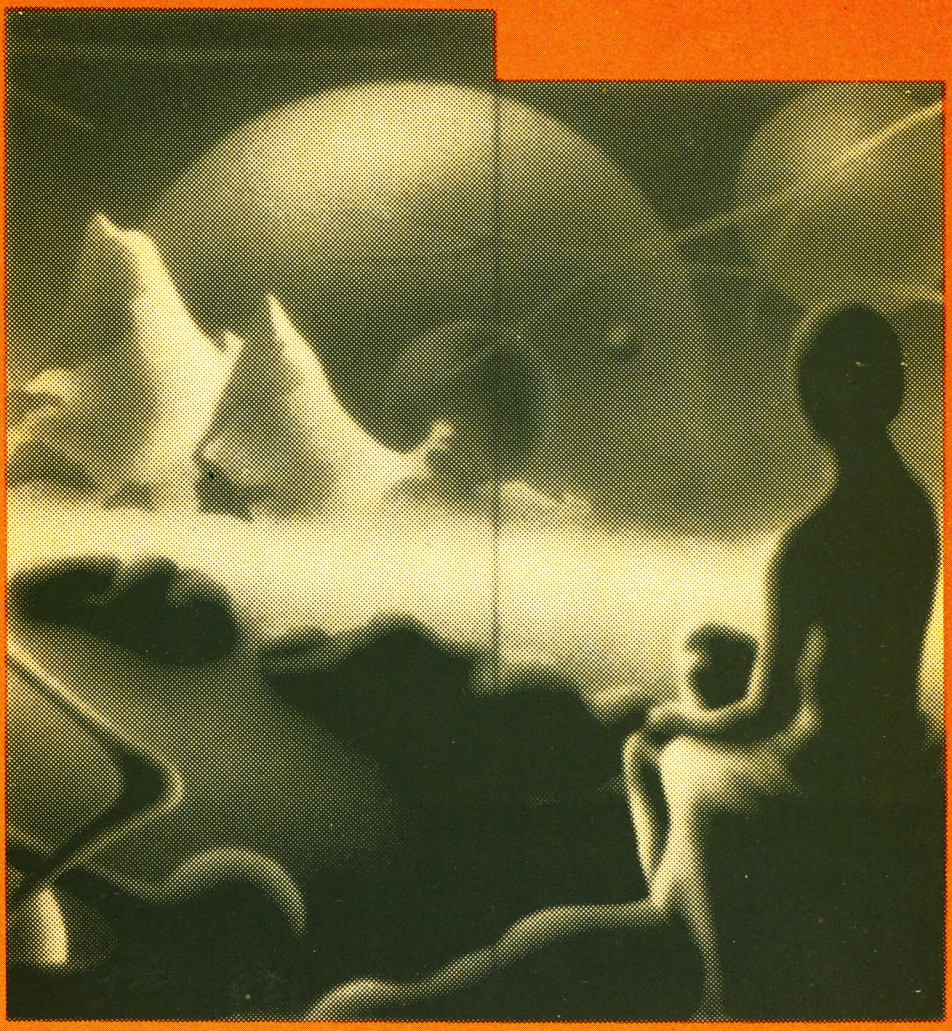
transmutations

a book of personal alchemy



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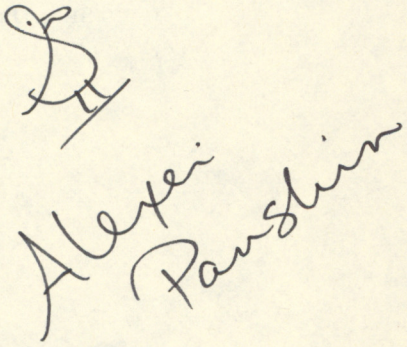
transmutations



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Rite of Passage
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Farewell to Yesterday's Tomorrow

BY ALEXEI AND CORY PANSHIN

Earth Magic
Mondi Interiori
SF in Dimension

transmutations
a book of personal alchemy

ALEXEI PANSHIN



ELEPHANT
BOOKS

ELEPHANT, PENNSYLVANIA

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For Bob Beaver

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BOB BEAVER'S BOOK: An Introduction

I'm sitting at my typewriter at the end of a long and desperate winter during which I produced no visible work at all. Nothing.

I didn't even answer letters. I spent the winter shoveling snow, smoking grass, watching the Gong Show and listening to Buddy Holly records.

Now I look at the great pile of pages that have accumulated in a sudden outburst with the coming of spring. It is undeniably a book that is sitting now on my manuscript stand. I wonder how to account for it.

I certainly didn't plan it. That's the central fact.

I am hemi-semi-demi-ambidextrous. I throw a baseball with my right hand, but I'm not clearly right-handed. I swing a tennis racket with my left, but I'm not clearly left-handed either. I can hardly do anything equally well with either hand. As things are, I do some things with my right hand and some with my left, and I never know until I attempt an act which hand will know how to do it. The hand knows.

The pieces that make up this book are undeniably the children of my left hand. They are intuitional flashes born out of immediate response to circumstances.

There have been many times when I've paced back and forth for a half hour, struggling to locate one right word. I've spent whole days fighting to fill a single page with words I could

believe in. But at other times, now and then, unpredictably, I've been gripped by a passion, a sudden appreciation, a sense of relationship. Then the words have poured forth out of me.

My conscious self doesn't argue with these imperative moments. I recognize myself as an organ, and do not question the tunes that are played upon me. I'm grateful to be an instrument. It's marvelous, especially when the tunes are new. And when the music has not been a piece of whatever great opera is centrally occupying my mind, but rather turns out to be an insistent little melody with a shape and integrity of its own, I've still hopped-to to set it down: a story written down white-hot between ten at night and ten the next morning. Or an essay, an appreciation, a prophecy, a poem, or some queer construction of words like nothing I've ever seen before. Makes no difference; I set it down. It's why I write.

Then the conscious rational me—that self of mine that lives in a world where money, food and shelter must be arranged—has the problem of shopping this work around, of finding a place of publication for it. The oddest pieces can fit into a novel if presented in the right relationship to the rest of the book. Many a strange riff has found its place in one of my novels. Some of these pieces have found a home of sorts in professional magazines, often marginal ones which will sometimes accommodate well-done work that doesn't really fit them or anyone completely comfortably. Some odd little tunes have been donated to friends, editor/publishers of mimeographed amateur magazines with titles like *Hitchhike, Syndrome,* and *Nyarlathotep.*

Then there have been other little bits that were so starkly idiosyncratic, or so out of time with the music the public was presently discoing to, or so apparently a private answer to a personal question, that I could think of nothing to do with them but put them away for later, when a context for them might appear.

This is that later moment. This is the context.

All the little intuitions and sudden compulsions are here. An outward description of the content of *Transmutations* is that it is a personal collection of oddments: passages from novels, autobiography, fables, poems, aphorisms, stories, essays, letters, and jive riffs—whatever form my flashes have taken.

Don't take that too seriously. It's all surface—where the components of this book have been and what they seem to look like. It's not a full accounting.

No full accounting is possible. This book is Yin in character. It is full of midnight acts and nighttime perceptions. It is not to be explained in the language of day. To be truthful, I think the book would resent it if I tried.

But I do accept the integrity of this book. I have no choice. I—the conscious, rational, plotting I—never planned this book; instead, it revealed itself to me.

Transmutations is the product of many widely spaced flashes. It accumulated itself over a period of years outside the range of my rational awareness—and then suddenly presented itself to me as a strange, unlooked-for whole. A gift. A sudden bastard child—but one I can't deny. Now that this left-handed creature of the night is arrived, now that it has thrust itself upon me, I do admit I recognize the bastard as my own child. It is both mine own and undeniably itself.

It came to me one month ago.

The winter was long, dark and cold, with one storm on the heels of another. In March, the snow was still with us and it seemed that spring might never come. A bleak world of strikes, energy crises, oil spills, terrorist raids, kidnappings, stranglers on the loose, cultural stagnation, economic failure, business and governmental corruption, universal misunderstanding and indecision. As so often: the outside world of affairs resembling my own personal life; my personal life resembling the state of my mind.

I rose early that morning, driven up before the sun. I'd been

restless for a week, sleeping short hours, waking at odd times. I went downstairs to the study, leaving Cory asleep.

My desk and typewriter are in the study, and my reference books and reclining chair. I shut the door against the late winter cold, and turned on the heater to warm the room and make it cozy. I left the curtains drawn.

I leaned back in my chair and put my feet up. I flipped the radio on. The tuning has been broken all winter. The only station the radio gets is WIOQ, a progressive rock station in Philadelphia. I've been content to leave it that way. I filled my pipe with gold Colombian and toked up.

I smoked and I read and I thought as I often do there in the quiet of the morning before the farm comes to life for the day. I thought a random variety of thoughts. I thought about the problems of being an original artist in America. I thought about Buddy Holly, cut short at 22 in the first bloom of his creativity. Ever since February, when I found half-a-dozen Holly albums and two books and finally began to get his life and music straight, I'd been thinking about Buddy Holly.

I wished that Bob Beaver were still alive so that I could turn him on to all the marvels I had discovered in Holly's music. It was not for the first time. Bob died in September. He was riding his motorcycle to work at the gauge factory. An 81-year-old man turned across his path. Beaver crashed into the car and died instantly. He was 30. I loved him like no other friend of my adult life.

Bob was tall, thin, crook-backed, fragile, and gray-haired in his twenties. He wasn't sunny by nature, but he put out such constant good-natured vibes that he was instantly likeable. In 1965, he was the high school hippie in a small and conservative Pennsylvania town; he was known for it. After graduation, he went to work in the gauge factory. He received hostility and incomprehension at every turn, and stilled it

completely by the simple dignity of his personal bearing, by the innate goodness that shone in him.

At the crowded memorial service held for Bob, the minister who spoke testified that it was Bob's example which had served as a model for the minister's own son in his fight to establish his autonomy from his father, his right to go to New York and become a rock musician. That's something that Beaver would have loved to do himself. He had a friend who was a roadie for the Doobie Brothers, and Bob talked sometimes about joining him, but he never followed through on it.

When I met Beaver, he was working in a record store. Music was the grounds we met on. I was able to make more musical common cause with Bob than with anyone else I've ever known. We listened to each other's new music. We swapped records back and forth. To be sure, there were areas of Bob's taste that I could only dimly appreciate—jazz and blues deeper and darker than I could follow. I could never love Robert Johnson and Duane Allman as Bob did. And Bob never could quite get his head around the nature of my musical universe. It puzzled him. But we stretched each other. Music was our main medium of communication.

In his teen years, Bob was told—wrongly—that the disease that was warping his back would kill him in a few years. He didn't make public news of that; only a few knew. But he did smoke cigarettes so furiously that the caption on his high school yearbook picture read, "Hack, hack, cough, cough. I'm gonna die." Like Robert Johnson and Duane Allman, he thought to live fast and die young. He never expected to live past thirty.

Beaver was completely understood by no one—including me—but he was liked by everyone who knew him. That's not completely a compliment. He used his likeability to hide behind, just as he used the gauge factory as a place to hide out in, losing himself in one mindless job or another on the third shift. Bright and sensitive as Bob was, he never did find a way to act and be

effective. He never found a medium, a way, a road. He never heard an inner voice. No, I think he did hear an inner voice, but he never dared to trust it.

He never found his way to be an instrument.

Not a day has passed since he died when some thought of Bob hasn't come into my mind. Buddy Holly has been a frequent trigger for thoughts of Beaver. I've been frustrated for lack of a musical communicant, someone who could hear something of what I've been hearing, as Bob would have.

On that morning in March, as I was sitting and mulling, I thought of someone else I'd known who was cut short too soon. Rather, I thought of a story that I'd written in response to that death.

In 1965, Jeff Green, a childhood friend, suffocated to death in an enemy tunnel in Vietnam. His funeral was the first I ever attended. Jeff's death cured me of any taste I might have had for the Vietnam War.

His death hit me hard. He was so young, athletic, bright and capable. Far more promising than me. He was a state high school wrestling champion. He'd been a Naval ROTC man at Cornell and turned Marine lieutenant on graduation for the challenge of it. And just like that, snuffed out, smothered, meaninglessly dead.

I published an epitaph for Jeff in *Nyarlathotep:*

I cupped my hands
to drink deep,
But in a heartbeat
my hands were empty.

That wasn't the end of it, though. In the months that followed, there were other deaths that were equally hard for me to understand.

My cousin Adrian died. We were about the same age. At the

age of ten Adrian had contracted polio, and thereafter he wasn't able to do much more with his body than wiggle the toes of one foot and flop one arm. I felt guilty about Adrian's paralysis. The previous summer he had visited us and I hadn't liked him. I'd wished him ill and knew it. I wasn't sure I hadn't caused his polio with my malice. But over the years, what patience and good humor Adrian displayed, and what heart! He was working on a master's degree in mathematics when he died at 26. His mind was lively and able; his body was simply unable to continue. Two months later, his mother, whose only reason for being for more than fifteen years had been Adrian, died of cancer.

Sometime that winter, a story came out of me, an expression of my loss of faith in the comprehensible justice of the universe. I called it "A Fine Night to Be Alive." It was only published many years later in a fantasy magazine, where it had no obvious right to belong.

That story crossed my mind on this morning in March, as I was toking and reading and listening to the radio and thinking of promise and failure, creativity and death. I thought of "A Fine Night to Be Alive." And I thought of "To a Teacup Held for Murder." And then, like a chain of molecules suddenly linking together, of other pieces.

A certainty glimmered and welled in me, clothing itself and taking on form, becoming an imperative. It went like this—that story, this poem, and that other never-published thing, all of them fit together. All of them. All of those unnameable, uncategorizable flashes that had flared out of me over the years belonged together. More, all the little fragmentary intuitions made some sort of four-dimensional whole I couldn't even begin to guess at.

As this undeniable conviction blossomed in me, I could by no means say that I knew precisely which pieces were the "right" pieces. Oh, I knew some of them. But beyond that,

I was possessed only of the irrational certainty that if I looked in my published books, my unreprinted magazine writings, in boxes, in drawers and in closets, the right pieces would be there and that I would know them when I saw them. And I have.

I didn't know what the book would look like when it was done, nor how long it would be, nor what it would *mean*—only that I should hop to the task of putting it together. And I have.

Transmutations is the result. Now that I have sleepwalked my way into producing it, I still can't explain it.

In fact, if this account is less than the full truth, it lies in the degree to which I have tidied the untidy, rationalized the irrational, and accounted for the unaccountable.

I wrote *Transmutations* when I wasn't looking. It scares me a little. I know how little the conscious me had to do with it.

Now that it is all but complete, I do know more about the book than I did on the day when the first overwhelming apprehension of its existence came to me. I know why it came to exist, and from that, something of what the nature of its relevance may be.

Transmutations exists because of Bob Beaver. It is dedicated to him.

I didn't know this was a book for Bob Beaver when I began work on it. It's only obvious to me now.

I spent the fall and winter just past brooding about Beaver and his death. Trying to make sense of it. Trying to make sense of myself and my own futility. Trying to understand what I should do and why I should do it. Why I should do anything.

Action seemed inconceivable.

I smoked dope hard hard hard, as though I could beat my thoughts into submission, as though if I smoked enough, everything would click into place and the sun shine through. Dope had been in short supply for months, but almost immediately after Bob's death, it began to come my way again. The best weed in years, in variety, in abundance. Good Colombian,

better Colombian, rare Colombian. Thai stick. Buds of Hawaiian so lush with resin that they were best trimmed with toenail scissors. Red Lebanese hash. I smoked dope and let the world go its own way.

I watched the Gong Show with the eye of a hawk. Here were people able to do things, one person after another standing up and performing their conception of an act. What could they have in mind? What did they have in mind?

I wondered what it takes to hold a stage and win an audience. Even more, I wondered about the nature of act. What is an "act"? I sought clues desperately.

I fell deep into the music of Buddy Holly. Earlier in the year, moved by impulse, I had bought a two-record album of Holly music, but it was so misleading and inadequate in its lack of information, in its choice of material, and in its arrangement of material, that I was only slow to realize the unusual nature of Holly's talent. During the winter, I sorted Holly out, uncovering and piecing together and ordering the music and the man, finally appreciating something of his true size and influence. It was as though I had overlooked the Beatles or Bob Dylan for twenty years, and the power and passion of Holly's music lifted me.

At the same time, I could not help but dwell on Holly's death as another premature loss. Why was his license to live revoked so suddenly? A young man, his creativity channeled, his career still developing, his limits unknown, newly married, full of plans, his life to live—dead. As much as his music was an answer for my unsettlement and confusion, his life only gave me cause for additional perplexity.

And through the winter I shoveled snow, digging out again and again, and then being reburied.

If Bob could have... If Bob would have...

What might I have shared with him?

I never knew how black Bob's blues were until after he was

dead. He kept the black side of his nature away from me, the depths of his fears, the certainty of his own doom. On a Tuesday, he might tell me that I would see him on Thursday for sure, and then I might not lay eyes on him for the next two months. Lost in blackness, confusion and despair, and unable to see his way out.

I never heard his blackness uttered. The closest he ever got to it was this: once Beaver came to my door in the midst of one of his absences, and thrust a note into my hand. It apologized for his inability to communicate, or even to see me.

It said in one place: "I've spent most of the last three days crying continually and trying to make sense out of my life which has suddenly turned so alien." And in another place it said, "Someday you really can ask me anything you want."

But the day never came, and never will.

These pieces are my own night thoughts, despairs and quandaries, and the answers I found to them. Bob was acquainted with some of the frustrations and rejections of my life, but I believe he thought that I was unfazed by them, that I was eternally confident and certain. He may have thought that he was alone in his ignorance, impotence and perplexity. That's not true. This book is evidence that it's not true. These pieces are the product of my own bafflement, my own attempts to come to terms with the gap between the higher order truth I would be led by and the dismaying actualities of twentieth century life through which I stumble.

I wish that Bob were still alive so that I could give this book to him. *Transmutations* is Bob Beaver's book. There is music here: rock and folk, jazz and blues. Heavy on the jazz. Heavier on the blues. That's for Bob.

Of all the weird stuff that Bob looked into, I think alchemy appealed to him most. There is nothing in these pages about retorts and alembics or the Philosopher's Stone, but nonetheless

you might call it a work of modern alchemy. Quicksilver runs through the pages.

Most of all, I see now that it was not accidental or fortuitous that I thought of Bob just before *Transmutations* burst upon me. It's the answer to my winter lost. It's the best comment I can make on the problem his death left me: how to account for promise, failure, creativity and death; how to find reason and means to continue to live.

And to the extent that this book might have spoken to Bob Beaver, to the extent that my questions and doubts and fears and hopes are not mine alone, but the common property of us all, this book may have more than personal relevance. I offer it, whatever kind of creature it is, to those readers—whoever they may be—who may recognize themselves by it, in the memory of Bob Beaver.

PRECIS

sane fear
some fun
sand fleas
subtle fire
suave farts
sad farewells
snappy fables
semper fidelis
science fiction
something fine
spooky fantoms
supernal fandangos
strabismic forecasts

TO A TEACUP HELD FOR MURDER

Fragile white-boned
Simpering smiler;
Beflowered cousin
Of honest steins and tankards:

You smirk and say
That you were poured into,
And are hardly responsible
For anything that followed.

Do you expect this jury
To accept that?
Come, come, sir:
You must know better.

There is no excuse—
The law is clear:
Containers are accountable
For what they contain.

FRISSON

Will you admit that you have fears
so breathtaking, so elemental, and so personal
that you only allow them free run of your mind
in the last hour of an October night?

Ca-lonk, a heavy distant door
said reverberatingly to itself.

A cold dusty echo

.

A FINE NIGHT TO BE ALIVE

Dick Starkey stood in the night shadows at the edge of the asphalt parking lot. While his eyes wandered over the cars, his left hand savored the solid weight of the .22 revolver. He idly bounced its reality against his thigh, and as he did, he hummed.

Starkey was dark-haired, a little more than medium height, stockily built, pleasant-faced and essentially ordinary. He was young, perhaps twenty.

All three stores in the little shopping center were open—drugstore, chain supermarket, and a discount house with colored plastic pennants over the entrance. The night breeze was light and fresh and the temperature was just cool enough for the tan poplin jacket he was wearing.

Random was the name of the game. He picked out a car, a light gray Buick Riviera. It was parked at the edge of the lot nearest the drugstore.

There was only a five minute wait. The owner was about forty, well-dressed, heavy-set and balding. Prosperous. He came across the lot with a white paper bag in his hand.

Dick opened the car door swiftly and slid in beside the man as he was buckling his safety belt.

"Jesus! What is this, kid? Hey, that's a prescription!"

Dick flipped the paper sack into the back and sat sideways,

his back against the door. He brought the pistol up to point squarely at the man's middle.

"Look, if it's money you're after, I only have a few..."

"Start the car," Dick said in a friendly, reasonable voice. "Turn left on the boulevard and keep going. I'll tell you where to go from there."

Exasperatedly, the man asked, "What's the point?"

"Shut up," Dick said casually, and slammed the butt of the pistol sharply against the man's arm.

The man gasped and held the arm tightly, his eyes closed, his breathing audible. Sweat stood out on his forehead. His composure was gone.

"Now do as you're told. Don't argue with me. Don't try to attract attention. Just drive. I want to show you something."

The man touched the wetness on his forehead and looked at his fingertips, then swiped at his forehead. Then he turned on his lights, and switched on the ignition. Dick relaxed as they swung onto the boulevard. The man was silent, looking straight ahead at the road, his hands tight on the wheel.

After a few minutes of driving, Dick said, "Where do you keep your wallet?"

"In my right front pocket."

"Reach for it with your left hand and slip it out on the seat."

The man steered with his right hand and awkwardly removed the wallet. Dick picked it up with gloved right hand and flipped it open. He held it up to the light from the street and saw there were eleven dollars in it.

"You weren't kidding, were you? Keep your eyes on the road! Eleven dollars. Charge everything, hey?"

The man looked away and said, "Keep it."

"Buy me for eleven dollars? You can't buy me off," Dick said. "I told you. I want to show you something."

He flicked a look at the traffic behind them and then said, "I saw a tv program last week with a deal like this—a guy with

a gun and a man driving. The driver got the gun away. That's tv, but I didn't believe it. He'd never have had the guts to try if it really counted. Would he?"

Almost inaudibly, the man said, "No."

"Right. Damn straight. If you tried to take the gun—*bang,* and you'd never know how it all comes out."

He began sorting through the plastic cards in the wallet.

"Your name is Palmer, eh?"

"You pronounce the 'l'," the man said.

"Is that important to you?"

With a certain nervous courage, Palmer said, "Are you running from the police?"

Dick laughed. "Are you kidding? Why would I be running from the police? I haven't done anything."

"Are you on...on pot?"

"Christ, do you take me for a longhair? I wouldn't fog my mind."

He sat easily at an angle on the seat. The gun in his left hand was propped on his knee and pointed at Palmer. He held the wallet in his right hand and flipped the cards with his thumb. He split his attention between the cards and Palmer.

"Tell me, what do you do, Mr. Palmer?" he asked.

"I sell insurance," Palmer said. Then, agitatedly, "What are you doing to me? I've got a family! I'm late!"

"Life insurance?"

"Farm insurance. Farm insurance."

"Oh." Dick stopped at a picture. "Is this your family?"

"Yes."

"Good looking kids. Where does the boy go to school?"

"St. Johns."

"I almost applied there," Dick said, "but I wound up at City College instead. That's the way things happen." He closed the wallet and dropped it on the seat. "Turn on Lake Forest."

The city had thinned. Along this stretch of the boulevard

the road was a line between two neon margins of bars, gas stations and motels. There was a yellow caution light at the intersection. At Dick's gesture, they swung right.

"What's the medicine for, Mr. Palmer?"

"My wife has a case of eczema. She's waiting for the medicine. I was supposed to be home for dinner."

"Being late isn't the worst thing in the world," Dick said. "Your wife can wait for awhile. Have you ever seen a dead man, Mr. Palmer?"

"My God!"

"I was just asking you. All I was doing was asking you."

After a moment, Palmer said. "I've been to funerals."

"Closed or open coffin?"

"All right," said Palmer. "I haven't. No."

"They insulate you from death," Dick said. "Ha. I think they ought to make people stand in line to walk through the morgue. You never see a dead man and you never see a man dying. Do you believe it when somebody dies on tv?"

"I guess not."

"No. You think, 'If they tried to kill me like that, it wouldn't be *that* easy. It wouldn't be all that simple.' It takes awhile to realize that death doesn't just happen to other people. You are going to die, too, and there isn't a single thing you can do about it."

"God, kid!" Palmer said. "Do you have to talk that way?"

Dick blinked at the vehemence. "What are you shouting for? You don't have to shout."

The road was two lanes, trees lining both sides. Just ahead at the top of a rise, there was a break in the trees and a gravel road on the left.

"Turn there," said Dick.

Palmer turned.

Dick said, "You know the trouble with life? Most people don't have any way to control it. I had a brother. Bright kid.

All-City in high school. Football. All sorts of headlines. I never even got a letter. He's dead now—leukemia—and nobody but me knows that he ever lived. Nobody cares. It was just his turn and he died. And there's nothing to show that he ever lived. He was *scared* before he died. He told me. He was afraid of being nothing. He used to lie awake at night and cry."

"I'm sorry," said Palmer. "I'm sorry."

"That isn't the point," Dick said. "Stop the car up here." He indicated with the gun.

Palmer stopped the car.

"Switch off. Put out the lights."

Palmer did. The only light was from the night sky. The road was a silver line. Palmer sat looking straight ahead, his hands on the steering wheel, his lips moving soundlessly.

"Give me the keys."

Palmer took the keys from the ignition and passed them over.

"You can have your wallet back now."

Palmer picked up the wallet.

"Get out of the car," Dick said.

Palmer opened the door. Dick opened his door and started to get out. With Dick halfway in and halfway out, Palmer began to run heavily up the road, a floundering run.

Dick held his left wrist with his right hand and squeezed off a careful shot. It whined past Palmer's feet. "Stop right there."

Palmer halted, ludicrously offbalance. He was still holding the wallet in his right hand and the packet of credit cards and pictures dangled in a long streamer.

"Come on back here," Dick said. "I told you. I want to show you something."

After a moment, Palmer swung around. He closed his eyes briefly and then he trudged back toward Dick.

"Up against the car," Dick said.

When Palmer was leaning awkwardly with outstretched arms braced on the body of the Buick, Dick moved to the rear,

opened the trunk, pulled out the tire iron, and slammed the trunk down again. With the iron in hand, he walked up close to Palmer.

"Has anything bad ever happened to you, Mr. Palmer?" he asked.

Palmer didn't answer.

Dick prodded him in the midsection with the iron. Palmer said, "No," in a muffled voice.

Dick slammed the iron at the window an inch from Palmer's left hand, a vicious backhanded swing. The glass window broke. Glass showered over the interior of the car.

Dick reached into the back seat and took out the medical prescription. He ripped the bag open and discarded it. He opened the brown pill bottle, scattered the pills on the gravel and then tossed the empty bottle into the brush.

"But..." said Palmer.

"Oh," said Dick, "it's not as bad as it might be. Rip off the car antenna. Break it off."

After a moment, Palmer walked forward, took a grip on the car antenna and struggled with it. It finally broke off and Palmer looked at it in his hands and then dropped it.

"You could make a zip gun with that," Dick said. Then he tossed the tire iron at Palmer's feet and it made a clink as it landed.

"Break the rest of the windows," Dick said. "Go on."

Palmer picked up the tire iron. He swung ineffectually at the front window and the iron bounced off the rounded laminated glass.

"Harder! Hit it for real."

Palmer swung again with more of his plump weight and the glass cracked, a radiating pattern. He hit it again until it broke through. Then the rest of the windows, one by one, all around the car. When they were all broken, Palmer stood slumped. He was crying.

"It was a new car," he said. "It isn't paid for."

"Bang in the hood."

"The police are going to get you. You just can't do things like this."

"Why would the police want me?" Dick said. "I'm just showing you something. Now bang in the hood."

Palmer lifted the tire iron and brought it down. He was crying and shaking his head.

"Do your kids love you?" Dick asked. He was crying, too.

"Yes!" Palmer shouted, and hit the car again.

"I'll bet they don't."

"They do."

"Stop," said Dick. The tears were running down his face and his voice was shaking. "Face me. Face me. You're a good man, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And your kids love you. And you run errands for your wife. And you work hard. And it doesn't make any difference. Do you understand? Do you see? When the finger points at you, you're dead. And it's my finger."

He raised the pistol and fired. "See? See? See?"

There were three light flat shots. The tire iron dropped from Palmer's hand, landed on its end and then toppled. Palmer put his hands against his chest, sagged against the car and made a desperate sobbing noise. Then he coughed and fell to the ground.

Dick dropped the car keys by his body. He pulled the glove off his right hand and wiped his eyes.

He looked down at Palmer and said, "I just want you to understand."

BREAD, LOVE AND DREAMS: a poem in bad taste

I call my baby Traffic Jam.
I keep her in my closet in an old tin can.
When I'm feeling lonely, I spread her on bread.
Oh, I'm sorry that my baby is dead.

And as I munch my jam on rye,
I wonder why we have to die?
But a taste of her keeps me going on,
It makes me feel that she's not all gone.

My baby died three months ago,
And now the jam in the can is getting low,
So I don't let it drip, and I don't let it run,
And I lick my fingers when I'm done.

Transcend

A PHONEBOOK ALPHABET: or how a science fiction writer populates the city of the future

Albo
Barbash
Czap
Dahdah
Elfman
Fadelsak
Goc
Hornbuckle
Infortuna
Juba
Kneezle
Livengood
Matasavage
Neptune
Ogrodnik
Puckhaber
Quack
Rumpa

Strawhacker
Tascarella
Undercoffer
Verbit
Wampole
Xhunga
Yob
Zuckerbrod

THE STORY OF *RITE OF PASSAGE*

On the 4th of July, 1958, a few weeks after I graduated from high school, I was standing in the backyard of my parents' home in Okemos, Michigan when it became clear to me what I should be doing with the typewriter I had just received that week as a graduation present. A hand, as it were, fell upon my shoulder and a voice spoke in my ear. "Write stories," the voice said.

And in a gorgeous flash I realized that I had been preparing myself to write sf for years without ever previously recognizing the fact: All those sf books seized from me in algebra class. Learning to type years before I owned a typewriter. Reading L. Sprague de Camp's *Science-Fiction Handbook* and Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder* over and over again until I'd all but memorized them.

So I went inside the house, sat down at my new typewriter, and began trying to write a science fiction story. I wrote one that weekend and submitted it to *Galaxy.* It was no good. It was wretched, in fact. But I knew what I ought to be doing and I kept at it.

In retrospect, the summer of 1958 was not a good time to try to write sf. It is clear now that at that moment sf was in a psychic trough, a state of uncreativity. One after another of the major sf talents of the Forties and Fifties were drying up,

ceasing to write, giving up sf, and no new dynamic figures were appearing to take their place. By 1960, the situation was so bad that Earl Kemp was given a fanzine Hugo for his symposium, "Who Killed SF?"

There was another factor. I had no special knowledge of science, no training in it, and no particular interest. My father was an applied scientist, head of the Department of Forest Products at Michigan State University. By his literalistic standards—which were that folk music should have been composed by an anonymous committee three hundred years ago, and that science fiction should be fiction about science—I had no business trying to write sf. If these were his standards alone, that might have been one thing, but the conventional, accepted understanding of sf within the genre at that time was still that science fiction should be fiction about science.

I didn't let any of this stop me. I knew what I ought to be doing and I kept at it.

My method of procedure was plodding, one foot in front of the next. In every story I wrote, I tried to do something I hadn't done before—a new kind of character, a different setting, an effect beyond my range. And I kept trying to see deeper into sf—into the non-scientific heart hidden beneath the sometimes-scientific surface—a course that eventually in the Sixties led me into writing sf criticism and theory. I was not swift, or brilliant, or even minimally successful. My one virtue was that I was steady.

Three years after I first began writing, in the summer of 1961, I was a PFC in the U.S. Army. I had been trained as a Preventive Medicine Technician—insects and sewers—and stationed in a Preventive Medicine Company detachment at Camp Red Cloud in Uijongbu, Korea. There was a time when I found a Korean War cartoon with the caption "What do you mean you never heard of Uijongbu?" hilariously funny.

By this time, I had had my first story published. It wasn't an

sf story. It was a story set in a boys' prep school. It was entitled "A Piece of Pie," and it had been published in the November 1960 issue of *Seventeen,* a glossy magazine aimed at teen-age girls.

My own typewriter was safely at home in Michigan, but I was doing the typing for the detachment, so I had access to a typewriter when I wanted to use one. It was during that summer of 1961 that I began writing the story that became *Rite of Passage.* The title at the outset was not *Rite of Passage.* I don't remember now just what the original title was.

In those days, my way of conceiving a story was to accumulate ideas, problems and elements that I wanted to work with, the more incompatible the better, and then to move them around and around in my mind until they made a pattern, but still leave myself room for improvisation. Something of this remains in the way I work today, but there are differences, too. Chiefly, I would say, the initial elements are more knowingly recognized and the improvisation is freer.

For a variety of reasons, I wanted to try a story with a young female protagonist. There were no female characters in "A Piece of Pie"—even though the story was published in a girls' magazine. There were certainly very few girls in sf stories. I wanted to see if I could write an sf story with a girl as a protagonist and bring it off. I hadn't done anything like it before, and it seemed a worthy experiment.

I had, moreover, just read *To Kill a Mockingbird,* which was then a best-seller. I'd loved the story and admired the writing, but I had been unpersuaded that the adult narrator could remember so much of her six-year-old self, or that a six-year-old could be so aware, so conscious, so knowing.

In sf, Heinlein had used a girl of eleven as a major character—though not a protagonist—in his *Have Spacesuit—Will Travel.* But again, I hadn't been completely persuaded. His little girl seemed both too young and doll-dependent for her age, and

at the same time too wise-crackingly confident of her own intellectual brilliance.

A girl of fourteen seemed about the place for me to aim. I could remember my own thoughts at fourteen, and it seemed to me that I might be able to portray a bright girl of that age as a character, particularly if I helped myself by making her a bit of a tomboy.

That was the first major element of the story. The second one was this:

In the May 1961 issue of *Analog,* G. Harry Stine had an article entitled "Science Fiction Is Too Conservative." Nearly fifteen years later, and without a file of the magazine to check, I cannot swear to the details of the article. But it seems to me that Stine, who had been a rocket engineer as well as an sf writer under the name of Lee Correy, was writing about the gap between advanced thought in science and engineering and the laggard reflection of that thought in science fiction. Sf wasn't keeping up its science. What I do remember is that in the course of this article, Stine raised the possibility of giant spaceships with populations in the multiple thousands. That notion stayed with me, and I put it on a back burner in my mind.

A third major element went into the conception of *Rite of Passage,* copped from a novel I picked up in an Army library some time that summer. I believe, without being positive, that it was a mystery novel by Arthur Upfield. I didn't read it. I thumbed through it, and put it down again. But in the moments I spent with the book, I became intrigued with the Australian aborigine custom of sending youngsters naked into the bush on a walkabout, either to survive and prove their fitness to live, or to die. I knew I wanted that in my story.

So I had my major pieces—and the larger problem of imagining a story to contain them. I needed a universe, a set of circumstances, a moment in time that could comfortably encompass giant spaceships, walkabouts and fourteen-year-

old girls. But by the middle of August, the pieces had fallen into place.

Between August and October 1961, I wrote a story of 20,000 words or so—essentially the material that is now Part III and the Epilogue of *Rite of Passage.* This was the second-longest story I had ever attempted. The longest was a novel I had written within months of my revelation in the backyard, the chief virtue of which was that it was two hundred coherent pages by a person who had previously found it something of an effort to muster the discipline necessary to write a five-page school essay. But this new story was far more original and far more successful, probably the best thing I had ever written.

With high hopes, I sent it off to John Campbell of *Analog* for consideration. While it was traveling to the United States from Korea, being considered and rejected, and making its way back to me again, I had three months in which to think the story over. And it came to me that the ending I wanted for the story was too large and overwhelming to be sustained by the events of the story as given. The ending was out of proportion. If I wanted to be believed, I would have to build up a mental climate in which a radical over-reaction would seem plausible, even inevitable to the reader.

I would have to start the story years earlier and build my way toward the ending I wanted the story to have. I would have to write a novel.

By that time, I had been moved from one detachment of my Army company to another, and I was no longer in charge of a typewriter. Even if I hadn't been moved, the problems of writing a long novel would have been so overwhelming as to give me pause. So I began to make notes and to think.

Then, in February 1962, I received an answer to the second submission of my original story, from Fred Pohl, editor of *Galaxy* and *If.* Far from thinking the story too short, Pohl

thought it was too long. He said that if I would cut it in half, he would consider it again.

My next opportunity to use a typewriter came on the night of February 21—February 20 in the U.S., the day that John Glenn orbited the Earth. I was on Charge of Quarters duty in the office of the headquarters of my Army company. My job was to answer the telephone if it should ring and to check the Quonset huts of our company from time to time to see that the space heaters were burning properly. Most people stretched out on a cot and tried to snatch what sleep they could when they had this duty, but I sat up all night, listening to John Glenn's passage around the Earth on the radio, all the while typing furiously in a state of high excitement, cutting seventy pages down to thirty-five.

I managed this difficult trick by cutting out much of what I had liked best about the story—including that overwhelming ending. The last ten pages of the original story were dropped altogether. With the novel in mind, I didn't regret the sacrifice as much as I otherwise might.

And Fred Pohl did buy the story, paying something less than a penny a word for it, $95 in all. My first science fiction sale, after nearly four years of trying.

The story was bought in March 1962, but it was not published for nearly sixteen months, appearing at last in the July 1963 issue of *If* under the Pohl-devised title, "Down to the Worlds of Men." A delay of this length in book publication is not unusual, but it is easily the longest delay between a magazine sale and publication that I have ever suffered through. But there was a good reason for it. In the November 1962 and the January and March 1963 issues of *If,* Pohl ran a serial by Robert Heinlein, *Podkayne of Mars,* a story told in the first person by a teen-age girl. And then Pohl waited a further two issues to print my story.

I actually anticipated that this might happen. In May 1962,

after I had been discharged from the Army, I happened to pay a visit to Avram Davidson, editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.* And I learned that Davidson had decided to reject Heinlein's novel, which was then on submission to *F&SF.* "Oh, no," I thought. "Heinlein will submit the novel to Fred Pohl next. Pohl will buy it and rush it into print—and hold my story up. And *everyone* will think that my story is derived from Heinlein's."

In fact, that part of it didn't happen. Except for their girl protagonists, the two stories were really not very much alike. And when "Down to the Worlds of Men" was finally published, it attracted no particular attention, except for the grace of an Honorable Mention in a Judith Merril *Year's Best* anthology. It remained unreprinted and thoroughly forgotten in the graveyard of old magazine issues.

But I continued to work at the novel of which "Down to the Worlds of Men" was only a fragment. It didn't come fast, not nearly as fast as the original story. I wrote in longhand while on a motor scooter adventure in Europe in the summer of 1962. I sat at home and typed in Okemos through the fall of that year. I worked at the story as I could after I returned to college, early in 1963.

I wrote other things, too. Two stories, aimed to duplicate my lucky sale to *Seventeen,* that didn't manage the trick and were published in *Datebook.* A story in a Christian magazine called *motive.* Collaborative stories with Joe L. Hensley published in *Dapper* and *F&SF.* And novelets set against the same background as *Rite of Passage,* published in *Worlds of Tomorrow* and *Analog.* Even another book, a critical account of the writing of Robert Heinlein—suggested to me by Earl Kemp of Advent, which eventually published *Heinlein in Dimension* in the spring of 1968.

But all that time, *Rite of Passage* was my main work. I finally completed the novel while in graduate school at the

University of Chicago in February of 1966—four-and-a-half years after I began it. Writing that story had called for more patience than I ever imagined I possessed, years and years and years of putting one foot in front of the next.

Even so, the time for patience was not over. During the next year-and-a-half, while I finished graduate school, moved to New York, and found a job, *Rite of Passage* bounced vainly from one publisher to another, each finding his own good reasons for rejection. The only one that I remember now was the suggestion that my Russian name might cause a reader to mistake my story for the product of a country backward in science fiction.

Patience, patience, patience. Not a very easy trick for me, but absolutely demanded by the circumstances. Nobody ever encouraged me to write. No one ever said that writing—and selling—came easy.

Those were the high spring days of the Sixties, when new and talented writers like Roger Zelazny, Samuel R. Delany, and Ursula K. Le Guin were establishing themselves in science fiction. But I couldn't make a dent anywhere. In the year-and-a-half after it was completed, *Rite of Passage* was rejected thirteen times by hardcover publishers, paperback publishers, children's book publishers, and the Science Fiction Book Club.

But this protracted moment of agony and frustration—which was compounded by delays in the publication of *Heinlein in Dimension*—could not last forever. In September 1967, *Rite of Passage* was finally accepted for publication in Terry Carr's forthcoming line of Ace Science Fiction Specials.

The Ace Specials are worth a word. In 1967, when Carr first proposed the Specials, Ace Books, his employer, was the absolute lowest-common-denominator of science fiction publishing, best known for their breezy Ace Doubles, two short novels printed back-to-back under the same set of covers. Basic sf, but for the most part not memorable sf.

Carr wanted to issue a new and prestigious line of science fiction, one book a month, both originals and reprints from hardcover, all of the books to have covers painted by the brilliant husband-and-wife team of Leo and Diane Dillon. A.A. Wyn, owner of Ace Books, then less than a year from his death, responded enthusiastically to Carr's proposal. Wyn never lived to see the Ace Specials, but they more than fulfilled any hopes he may have had for them. Under Terry Carr's editorship, the Ace Science Fiction Specials were an ornament of the later Sixties, including such fine original novels as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness,* Joanna Russ's *And Chaos Died,* and R.A. Lafferty's *Fourth Mansions.*

Terry Carr asked for two changes in *Rite of Passage.* One was a reduction in the age of the protagonist-as-narrator from 26 to 19. The other was the summarization of a story told in Part III. At this distance, I think both changes may have been mistakes, but at the time I was so excited at finally selling the novel that I readily agreed to them.

Rite of Passage was published in June 1968, almost seven years after it was begun. It was aided immensely in its impact by the excitement generated by the Ace Science Fiction Specials. *Rite of Passage* was the second original novel in the series, coming between R.A. Lafferty's *Past Master* and Joanna Russ's *Picnic on Paradise,* strong novels both.

Within days of publication, my life was transformed. I was being sought out by fanzine editors for interviews. Within the microcosm of sf fandom, I was a celebrity. *Rite of Passage* was nominated for both the Nebula Award of the Science Fiction Writers of America and the Hugo Award of the World Science Fiction Convention as Best Novel of the Year. It won the Nebula, and was a close second for the Hugo to John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar.*

How strange and mysterious the world is! How can one ever account for the difference between the difficulties I had in

originally selling *Rite of Passage* and its eventual reception—except perhaps by saying that readers of sf are less bound by conventional mental categorizations than publishers of sf are. I still have problems with that today, stubbornly insisting on writing novels that do not fall into conventional publishing categories and then having to wait for years on end for an editor who can see their merit.

To date, *Rite of Passage* has had four paperback printings in the United States; a British hardcover edition; a British book club edition; three British paperback printings; a Japanese edition; a French edition; and a German edition under the title *Welt zwischen den Sternen.* This last was a horrible abortion shorter by eighty pages than the original, even though English generally expands when translated into German. And my ending—for the sake of which the novel was written in the first place—was missing entirely. Oh, my.

I've also seen a catalog entry for a pirate Italian hardcover edition. I've never seen a copy of the book, however.

In the fifteen years since I wrote the original of "Down to the Worlds of Men" and the ten years since I finished *Rite of Passage,* counting all editions, the story has earned the sum of $7,702.65. But no one ever said that making a living as a writer was easy. Any readers of this who may be tempted to listen to voices in their backyard should bear this in mind.

And yet *Rite of Passage* is an acknowledged classic. How do I know? There is a Cliffs Notes on science fiction with almost ten pages devoted to *Rite of Passage* that begin: "*Rite of Passage* is a good novel by any standards; consequently, it should rank high on any list of science fiction. One of the reasons that it is as good as it is, is that it operates on at least three levels of significance while remaining a unified, coherent novel."

If that were not sufficient, I have the testimony of a friend of mine, a young and ambitious sf novelist I won't embarrass by naming. Last summer, he and I were exchanging letters

about the possibilities—and the difficulties—of being a serious sf writer. He said that he had hopes of writing a classic. And he said, "As far as I'm concerned, you have a classic behind you already: *Rite of Passage.*"

That's enough to chill anyone's blood. Classics aren't books that are read for pleasure. Classics are books that are imposed on unwilling students, books that are subjected to analyses of "levels of significance" and other blatt, books that are dead. *Rite of Passage* was published only eight years ago. It's too young to die!

I answered my friend with as much calm as I could muster that only time can make a classic, and premature nominations were not in order. I've learned a lot in the last ten years, and I can do better than *Rite of Passage* today, I said. And besides, sf is about to undergo great changes. Very shortly, *Rite of Passage* is going to seem as much of another time as Edgar Rice Burroughs seemed in the time of Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and A.E. van Vogt.

But how wrong I was. Last November, I was made aware that the original paperback publisher of *Rite of Passage* had authorized Gregg Press to republish *RoP* in a hardcover series of classic sf novels. A classic in spite of all my objections! More evidence—if the rest of this account were not sufficient—that books have fates of their own that authors are powerless to affect.

If you should read *Rite of Passage,* you are going to be reading a classic, whether or not you or I like the fact. But don't you despair, and don't get hung up on it.

The mail and criticism that *Rite of Passage* has received during these last eight years has made me aware that a book isn't a single, static thing with one unarguable meaning. *Rite of Passage* is words on a page, a framework, a matrix. Each reader who comes to it brings his own special knowledge, habits and attitudes. Each reader reads a different book. Each reader

imagines a different story. Some readers of an academic cast of mind may perceive "levels of significance." Other readers may see very different things.

A few years ago, for instance, a friend of my mother's sent me a copy of a test on *Rite of Passage* that she had given her students. The first question read: "True or False? The theme of *Rite of Passage* is...." I can't tell you what the presumed theme was, but I can tell you that I didn't recognize it. Beads of flop sweat leaped out on my forehead. After two more questions, I had to put the test aside. I didn't know the "right" answers.

There are no "right" answers to a test on *Rite of Passage.* What you find in *Rite of Passage* is what you find in *Rite of Passage.* The meaning of the book changes from one moment to another, from one reader to another, even from one reading to another. Those who have written to tell me that they have loved the book have included teen-age boys in love with Mia Havero, graduate students who wish to argue philosophy, and middle-age women who have a meal to offer me the next time I'm in Cleveland. And the experiences they report have not been the same.

If you read *Rite of Passage* in the ordinary way of things and enjoy yourself, I couldn't be more pleased. I hope it gets you off.

On the other hand, if you should ever be assigned *Rite of Passage,* and you start to read it and it doesn't work for you, just put it aside and forget the whole thing. Tell the teacher I said it was okay.

HOW TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION:
a collection of testimony

Robert Sheckley:

I can't even claim to know science fiction. I realize of course that I write it. But I don't try to write it. I don't sit down and say to myself, now I'm going to think up a science fiction idea. Let's see, shall it be unearthly monsters this time, or world-doom?

It really doesn't work that way. What happens is, something or other catches my attention, and a few words or images join together in a provocative manner. Or sometimes a whole scene leaps into my head.

Whatever it is, it simply comes. I don't tell it what it should be. It tells me. And what it usually turns out to be is another science fiction story.

Damon Knight:

I get embarrassed when I find myself talking about a high-order abstraction as if I had been there in person and counted the knobs on it, and chipped off a piece to take home. I do not think I know much about the unconscious. But I am certain I have one, because I use it (or it uses me) every day; it does about ninety per cent of the creative work I put out. My unconscious gets ideas (as opposed to gimmicks); I never

do. My unconscious dictates the form and mood of stories, and often supplies whole scenes and characters. I am just the scribe; I tinker with the work as it goes along in order to give it surface coherence and logic, but I have to keep in touch at intervals with the unconscious as I do so; if I don't the product gets very flat indeed.

Isaac Asimov:

How it is with other writers I can't say, but with me, writing is not actually a conscious and painstaking act of composition and construction. I have within me what the Greeks referred to as a "daimon" and which I refer to as "a little man" that does all the work, and my only part in it is to type very, very fast and try to keep up with him.

The only trouble is that he writes what he wants to write and I can do nothing about it.

A.E. van Vogt:

I dream my story ideas in my sleep.

I don't say that I get all my ideas by dreaming, but it is how I get aspects of them. I'm writing a story, for example, and I suddenly realize that I don't know what comes next—you see, I have no endings for my stories when I start them...just a thought and something that excites me. I get some picture that is very interesting and I write it. But I don't know where it's going to go next.

So then I sleep on it, and keep waking up and thinking, "Well, now, I need a lift here of some kind."

Then, I fall asleep, you see, even as I put that thought into my mind. Then I wake up again and repeat that, just run through the thought. If I can't do this, if I sleep all through the night, the next day I just wander around without ideas.

Generally, either in a dream or about ten o'clock the next

morning—bang!—an idea comes and it will be something in a sense non-sequitur, yet a growth from the story. I've gotten my most original stories that way; these ideas made the story different every ten pages. In other words, I wouldn't have been able to reason them out, I feel.

I have tried to plot stories consciously, from beginning to end and I never sell them. I know better, now, than to even attempt to write them that way.

Philip K. Dick:

I myself have derived much of the material for my writing from dreams. In *Flow My Tears,* for example, the powerful dream which comes to Felix Buckman near the end, the dream of the wise old man on horseback, that was an actual dream I had at the time of writing the novel. In *Martian Time-Slip* I've written in so many dream experiences that I can't separate them, now, when I read the novel.

Ubik was primarily a dream, or series of dreams. In my opinion it contains strong themes of pre-Socratic philosophical views of the world, unfamiliar to me when I wrote it (to name just one, the views of Empedocles). It is possible that the noosphere contained thought patterns in the form of very weak energy until we developed radio transmission; whereupon the energy level of the noosphere went out of bounds and assumed a life of its own. It no longer served as a mere passive repository of human information (the "Seas of Knowledge" which ancient Sumer believed in) but, due to the incredible surge of charge from our electronic signals and the information-rich material therein, we have given it power to cross a vast threshold; we have, so to speak, resurrected what Philo and other ancients called the *Logos.* Information has, then, become alive, with a collective mind of its own independent of our brains, if this theory is correct.

CREATIVITY

Creativity is lefthanded.

THE SEVENTIES

After the street theater Sixties, a whole decade has somehow passed like a gray and foggy dream. A left-handed decade. A mindless decade. A stumbling, uncomfortable decade. At the end of the Seventies, we look back and wonder where the years went, and for what? What happened in the Seventies?

Did *anything* happen in the Seventies?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But we are only going to know what it was gradually. Only in retrospect will we be able to penetrate the darkness of the Seventies and know who was who and what was what. Only when we awake from our dream to the reality of the new landscape around us will we come to understand what the dreamwalking of the Seventies was for and what seeds were planted by moonlight.

BRIGHT SAM, CHARMING NED AND THE OGRE

Once upon a time, there was a king who had two sons, and they twins, the first ever born in the country. One was named Enegan and the other Britoval, and though one was older than the other, I don't remember which it was, and I doubt anyone else does, either. The two boys were so alike that not even their dear mother's heart could tell one from the other, and before their first month was out they were so thoroughly mixed that no one could be sure which to call Britoval and which Enegan. Finally, they gave the whole thing up as a bad lot, used their heads and hung tags on the boys and called them Ned and Sam.

They grew up tall and strong and as like each other as two warts on the same toad. If one was an inch taller or a pound heavier at the beginning of the month, by the end of it they were all even again. It was even-steven between them in wrestling, running, swimming, riding, and spitting. By the time they were grown-up young men, there was only one way to mark them apart. It was universally agreed that Sam was bright and Ned was charming, and the people of the country even called them Bright Sam and Charming Ned.

"Hark," they would say as a horse went by on the road. "There goes Prince Charming Ned." Or, alternatively, "Hey, mark old Bright Sam thinking under yon spreading oak."

The boys did earn their names, and honestly. Ask Sam to do a sum, parse a sentence, or figure a puzzle, and he could do it in a trice, whereas Ned just wasn't handy at that sort of thing. On the other hand, if you like charm and heart, courtesy and good humor, Ned was a really swell fellow, a delight to his dear mother, and a merry ray of sunshine to his subjects, while Sam at his best was a trifle sour.

Then one day the Old King, their father, died and the question arose as to which son should inherit, for the kingdom was small and the treasury was empty, and there simply was not enough for both.

The Great Council of the Kingdom met to consider the problem. They met and considered, considered and voted, voted and tied. At first they said it was obvious that the elder son should inherit, but they found that no one at all could say which was the elder. Then an exasperated soul proposed that the younger should inherit, and all agreed that was a fine way out until they discovered that it was equally problematic which was the younger. It was at this point that they decided to vote to settle the question—but the vote turned out to be a tie, for half said, "A king should be bright so as to be able to rule intelligently and deal wisely with the friends and enemies of the kingdom. Nobody really has to like him," and the other half said, "A king should be beloved by his subjects and well thought of by his neighbors and peers. The Council can always provide the brains needed to run things if brains are ever required."

At last, finally, and in the end, it was decided by all that there was only one way to settle the matter. Charming Ned and Bright Sam must undertake a Quest and whichever of them was successful would become King of the Realm, and take his fine old father's place. If neither was successful, they could always bring in a poor second cousin who was

waiting in the wings, hat in hand. Kingdoms always have second cousins around to fill in when they're needed.

The Quest decided upon was this: It seems that many miles away—or so the story had come to them in the kingdom—there was a small cavern in which lived a moderate-sized ogre with a fine large treasure, big enough to handle the kingdom's budget problem for some years to come. It was agreed that whichever of the two boys could bring the treasure home where it belonged would have proved to the satisfaction of everybody his overwhelming right to be king.

Well, the two young men set off the very next morning, when the sun was up and the air was warm. Sam, intelligent as always, had loaded food and supplies into a knapsack and put it on his back, and buckled a great sword about his waist. Ned took nothing—too heavy, you know—but simply put his red cap on his head and walked on down the road, whistling. Everybody in the kingdom came down to the road to wave and see them off. They waved until the boys were around the first bend in the road, and then, like sensible folk, they all went home to breakfast.

Sam was loaded so heavily that he couldn't walk as fast as his dear brother, and Ned was soon out of sight ahead of him, without even the sound of his whistle to mark him. This didn't seriously bother Bright Sam, because he was sure that preparation and foresight would in the end more than make up for Ned's initial brisk pace. When he got hungry, not having any food would slow Ned down.

But Sam walked a long time, day and night, and never saw his brother. Then he came on the skinniest man he'd ever seen, sitting by a great pile of animal bones.

"Hello," Sam said. "I'm looking for an ogre who lives in a cave and owns a treasure. Do you know where I can find him?"

At the question, the man began to cry. Sam asked him what the trouble was, since sour or not, he hated to see people cry.

The man said, "A young fellow stopped a day or two ago and asked me the same question exactly. And he brought nothing but trouble on me. I had a flock of sheep, and fine ones, too, and I was roasting one for my dinner when he stopped, and he was such a nice, pleasant fellow that I asked him to eat with me. He was still hungry after the first sheep, so I killed another, and then another, and then another. He was so friendly and charming, and so grateful, that I never noticed until he had gone that he had eaten every last one of my animals. Now I have nothing at all. And I'm starting to get hungry myself."

Sam said, "If you will tell me where the ogre lives, I will give you some of the food that I have with me."

The man said, "Give me some of your food and I will tell you just what I told that other young fellow."

So Sam gave him food, and when the hungry man was done eating, he said, "The answer is that I don't know. I don't have any truck with ogres. I just mind my own business."

Sam went on down the road with his pack a little lighter than before. He walked a long time, day and night, and never saw his brother. Then he came on a little castle in which lived a princess—well, perhaps not a princess as most people reckon it, but since she lived there alone there wasn't a single person to say she wasn't. That is how royal families are founded.

This little castle was being besieged by a very rude and unpleasant giant. As a passing courtesy, Sam drew his sword and slew the giant, lopping off his great hairy head. The princess (and pretty indeed she was) came out of her castle and thanked him.

"It was very nice of you and all that," said she, "but I'm afraid that the giant here," and she nudged his head with the toe of her dainty slipper, "has seven brothers, and the whole lot take turns besieging my castle. This will no doubt anger them. I used to have a charm that kept my land protected from all such creatures, but alas no longer. A young man

with a red cap came whistling down the road last week looking for an ogre and he was so sweet and charming that I gave him the charm to protect himself with and keep him from harm, and ever since these horrid giants have been attacking my castle."

"Well, why don't you move?" asked Sam. "There aren't any giants where I live, though we do have a dragon or two, and we have some very nice castles looking to be bought."

The princess said that sounded like a very nice idea, and she just might take his advice.

"By the way," said Sam, "do you know, by chance, where I can find the ogre you were speaking of just a minute ago?"

"Oh, certainly," she said. "It's not far at all. Just follow your nose for three days and nights and you'll be there."

Sam thanked her, slew a second giant come to look for his brother, and went on his way. He followed his nose, and after three days and nights it told him that he had found the ogre's cave. He knocked politely and the ogre came out. The cave was a bit small for him. He was covered with hair, and he had three red eyes and two great yellow fangs. Other than his appearance, he seemed friendly enough if you like that sort of company.

Sam drew his sword and said, "Excuse me, but I've come for your treasure."

"Well, if you can tell me a riddle I can't guess," said the ogre, "I'll give all I have to you. But if I do answer it, I want your money and all that you have."

Sam agreed. It is common knowledge that as a rule ogres are not bright, and Sam knew some very hard riddles indeed.

He thought, he did, until it near cracked his brain, and finally he said, "What is it that is not, and never will be?"

The ogre turned the question over in his mind. Then he sat down to really think about it. For three whole days and three whole nights they sat there, and nobody thought it odd of them because nobody lived nearby. The ogre tried

a dozen answers one by one, but each time Sam said, "I'm sorry, but that's not it."

Finally, the ogre said, "I can't think of any more answers. You win. But don't tell me the answer. Write it on a piece of paper. I can think about it after you're gone."

So Sam wrote his answer down on a piece of paper and gave it to the ogre who put it in his pocket. Then he said, "And now, could I trouble you for your treasure?"

The ogre said, "You won all that I have fair and square. Just a minute." He went inside the cave and in just a moment he was back with a single brass farthing. "I'm sorry, but that's all there is. There used to be more, but I gave it all to a nice young man who was here just a week ago. I had to start my collection all over again after he left, and now that you've beaten me, I'll have to start even one more time."

Because he knew his brother well, Sam asked disbelievingly, "This young fellow didn't ask you any riddles you couldn't answer, did he?"

The ogre drew himself up and said in a wounded tone, "Of course not. But he was such a nice young fellow that I couldn't bear to let him go away empty-handed."

Well, that left Sam with something of a problem. He'd beaten the ogre and won his treasure, but nobody was likely to take a single brass farthing as proof of that. So he thought for a minute, and then he said, "And how do you find your cave for size, my friend?"

"Cramped, to tell the truth," said the ogre. "But good caves are hard to find."

"And do you have much company here?"

"No," said the ogre. "I think on my riddles to pass the time."

"Well," said Sam, "how would you like to come along home with me? When I'm king at home I can provide you with a fine large cave and pleasant neighbors, and send people with riddles to you from time to time. How about that?"

The ogre could hardly turn an offer like that down, so he agreed readily and they set out together. When they got near home, it was apparent to Sam that a celebration was going on in the kingdom.

He said to his ogre friend, "How would you like to go to a party?"

"Oh, swell," said the ogre. "I'm sure I'd like to go to a party. I've never been to one."

"Well, I'll go in first and tell them to set an extra place, and then I'll come out for you in a minute," said Sam.

He went inside to find that there was a double celebration in progress. His brother Ned was about to be crowned king and to marry the sweet princess that Sam had sent home.

"Drop that crown," said Sam. "Stop this wedding."

Everybody looked around at him.

He said, "I succeeded at the Quest, and I claim the right to be king, and to marry the princess."

Everybody laughed at him. They said, "You're really not all that bright after all, are you? Charming Ned brought home the ogre's treasure. What did you bring, fool?"

Sam showed them his single brass farthing. "I brought this," he said, and they laughed all the more. "And I brought one more thing," he said, and threw open the doors. In walked the ogre, looking for the party he'd been promised.

Sam explained to the ogre that the party would begin straight away the moment he became king. Since the ogre was standing in the only doorway, Sam was made king in no time at all.

After that, Sam set the ogre up in a cave of his very own, and after the neighbors discovered he wasn't a bad sort, he got on quite well. The ogre became a regular tourist attraction, in fact, one of the finest in the kingdom, and brought in a nice regular bit of revenue, taxes on his riddle-winnings aside. Sam established a charm school and put his brother Ned in charge, and that did well, too. Sam married the princess and everybody

lived quite happily from then on. If they haven't moved away (and I don't know why they would) they'll be living there still.

And oh, yes. It took the ogre a full ten years to decide he couldn't answer Sam's riddle. Every week he would bundle the answers he'd thought of together and send them to Sam, and Sam would go through them and send them back. Finally the ogre decided he would never find the right answer to the question, "What is it that is not and never will be?"

He opened the worn piece of paper that Sam had given him so long before and took a look. The answer was, "A mouse's nest in a cat's ear."

"Oh, hell," said the ogre. "I was just about to guess that."

INTERESTING

What makes you interested?

RATIONAL PEOPLE

Rational people are always
bumping into rocks.
I used to be a rational person.
I could show you scars.

TAMERLANE'S ERROR

In this world there are a million windows through which to see. There are a million mirrors, and a million prospects. The ordinary man accepts this, and if the world looks a little different to him one day and the next, or if his mirror shows him something new, it neither troubles nor surprises him. The variety lends roundness to life.

However, for those few raised to a single narrow squint, the discovery of even a second perspective on the smoke and swirl of the evanescent world can be important, shocking and joyful. This is good if it leads to new vistas, and bad if the second perspective is mistaken for Final Truth.

Timur i Leng, vizier of Chagatay under Suyurghatmish, discovered one day that the world looks different from forty feet in the air and was overwhelmed. He gathered his army and overran Khorasan, Jurjan, Mazandaran, Sijistan, Azerbaijan, and Fars. In each place he raised a pyramid of skulls forty feet high and limped to the top in the hopes of recapturing that first thrilling rush—and missed the point completely.

THE SUFIS ON FIRST IMPRESSION

For about six months, I have been reading a number of books signed by Idries Shah, who is Grand Sheikh of the Naqshbandi Order of the Sufis. These books are, for the most part, anthologies of active Sufic material drawn from the past thousand years. The Sufis have the reputation of being Moslem mystics, but they are clearly something much more than that. One of the things they have been is the most important literary figures of the Middle East, so there is no lack of material for Shah to draw on—though, at the same time, many of the stories and anecdotes he prints have been passed on through oral tradition, rather than formal publication.

It is not easy for me to speak of the Sufis for a variety of reasons. I've been studying these books for six months, as intensively as I have ever read anything in my life, and I've dug into libraries for verification of some of the external aspects of what I have been reading. That can't be summarized in a phrase, a paragraph, or a page. That is one reason. Another is that I am not a Sufi, and the Sufis are subtle. I am an ignorant child dealing with masters and much of what they say is beyond my present ability to appreciate. Yet another reason is that the Sufis deal in sophisticated forms of knowledge that cannot necessarily be expressed in simple explicit terms. Since I'm limited in what I can say about the Sufis, let me try to say

instead why encountering them has made such an impression upon me.

During the past several years, Cory and I have been working on a book called *The World Beyond the Hill,* a history and theory of science fiction. This is the most recent in a long series of attempts to understand this strange literature and why it should have been so important to me for more than twenty years. I have been reading it that long. I have been writing it, or attempting to, since I graduated from high school more than fifteen years ago. I have been writing criticism of science fiction for the last nine years.

What *is* science fiction? Why write it? Why read it? What is the source of its intense fascination for me and for so many others? There hasn't been much help in the sf criticism that has been written. Sf criticism is a young art and most of those who have been interested enough to write it have been sf writers. These, for the most part, have accepted the Gernsback theory of sf, that science fiction is an extension of science, and have not probed deeply into the questions of sf's nature and origin. They have also, in most cases, preferred to think of themselves as natural artists, practical men writing practical fiction for other practical men. I could quote chapter and verse. There hasn't been much help here for anyone like me who has not been satisfied with conventional wisdom.

In my own grope for understanding, I've had to go beyond sf in search for perspective. I've read as widely as I could in the academic criticism of literature. I've read the theorizing of writers of mimetic fiction. But again, the questions that haunt me have not been answered. At a fundamental level, I've run hard against the iron wall of assumption.

For instance, we all tend to accept fiction as a given of life. It exists all around us. We tell stories to children as early as they can hear them. We all love fiction. What is more, all mankind tells stories—*all* mankind. Why? Why should fiction

exist at all? Why should it be universal? What need does it serve? Even a child can tell when stories are constructed rightly, and when they are falsely made. How? What is the essential nature of fiction? Why write it? Why read it? What is the source of its intense fascination for me, for you, and for everyone?

Cory and I, reinforcing each other, have probed into these questions. What is more, we have found answers to them, answers that work, answers that do explain. We have been in country unknown to us—and, as far as we knew when we entered it, hardly suspected by anyone.

We have discovered that fiction is a highly sophisticated analogical device. It exists to present what cannot be presented meaningfully in any other way. Fiction demonstrates over and over that it is possible to solve seemingly insurmountable problems, problems that cannot be solved by any pattern of conduct within a person's previous range. These problems are solved not by direct attack, but by change within the person that makes his problems no longer a problem.

Anyone who has owned a cat must know that when it is a kitten it can learn a variety of responses to the world, but that when it grows up, it is, to a great extent, condemned to the behaviors it learned as a kitten. Mammals in general become frozen in their responses as adults. And we humans have a tendency to do the same. Few of us are as flexible as adults as we were as children.

But fiction teaches us that if we are able to surrender attachment to the behaviors to which we have grown accustomed, if we surmount fear and desire, we can continue to grow and to learn all our lives. Fiction is the symbolic equivalent of actual human behavior. Fiction demonstrates a kind of growth peculiar to humanity. This kind of growth is what separates man from the rest of creation.

And, we suspect, all human beings respond to fiction because those who have not been able to did not solve their seemingly

insurmountable problems, and died. That is, the response to fiction has been bred into the human race.

This may seem a strange set of assertions—no stranger to you than to us, I may say. But, given the space we are taking in our book, these assertions can be very clearly demonstrated. What is more upsetting—because we, like you, are captives of the givens and the assumptions that have been handed to us as we have proceeded through our society's educational system—is that the consequences of what we have discovered about fiction have led us to even stranger places and unlikelier ideas.

This is enough to make us alternately stand tall in pride and clutch each other in desperation. It is enough to make us ask ourselves if we are geniuses or if we are whacked out of our gourds.

Encountering these Sufi books has made it clear to us that we are neither that good nor that crazy. We are children who have stumbled on the fringes of the knowledge of real adults, full human beings, those who are not bound by the assumptions of their culture. This is the knowledge that the Sufis are masters of. I am absolutely confident of this, but I say it with the proviso that there are Sufis and there are those who claim to be Sufis, and you must be able to tell the difference.

One other thing I can say is that true Sufis will consistently run contrary to your expectations. One of the ways that they may do this is to appear thoroughly ordinary. To see them and to see them as they are, it is necessary to surrender the assumptions that blind you—the most blinding of which are the assumptions you do not realize you have. To see them, you must see through yourself.

Here are some of the things that Sufis have said about themselves:

"What is a Sufi? A Sufi is a Sufi." In Persian, it makes a neat little rhyme.

"Sufism is truth without form."

"If you encounter two institutions calling themselves Sufic, exactly the same, at least one of them must be a fake."

"Being a Sufi is to put away what is in your head—imagined truth, preconceptions, conditioning—and to face what may happen to you."

"The question is not 'What is Sufism?', but 'What can be said and taught about Sufism?'

"The reason for putting it in this way is that it is more important to know the state of the questioner and tell him what will be more useful to him than anything else. Hence the Prophet (Peace and Blessing upon him!) has said: 'Speak to each in accordance with his understanding.'

"You can harm an inquirer by giving him even factual information about Sufism, if his capacity of understanding is faulty or wrongly trained.

"This is an example. The question just recorded is asked. You reply: 'Sufism is self-improvement.' The questioner will assume that self-improvement means what he takes it to mean.

"If you said, again truly: 'Sufism is untold wealth,' the greedy or ignorant would covet it because of the meaning which they put upon wealth.

"But do not be deceived into thinking that if you put it in a religious or philosophical form, the religious or philosophical man will not make a similar covetous mistake in taking, as he thinks, your meaning."

The books by Idries Shah that I have mentioned are, it is clear, a manifestation of Sufism tailored to our culture and our capacity. I would hesitate to speculate why they are being published now, except inasmuch as it seems clear that the troubles we are suffering today in our culture are the results of the assumptions of our culture as to what the

universe is like, what is true, and what is important. If we are to survive, it will be necessary to us to transcend our previous limits, to solve the seemingly insurmountable by surrendering our attachments and changing ourselves.

Among the relevant books that have been recently published are *Reflections, The Magic Monastery, The Way of the Sufi,* and *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin,* all by Idries Shah, and *The Diffusion of Sufi Ideas in the West,* edited by Leonard Lewin and published by Keysign Press in Boulder, Colorado.

Reflections and *The Magic Monastery* are more accessible than many of Shah's books because they contain his own original material and they are thus phrased in terms that are more immediately recognizable to us than some of the older material from other cultures. *The Magic Monastery* in particular has stories in it that sf readers may easily be able to respond to. *Reflections* is a book with a cutting edge. If you stare into the mirror it offers long enough and hard enough you may begin to see yourself.

The Way of the Sufi is the broadest in range of all Shah's books. It has an introductory essay by Shah, relevant materials from classic Sufi authors such as El-Ghazali, Omar Khayyam and Jalaludin Rumi, typical materials from the four major Sufi Orders, accounts of the masters of the Sufi Way, teaching stories, and much more.

The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin has been for me, the most subtle and difficult Sufi book that I have yet encountered. It is, on the surface, a collection of traditional Middle Eastern jokes centering around the figure of Mulla Nasrudin, who is both an idiot and a master. Many of the jokes, read as jokes, fall flat. Others are wonderfully subtle knots resolved by lefthanded thinking. I have penetrated into these stories just far enough to have a faint suspicion of how very much more there remains in them to be revealed.

Here is one Nasrudin story, for your puzzlement or your enlightenment:

"Congratulate me!" shouted Nasrudin to a neighbor. 'I am a father."

"Congratulations! Is it a boy or a girl?"

"Yes! But how did you know?"

The Diffusion of Sufi Ideas in the West is an anthology of material on contemporary Sufi activity in both the Middle East and the Western world. It is more explicit and more informational than other Sufi books. As such it is a useful adjunct to the other books mentioned here which reveal less than they stimulate.

Expect these books to be different from anything that my description of them leads you to expect.

Bear in mind that everything that I have said here, first word to last, is partial and inadequate to the actual facts of the matter. Bear in mind also that anything that I *could* say would also be partial and inadequate.

And take with you this last quotation:

"'How shall I know a real Sufi?' you say.

"I say: 'Become honest, for like calls to like.' If you really were honest, you would not need to ask the question. Since you are dishonest, you do not deserve much more than you get."

PATTERNS OF ILLUSION

I have sometimes thought that there is no true reality, that is, no true enduring material reality. All that we see and sense about us, however seemingly solid and real, is no more than a temporary matrix through which atoms shuffle and boogie until the matrix collapses and the atoms bop on to participate in other patterns.

My mental image of the Universe of Material Reality is of a gigantic living room filled with huge monolithic furniture. All is perfect and seamless. All is blocklike and solid and totally itself. But there is no life in this room. Nothing in this room ever happens, nothing ever changes through a timeless eternity.

This is not the world I live in. The world I live in is a fragile tissue of web and lace and deception. Under the lens of science, all solidity turns to mist. The seemingly fixed runs and moves like quicksilver. All of the stabilities we think we see around us, science tells us are mere appearance. The patterns of illusion.

If there is anything that is real and incontrovertible amidst all this evanescence, it is the reality and significance of *event,* the pivots on which the universe turns.

Patterns of illusion—and patterns of illusion elaborated out of patterns of illusion—swim and swirl through and around each other in a fantastic kaleidoscopic dance. The seeming reality of the illusions is maintained only through constant

movement—as the pseudo-reality of a memory cell is projected only through the constant sequential scanning of electron grid potentials. And all this movement is meaningless, no more than maintainance of the patterns, marking time.

But certain instants; certain connections; certain angles; certain relationships in this interpenetration of illusion are significant. In those certain situations, out of the unique potential inherent in those angles, connections and relationships at that particular instant, sudden and powerful interactions arise. Event! And patterns of illusion are destroyed, altered, or synergetically elaborated.

As though the universe were a thought, but not a fixed thought. A multi-billion-year thought in the process of unfolding, modifying and evolving itself. This place, this time, this now, nothing but the inside of a thought thinking itself.

And we temporary matrixes can only prowl the limits of our perception in the hope and terror of encountering a significant angle, a right connection, a brief instant of reality, somewhere, sometime.

RHYTHMIC EVENTS

John Dewey said: "To designate the slower and the regular rhythmic events structure, and more rapid and irregular ones process, is sound practical sense."

What kind of event are you, structure or process?

Think of yourself as a wave

Think of yourself as a vibration

Think of yourself as a hologram

Think of yourself as a thought

"FOUND IN SPACE" BY R. MONROE WEEMS

Once upon a time, there was a community of giant mutant chipmunks, furry and blue, living in an abandoned basement in a great spaceship lost between the stars. One day, without any explanation that they could think of, they found a human baby in their midst. Pinned to his diaper was a note that said: "Cheep-cheep 3:16—'The wider world awaits,'" which was a quotation from the sacred scriptures in which they no longer believed.

They marveled at this miracle. For as they used to say to each other, giving the main bulkhead a rap with their furry knuckles: "What could be more solid? We know what we know."

However, they were generous folk and more than a little afraid of this infant creature they could not understand, with his absurd message, so they determined to raise the misfit foundling as one of their own, and never to tell him how ugly he was. They named him Francis X. Cheep-cheep, after the evangelist, and they put him in the good hands of a sweet old mom and dad who raised him as though he were one of their own litter. His legacy was lost, thrown into the nearest wastepaper basket.

Frank was given the best education his society had to offer. He was taken on field trips to the ends of the universe. He was

made acquainted with all the dimensions of the world. He was a bright and able lad, and he prospered.

Oh, he had the usual troubles in growing up. He yearned for his mom and resented his dad, who was a bit heavy-handed. And once he fought with young Meeper Blue, who told him he was adopted. But boys will be boys, his bites soon healed, as did Meeper's, and they were friends thereafter. Once he called nasty old Mrs. Snidely names and had to be punished. And finally there was the period when he had his problems in confronting his father and leaving home.

But when he did grow up, he rose to the top. He invented a mechanical currycomb. He invented a superior new waste-disposal system that *blooped* junk, trash and other crap into nowhere in particular. He invented other machines and made millions. On the side, he was a mean fighter, a cool jiver, a sweet singer, and a bad dude. But in his success, he remembered his friends like Meeper Blue, and he paid honor to his mom and his dad.

But with all this success, and money and fame, Francis X. Cheep-cheep wasn't happy. He really ought to have been. Everyone told him that if *they* had what *he* had, *they'd* be happy.

But he wasn't. He kept feeling that there was something else he ought to be doing, if only he could remember what it was. He felt threatened by nameless terrors. He slept badly. That doesn't sound like much, but it was awful. Every time he started to feel good, really good, along would come a nameless terror and wipe him out.

Part of it was that there was nothing left to do, nothing that was worth doing. Life was as confining as a goldfish bowl. He looked around him at his society and it seemed a shuck. Anything anybody else could do, he could do, and he knew it. Life seemed pointless, a cosmic joke.

"There has to be more than this, beyond this limited hor-

izon," he said. "If life has any meaning—and if it doesn't, why live?—there has to be more to it than this."

But he looked around him and there was nothing more. After all, *rap, rap,* what could be more solid?

He let his mind wander in search of an answer, but the places his mind wandered were bad places, and in those bad places he found only more nameless terrors. Wow, bad!—stuff like falling through space forever and ever, never fetching up against a bulkhead.

Something had to give way. The situation was intolerable. And, one day, something did give way.

Frank was visiting his dear old mom and dad, and he happened to look in a mirror. He looked in the mirror. He looked at mom and dad. He looked back into the mirror again.

Something was clearly wrong.

"Aargh," he cried, leaped upon his dad and bit him severely on the thigh. It was something he had always longed to do.

They came and took him away to an institution for bewildered chipmunks like himself so that he could do no one harm until he recovered his senses. Meeper Blue was his doctor. They felt an important person like Francis X. Cheep-cheep would feel more comfortable in the capable hands of someone he knew.

"I see through it all now," Frank said. "None of this is real but me. You can end the sequence at any time. Wrap it up and put a ribbon around it and put it in the disposal! None of this is real. None of this is reasonable."

"Hmm.." said Dr. Meeper Blue, in a serious and professional way. "Why do you say that, Frank?"

Frank leaped up and flicked on the water tap next to the disposal system. "Is *this* reasonable?" he asked. "Why should water spring forth out of the wall at a touch? It isn't natural."

Meeper noted his words, wrote them down, read them over, and then nodded to himself. Then he looked up at Frank.

"Why not?" he asked judiciously. "Water has always come out of a tap, just like that. Why should it be any different now just because you aren't feeling yourself?"

Frank snorted. "I knew you'd say that. It's *plausible,* and you want me to believe in plausibility. But I won't. I refuse to believe in plausibility any longer. It violates common sense."

"Hmm.." said Meeper, and noted it all down.

"Or how about this? All around me I see this elaborate facade—bulkheads, schools, nuts, currycombs, chipmunks. What is it for? What is life for? All I can see is chipmunks working to live, living to work, working to live, living to work, ad infinitum. That's pointless ninnygaggle."

"Shucks, Frank. I have bad days when it looks like that to me, too. You're going to die someday. Get fun out of life while you can. You'll feel a lot better when you go back to work."

"You'd better be careful how you talk to me, or I'll bite you on the thigh, too!"

"Sorry, Frank."

"You're just saying that, but you don't mean it. I can tell. I know the truth now. All this spigglemorphing nonsense exists for just one reason. To keep me distracted so I won't be able to remember. But the truth is that *I'm not like you*!"

At these words, Meeper Blue averted his eyes.

"Yes. Ha. Gotcha. You're more or less real. You're one of *them.* Most of you aren't even that much. I know that now. Empty counters, automatons, automatic pieces, zombies. But you, you were assigned to me at the outset to see that I didn't remember."

"It isn't that way, Frank. Really. It isn't that way at all."

"That's what you say," Frank scored triumphantly.

Meeper sighed and set down his notebook.

"Now, Frank, it is true that you are ugly, and we've all done our best not to rub it in. But it's natural. I mean, you were *adopted.* But you can be helped. New surgical techniques have

been developed since you were a squeaker. If it bothers you so much—and we've all gotten used to it—we'll fix you up. Heaven knows, you're rich enough. You should be happy... And you can afford this kind of work if anyone can.

"Your sweet old mom and dad have signed the papers. We weren't going to tell you. We were going to let the fur and tail transplants be a surprise. But probably it's better that you should know now."

Frank looked at Meeper Blue and chittered in wonderment. He was two feet taller than Meeper or any other chipmunk. He was furless (except for lank drapings on his head and fuzzy patches elsewhere). He had no tail. He wasn't blue.

There was an unbridgeable gulf between them. How had he accepted it for so long. How had he ever accepted it?

They had told him that he was like them. They had seemed not to notice how ugly he was. They... And he had craved popularity and social acceptance.

He had been a fool. He felt like a stranger alone in a strange land.

Frank said, "You mean you aren't going to dismantle the sequence?"

"No, Frank."

"But I've seen through you now."

"No, Frank."

Dr. Meeper Blue stood. "I think that's enough for now. We're making real progress, Frank. Real progress. We'll see how things look to you after the operation. *I* think we'll have you out of here in no time at all. The nurse will be here in a few minutes, swinging her bushy little tail behind her, to give you your shot. You'll like her. She's a real—*chht, chht*—sweetiepie."

He winked. "And when you wake, you won't be ugly anymore."

Meeper went out of the room. Frank didn't bother to say goodbye.

Instead, he occupied himself with his thoughts. The prime datum of existence was himself, Francis X. Cheep-cheep. He was sure of that. They had told him clumsy lies, that he had but a few short years of life behind him, a few short years to anticipate. But that was wrong and he knew it. This space of time was but a tiny phase in his experience. He was sure of his continuity.

"I'm not going to die. I may be a closed curve, but closed or open, I neither have a beginning nor an end," he said aloud to himself. "That for you, Meeper Blue."

But the prospect of the operations frightened him. What if they made him forget? What if he had to start all over again to work out the truth?

There was a discreet tap at the door.

"Yoo-hoo, Mr. Cheep-cheep," came the voice of a real sweetiepie. "Are you decent?"

He heard the words as "you who?" and they struck him to the heart. He was galvanized into action.

"I am Francis X. Cheep-cheep," he said. "And I will not forget!"

He crossed the room in a bound, fed himself into the disposal system of his own invention, pressed the handle, and *blooped* elsewhere. It gave him great joy to do it.

He landed on a great pile of crap, trash, and other miscellaneous junk. As he strove to get his bearings, a nutshell materialized in the air above him, plinked him sharply on the noggin, and bounced away down the slope.

He followed its progress with his eye. He was in the largest room he had ever seen, spherical, well-lit, fully two hundred feet across. The surface of the sphere was frosted gold. Through the center of the sphere ran a roadway of metal latticework. At the very heart of the sphere, a band of something encircled the roadway.

The heap of trash he sat upon rested on the roadway not far

from the central ring—that part of the trash that had not spilled over and fallen far far to the surface of the sphere below. It was the greatest unbroken distance he had ever seen, and it made him giddy to look.

And it was then that Frank realized an incredible fact. He had traveled *outside the universe*—and he still lived!

He brimmed over. He nearly fainted.

But there was something somehow familiar, elusively familiar, about this place. He scrambled down the slope of trash as carefully as possible, sending only a few small avalanches of this and that careening over the edge and down to the golden surface below. At last he reached the roadway.

He was drawn to the central ring around the roadway.

The frame of the ring was some transparent material. A variety of dials and gauges were inset into the framework so that they might be read by one standing on the roadway. And in front of Frank's eyes there was a red button asking to be pressed.

Insisting to be pressed.

Demanding to be pressed.

He had to press it. He could not help himself. He must. He must. He was governed by irresistible impulse.

He pressed the button.

Instantly, the light around him failed. The surface of the golden globe became transparent (except where the pile of trash, junk and random crap rested).

Frank saw the larger universe outside the ship!

He hung alone in nothingness. He was surrounded by deepness.

He saw the stars! (Except where the garbage impeded the view.)

It was too much. It was too much!

This vision was one of those nameless terrors that had haunt-

ed him all his life. It had been terrifying in dreams, and it was terrifying now.

He screamed and stabbed at the button to turn the vision off.

He fell to his knees and cried with the agony of it all. He grokked wrongness.

Then he heard a sigh. Not his own sigh, but a sigh like the tolling of a bell.

"Garbage," a voice said. "Garbage all over my frosted golden globe. That will really be a mess to clean up. You really screwed up this time, didn't you? Garbage isn't what the machine is for."

Frank looked up, but the radiant glory of the figure standing before him was too much for him and he had to look away again. He felt stabbed with the sharp knife of emotions that were too powerful for him, emotions he was no more fitted to experience than a clam to play a tuba. Waves of weariness, tragedy and grief swept over him like a shitstorm.

With eyes averted, he said, "W-Who are you?"

"R. Monroe Weems. Who do you think you are?"

"I'm Francis X. Cheep-cheep."

"Wrong, Bob," said the great glorious personage. "You've forgotten yourself again. You are not Francis X. Cheep-cheep."

"But it's all I know. It's the one thing I'm certain of."

The figure sighed once more, a sigh that rang in the ears of Francis X. Cheep-cheep like the sound of doom.

"You haven't done what you were assigned to do. You are supposed to use the Machine to lead these chipmunks out of that blasted basement they huddle in and show them the stars. Not for a *garbage disposal.* Not just to pop about by yourself like a silly tourist. You have a job to do and you still haven't done it. Will you never learn?

"Well, you'll just have to go all the way back to the beginning one more time and try to do it over. My boy, you *know* you have a great future in front of you if you can only

forget this Francis X. Cheep-cheep nonsense and *remember* yourself."

A great future.

A great future!

So Francis X. Cheep-cheep had his answer. He was a closed curve. (Or was he?)

But a lot of good it did him to know it.

When the chipmunks found the baby boy in their midst, there was a note pinned to his diaper.

It said:

"Cheep-cheep 3:16—'The wider world awaits.' (Save this note for future reference.)"

While I was growing up,
the heroes of my youth grew old.

FICTION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Like all art, fiction exists as a reminder from ourselves to ourselves of the possibility and the necessity of personal evolution. If we need to be reminded loudly and often that growth is our business, it is because we find it easy to forget when living in the midst of the immediate demands and claims of society. We divert ourselves. We distract ourselves. We cling to what we are and what we have, greedy to keep, afraid to lose. And yet, not quite knowing what we do, we return again and again to fiction to be reminded of true order, value and purpose.

And to the extent that true order, value and purpose are to be found in fiction—found in the very structure of fiction regardless of its particular content and recommendations—fiction serves as a practical guide to life. To serve as practical education, it is not necessary that fiction should be about familiar circumstances, or even about people, places or things that have ever existed or are ever likely to exist. Fairy tales are not read to children as reportage of existing fact. They are read to children as essential practical education in the moral order of the universe—as truth.

We trap and cheat ourselves if we assume that fiction, in order to be taken seriously, should reflect familiar circumstance, current behavior and present possibility. What we cannot imagine...we shall be that. Next to what we cannot

imagine, all present social demands and claims must stand revealed as petty and impractical. The true practicality revealed by fiction is evolution, not attachment.

As an analogy, we might consider our human use of fossil fuel supplies. To many men, it has seemed the height of practicality to use these supplies of fuel as though they were endless, to use fuel to find more fuel to make more machines to use more fuel to make more profit to buy more machines to use more fuel... We might say instead that it would be true practicality to use our fossil fuel supplies as the means by which to develop self-renewing sources of power, even though these sources do not presently exist, and that it is false "practicality" to use these supplies as final ends in themselves. This set of alternatives might even make the basis of a novel, as similar sets of alternatives have made the bases of a hundred novels.

It is the mistaken, if not wholly unnatural assumption of a child that the condition of adulthood to which he aspires is a single thing, permanent and complete. For all that he knows, his parents were born to be his parents, his teachers were destined to be his teachers, and the policeman who helps him across the street has always been a policeman and always will be. If he is given a biography of a great scientist to read, it will be an account of a far-sighted youngster just waiting for the proper hour to utter his equation of moment and receive the applause of the world.

In fact, however, as adults know, adults are not born, but made, and re-made and re-made again. Over and over through adult life we are faced with critical situations which are too large, complex and difficult to be resolved with the resources of our present selves. The only way these life crises may be successfully met is by personal evolution—that is, by a sudden spurt of growth, by a wild quantum jump in ability that reduces what was previously impossibly difficult to a mere triviality.

In our society, these crises occur with statistical regularity.

A man's particular problems may be his own. His particular solutions may be his own. But the same crises seem to happen to most men at the same approximate moments in life, and if successfully surmounted are surmounted in the same way—by an evolutionary leap, a quantum jump.

The first of these crises generally occurs at the age of seventeen to nineteen when childhood ends and adulthood begins. From the child's point of view, the jump to adulthood looks impossible. In fact, the jump is impossible—for a child. To complete the jump successfully, the child must reject his former limited self, stake his life on a new identity, and remake himself and his universe in larger scale. When the child does identify himself with some end beyond the horizon of the childhood world, and loves it wholeheartedly, suddenly what was impossible to children becomes possible to him. He may separate himself from the shelter of his parents. He may take a full-time job. He may join the army. He may marry. He may become a university student.

A second crisis generally occurs in the mid-twenties. Society has encouraged the child to assume a new adult identity—has, indeed, held adulthood out as an end. But, by the mid-twenties, life usually reveals new and larger ends that cannot be contained within the new adult identity of the nineteen-year-old. That is to say, for the student, graduation approaches. For the husband or wife, parenthood. For the worker or soldier, promotion. In order to solve these problems—for their immediate prospect looms as problems of desperate proportion—the person must again expand his horizons. Again, he must change and become someone new. Again, he must evolve by rejecting his former limited self, by identifying himself with higher purposes, remaking himself and his universe to larger scale.

The person then ceases to be an apprentice adult, a mere man among children, and becomes a journeyman, a man accepted among men. He who passes this crisis generally is not only able

to encompass the entire basic range of adult behaviors with which he formerly struggled, but has also qualified himself in some profession or other. If apprentices are known by the training they are engaged in, journeymen are known by their occupations.

And so it continues through life. Again and again, the pressure of societal demand, or ambition, or aspiration makes the limitations of present self-definition inescapably apparent. Again and again, we children must take a reckless plunge into the unknown and stake our lives on a new larger identity. This is how journeymen become masters. This is how university professors become deans, politicians become senators, businessmen become company presidents.

In our society, crises tend to come in the early thirties, again at the end of the forties, in the mid-sixties, and at the close of life. Each of these is an identity crisis. Each can only be solved by a quantum jump, by an evolutionary leap, by an expansion of personal universe, by an identification with a new and higher object of love. Each new identification opens new horizons of possibility and makes formerly unsolvable problems as nothing.

Fiction is a dramatic description of personal crises and their resolutions. This is the common structure of all fiction. There is, in fact, only one eternal Story, of which the thousands upon millions of individual stories that men have told through the centuries are but variations or fragments.

The Story begins with a protagonist ripe for change. This protagonist may be a single character, or several, or a community. The protagonist may be restless. He may have unfulfilled potential. He may be troubled by dreams. He may feel hedged about by inappropriate rules. But in one way or another, his ripeness for change is apparent.

The character makes a transition from his familiar, safe-but-limited environment into a larger and more dangerous world

in which there is room to grow. The transition may occur voluntarily or under the pressure of events. It may be an accident or it may be deliberately sought.

In the larger world of unknown things, the character encounters perils and problems such as he has never faced before. The more that he attempts to deal with these in his previous terms, the more dangerous and threatening the perils and problems become. Ultimately, the protagonist has three choices. He may refuse the challenge of the unknown and retreat to the tight confines of his former situation. This is the way of stagnation. Or he may remain in the unknown world, fail to change, and be devoured by its perils. This is the way of attachment. Or he may surrender his former characteristics and grow. This is the way of evolution.

It is the way of evolution that is the true way. A version of the Story might, for instance, present us with three brothers and a challenge from the unknown. Perhaps a giant on the rampage. Perhaps men with legal documents. One brother might preserve his present state, but would clearly not be the better for it. One might suffer an awful fate for the sake of his limitations. But the third, whom we would be invited to admire, would certainly evolve.

This is the way of evolution in stories: The character must perceive the necessity of change. Whatever it was that formerly he identified himself with in this universe—and counted his chief strength—must seem, either sooner or later, to be evidently inadequate to deal with the perils and problems of the larger world of unknown things. What seemed to him his strength must be revealed to him as his limitation.

In a very real kind of death, he must surrender his old identity. This surrender is only possible if the character has and holds clearly in mind a higher aspiration—some new and higher object of worthy identification. The character then tests his new identification on the problems and perils that have threat-

ened him. And if re-birth has taken place, if there has been evolution, the new identification gives him such power that the problems and perils fall before him as though by magic.

Fiction not only tells us that personal evolution is possible. It tells us that evolution is identification with higher aspiration, and that such larger love renders overwhelming problems trivial.

These lessons of fiction are borne out in life. They explain, as nothing else can, the differences in ability that separate the apprentice from the journeyman, and the journeyman from the master. These differences are so marked that to the apprentice the abilities of even a journeyman seem magical—and the abilities of the master are beyond his ability to accurately reckon.

The apprentice loves a craft. That is his higher identification. But what he loves is appearance—mere surface. The apprentice serves his love by imitating the acts of his betters. But because he has identified himself with appearance, essence eludes him, and in every act he stumbles.

The journeyman differs from the apprentice in recognizing the existence of art-beyond-mere-craft. He has dedicated himself to a higher love—the art of the master, unsuspected by the apprentice. And the craft that is a problem to the apprentice in every detail comes effortlessly to the hand of the journeyman. The journeyman is accomplished in craft, but a bumbling imitator in art.

The master may accomplish what the journeyman only dreams because art is the higher love of the journeyman, while art is not the end of the master but merely the means to even higher ends. In consequence, art is no problem to the master, but his natural tool.

A man may be a true creative artist in any human endeavor if his ends are high enough. This is as true of janitors as of musicians, as true of pizza makers as of physicists.

Fiction tells us that there is a hierarchy of purpose in the universe. If this is true, proper occupation can be nothing less than devotion of oneself to the ultimate purpose of the universe by all available means. If one were able to identify oneself with this purpose, then all personal problems would be as nothing and much would be possible that is impossible to the ordinary apprentice, journeyman, or even master.

This is the self-justification of all organizations. It is the promise of advertising, of political movements, of the various religions that seek to claim our allegiance, and of low art and high. All these appeal to us through the vehicle of the Story. All present us with candidates for the ultimate purpose. Under test, however, these supposed ultimate strengths generally prove to be limitations of one kind or another. If there is an index of true human adulthood, it is not the attainment of legal majority or of full physical growth, but the ability to distinguish lesser purpose from ultimate purpose.

DOG PUZZLE

Imagine a house full of dogs. Imagine another house with a dog in every room. Imagine another house with a dog that is everywhere.

Which house is biggest?

THE DESTINY OF MILTON GOMRATH

Milton Gomrath spent his days in dreams of a better life. More obviously, he spent his days as a garbage collector. He would empty a barrel of garbage into the back of the city truck and then lose himself in reverie as the machine went *clomp, grunch, grunch, grunch.* He hated the truck, he hated his drab little room, and he hated the endless procession of gray days. His dreams were the sum of the might-have-beens of his life, and because there was so much that he was not, his dreams were beautiful.

Milton's favorite dream was one denied those of us who know who our parents are. Milton had been found in a strangely fashioned wicker basket on the steps of an orphanage, and this left him free as a boy to imagine an infinity of magnificent destinies that could and would be fulfilled by the appearance of a mother, uncle, or cousin come to claim him and take him to the perpetual June where he of right belonged. He grew up, managed to graduate from high school by the grace of an egalitarian school board that believed everyone should graduate from high school regardless of qualification, and then went to work for the city, all the while holding onto the same well-polished dream.

Then one day he was standing by the garbage truck when a thin, harrassed-looking fellow dressed in simple black mater-

ialized in front of him. There was no bang, hiss, or pop about it—it was a very businesslike materialization.

"Milton Gomrath?" the man asked, and Milton nodded. "I'm a Field Agent from Probability Central. May I speak with you?"

Milton nodded again. The man wasn't exactly the mother or cousin he had imagined, but the man apparently knew by heart the sort of lines that Milton had mumbled daily as long as he could remember.

"I'm here to rectify an error in the probability fabric," the man said. "As an infant you were inadvertently switched out of your own dimension and into this one. As a result there has been a severe strain on Things-As-They-Are. I can't compel you to accompany me, but if you will, I've come to restore you to your Proper Place."

"Well, what sort of world is it?" Milton asked. "Is it like this?" He waved at the street and the truck.

"Oh, not at all," the man said. "It is a world of magic, dragons, knights, castles, and that sort of thing. But it won't be hard for you to grow accustomed to it. First, it is the place where you rightfully belong and your mind will be attuned to it. Second, to make things easy for you, I have someone ready to show you your place and explain things to you,"

"I'll go," said Milton.

The world grew black before his eyes the instant the words were out of his mouth, and when he could see again, he and the man were standing in the courtyard of a great stone castle. At one side were gray stone buildings; at the other, a rose garden with blooms of red, and white, and yellow. Facing them was a heavily bearded, middle-aged man.

"Here we are," said the man in black. "Evan, this is your charge. Milton Gomrath, this is Evan Asperito. He'll explain everything you need to know."

Then the man saluted them both. "Gentlemen, Probability Central thanks you most heartily. You have done a service.

You have set things in their Proper Place." And then he disappeared.

Evan, the bearded man, said, "Follow me," and turned. He went inside the nearest building. It was a barn filled with horses.

He pointed at a pile of straw in one corner. "You can sleep over there."

Then he pointed at a pile of manure. There was a long-handled fork in the manure and a wheelbarrow waiting at ease. "Put that manure in the wheelbarrow and spread it on the rose bushes in the garden. When you are finished with that, I'll find something else for you to do."

He patted Milton on the back. "I realize it's going to be hard for you at first, boy. But if you have any questions at any time, just ask me."

Does every man get the guru he deserves?

JOHN W. CAMPBELL'S VISION

In September 1937, John W. Campbell, Jr. became editor of *Astounding Stories* under the supervision of F. Orlin Tremaine. Campbell was then just turned 27 years old.

E.E. Smith's first Lensman novel, *Galactic Patrol,* the peak and summation of Thirties' science fiction, had just begun serialization. A few issues more were in production. There were more stories in inventory. But Campbell, who had no previous experience as an editor, was being asked to assume the on-going editorial direction of the most successful science fiction magazine of the day.

Campbell once said: "When I first came to Street and Smith—quite some years ago, now—I asked the editor-in-chief: 'What does an editor do when he doesn't get enough stories to fill the magazine?' He sort of looked at me and said: 'An *editor* does.' That is the fundamental proposition against which any editor has to work."

Campbell became editor of *Astounding* in what seemed to be strait and difficult times for SF. *Weird Tales* had lost its way. Lovecraft and Howard were dead, and Clark Ashton Smith was ceasing to write. The new publishing genre, science fiction, was not doing well, either. Stanley G. Weinbaum, its freshest new writer, was also dead only months after his first appearance.

It is one thing to say that *Astounding* was the most successful science fiction magazine of the day. It was. It was the only monthly among three magazines. In 1936, Hugo Gernsback had been forced by circumstances to give up his dream of a magazine of scientifiction. He sold a failing *Wonder Stories* to a line of pulp magazines, who revived it after a hiatus, renamed *Thrilling Wonder Stories.* Both *Thrilling Wonder* and *Amazing Stories,* edited by 86-year-old T. O'Conor Sloane, were limping bimonthlies. *Amazing Stories,* too, would be sold to a pulp chain in early 1938 and change editor and character.

Neither were the stories of science fiction in the middle Thirties the exuberant fantasies of super-science and the exploration of alien playgrounds typical of the early days of E.E. Smith and the teen-aged whiz kid John W. Campbell. Instead, they were space opera of the narrowest kind, conventional pulp action adventure stories transferred to the planets of the Solar System.

What John W. Campbell brought to *Astounding* in this period of apparent collapse and imaginative failure was not editorial experience. It was something far more important—a new and more sophisticated conception of science fiction, derived from a new and more sophisticated conception of the nature of the universe.

All Twentieth Century SF to this point still made sense of itself in terms of a unifying vision left over from the Nineteenth Century. This vision was founded on the fundamental science of the day—biology, the science of Darwin and Mendel. On biological principles, the universe was seen to be governed by inexorable laws of growth and decay. Laws of evolution and devolution. These laws underlay the cyclic rise and fall of races and civilizations. They made one coherent pattern out of history's apparent odd bumps and lurches. This vision provided the underpinning for the lost race story, for occult

fantasy, and for H.G. Wells and his successors, as it did for the German Nazi Party.

These laws are still the premises of "Twilight," the first story Campbell published under the name "Don A. Stuart"—written in 1932, but not published until November 1934. In this Wellsian story, a time traveler finds mankind far in the future in the final stages of racial senility. Men have forgotten the principles behind their machine cities, which will still chug on eternally without them when the last men are dead. This situation is perceived to be melancholy, but not tragic. The real tragedy is that mankind destroyed all other animal life on Earth, so that there will be no one to succeed him:

"Always before when one civilization toppled, on its ashes rose a new one. Now there was but one civilization, and all other races, even other species, were gone save in the plants. And man was too far along in his old age to bring intelligence and mobility from the plants. Perhaps he could have in his prime."

Despite its air of Wellsian *Weltschmerz,* "Twilight" is an indication of a break in the old biological vision. Its ultimate allegiance is to the new science of the day—physics—not to biology. Mankind has destroyed the biological cycle, and at the end of the story, the machines, to whom the time traveler has imparted curiosity, will carry on until the final heat-death of the universe.

By the mid-Thirties, the transcendent unifying vision derived from biology no longer seemed in accord with the facts presented by the new Twentieth Century worldview. It seemed vague, unfounded and mystical, an old speculation no longer relevant. Therefore, the mid-Thirties collapse and retrenchment of SF.

Under this pressure, the young physics graduate, John Campbell, set out to analyze the weaknesses of the science fiction of his time, examining them and offering alternative

points of view. The Don A. Stuart stories, published from 1934 to 1939 in *Astounding,* except for the last, published in *Unknown* in 1939, were primarily exercises in criticism.

In the introduction to a 1952 collection of Don A. Stuart stories, Campbell wrote: "In many of the Don A. Stuart stories, there is the element of a dirty, underhanded crack at the pretensions of science-fiction—dressed in the most accepted terms of science-fiction. For no literature is sound, no philosophy of action workable, if it doesn't take a hard look at itself, and consider whether the Eternal Fitness of Things isn't getting a little tight across the shoulders."

Campbell's Don A. Stuart stories can be seen as challenges to the premises of "Twilight." The answer Campbell presented to the sense of futility apparent in "Twilight"—the same fatalistic futilism that overwhelmed Aldous Huxley and Olaf Stapledon, both writing at this same time—was the indomitable will of man. The dreams and the willpower of man are more than the match of the vegetative power of growth and decay. In this sense, Campbell's early super-science epics like *Invaders from the Infinite* and *The Mightiest Machine,* fantasies of the will to power and the dominance of man, were answers to fictions of decay and failure like *Brave New World.*

Campbell once wrote: "Man is *not* a realist; he's an idealist first, and a realist second." Campbell gave full credit to the power of thought from the time of the early super-science stories. He was convinced that the universe was responsive to thought, and that it would give up its secrets to anyone who had not lost his curiosity, but simply asked the right questions. He often said, "Nature is a blabbermouth."

In *Invaders from the Infinite* (*Amazing Quarterly,* Spring-Summer 1932), his trio of scientific wondersmiths, Arcot, Wade and Morey, name their mighty spaceship, *Thought*:

"The swiftest thing that ever was, *thought!* The most irresistible thing, *thought,* for nothing can stop its progress. The most

destructive thing, *thought.* Thought, the greatest constructor, the greatest destroyer, the product of mind, and producer of powers, the greatest of powers. Thought is controlled by the mind. Let us call it *Thought!*"

Armed with belief in the indomitability of man and the power of thought, Campbell showed mankind recovering from the threat of devolution under the pressure of fresh challenge, and man attaining new mental heights, in one Don A. Stuart story after another. In "Forgetfulness" (*Astounding,* June 1937), a story published only a few months before he became editor, Campbell presented the situation of "Twilight"—or so it seemed—and challenged it.

In "Forgetfulness," humanoid explorers from another star land on a far-future Earth and discover simple human beings, apparently degenerate, living outside long-abandoned machine-run cities. But these men are not devolved. They are advanced masters of mental powers who no longer have need for their cities:

"Seun is not a decadent son of the city builders. His people never forgot the dream that built the cities. But it was a dream of childhood, and his people were children then. Like a child with his broomstick horse, the mind alone was not enough for thought; the city builders, just as ourselves, needed something of a solid metal and crystal, to make their dreams tangible."

"Forgetfulness" is a late example of Wellsian science fiction. "Who Goes There?"—published after Campbell had become editor of *Astounding,* in the August 1938 issue—is an early example of "modern science fiction." In this story, the doubts and challenges are past. It is clear that Campbell had arrived at a new unifying vision of the universe, one based on a faith in the fundamental nature of physical law.

In "Who Goes There?", a shape-shifting monster is released from the Antarctic ice—an ancient Lovecraftian horror bent

on taking over the world. One member of the expedition reacts to the creature with hopelessness and despair:

"Copper stared blankly. 'It wasn't—Earthly,' he sighed suddenly. 'I—I guess Earthly laws don't apply.'"

But the more considered conclusion is not at all Lovecraftian:

"'This isn't wildly beyond what we already know. It's just a modification we haven't seen before. It's as natural, as logical, as any other manifestation of life. It obeys exactly the same laws. The cells are made of protoplasm, their character determined by the nucleus.'"

And, at the conclusion, this calm, scientific thinking is vindicated. "Who Goes There?" is not merely a debunking of occult fears. It is the proclamation of a new universal vision.

In the new universe that Campbell intuited, nothing is absolutely alien because all existence arises out of a common set of principles. The universe is held together, not by the iron bands of rigid law, but by the mutual relationships of its parts. We might call this a proto-ecological vision. The old universe was rigid and discrete, and powered in deterministic cycles. The Campbell universe, derived from the new insights of advanced physics, was a cosmic kaleidoscope in which patterns were free to be ever-new. It is this vision that underlies all modern science fiction.

Campbell never put his intuitive vision in words—certainly not in the days when it was only a half-formed *certitude,* expressible only in the form of action-parables. But it is visible in his late Don A. Stuart stories and even more visible in the fiction he generated as editor of *Astounding.*

The fact of his vision, and its size and complexity, if not its detailed nature, may be seen in a story Harrison and Aldiss tell as an example of Campbell's outrageous and provocative sense of humor:

"Characteristic is a statement he made just a few months

before he died. There was a group of us and the talk came around to literature and the place of science fiction in the greater whole of English letters. It was pointed out that some enthusiastic aggrandizers of SF stand on the barricades and declare that someday, due to innate superiority, the short story and the novel will be engulfed by science fiction and become a part of it. Others, perhaps more realistically, say that SF is one specialized part of the whole of literature. But not John Campbell! With a sweep of one great hand he dismissed these feckless arguments, then spread his arms wide. 'This is science fiction,' he said, from open-armed fingertip to fingertip. 'It takes in all time, from before the universe was born, through the formation of suns and planets, on through their destruction and forward to the heat death of the universe. And after.' His hands came together so that his index fingers delimitated a very tiny measure of space. 'This is English literature, the most microscopic fraction of the whole.'"

Campbell was not in himself the sole source of the new attitudes toward science fiction and the universe. He was spokesman and orchestrator of a new vision, but it was the vision of a time, shared by others, if more dimly. It was only because of this that Campbell was so able to find the writers to express his new insight and write the stories necessary to fill the pages of his magazine.

One of the earliest of his new authors, Lester del Rey, remembers: "He was, as I came to know, a great and creative editor. Nobody has any idea of how many of the stories in his magazine came from ideas he suggested, but a group of us once determined that the figure must be greater than half. He had a remarkable ability to pick just the right idea for a particular writer, or to throw out the same general idea to several writers and get back entirely different stories from each of them. Part of his success probably came from the fact

that he gave just enough of an idea to inspire, but not so much as to stifle the writer's own ideas."

Because of his philosophical centrality, Campbell *was* science fiction from the time he became editor of *Astounding* through World War II. In the postwar era, John Campbell's science fiction magazine was never again anything better than first among equals rather than the Platonic Ideal of Modern Science Fiction that it had been, but Campbell was chosen Guest of Honor at three World Science Fiction Conventions and his magazine won many awards. Campbell was still editing *Astounding*—by then called *Analog*—when he died in 1971.

Speaking of the problems of being a science fiction editor at a World Science Fiction Convention, Campbell once said: "One of the problems that I have is that every time I try to introduce a new approach or go off in a new direction everybody gets mad at me. Particularly the authors get mad at me: I am being a dictator, I am trying to get them to write more of what I want. Yes, sir, I *am* trying to make them write what I want. I want a new approach in stories. That does *not* mean the kind of approach that worked in the past.

"My problem is to get stories that are not like all the stories that have been published before and which deal with themes that have not been worn out—the Sense of Wonder that we have heard a lot about.

"One of the greatest problems is the guy who has written a story that has been a complete and howling success. I liked it, the reviewers liked it, the readers liked it—and so his next story is the same story told a little differently. Some of the early science fiction fans can remember Ray Cummings. He wrote a story called 'The Girl in the Golden Atom' (*All-Story Weekly,* March 15, 1919). I forget how many times he wrote that story; it was a great success...but he went right on writing that same story. It is natural that when a man has had a success of a particular type that he will seek to repeat that success.

But this is precisely what I *cannot* use. It is not science fiction! I do have to make writers write stories of a different kind. I don't care *what* kind as long as they will get out of the rut of writing the same kind."

If there was a flaw in Campbell's great all-encompassing vision, it was that in time John W. Campbell's own evolution came to an end. Eventually, while Campbell was demanding newness from his writers, he as an editor was vainly engaged in trying to repeat his own former successes. He attempted to relate to young writers as he had related to the young Isaac Asimov twenty years earlier, and attempted to stimulate them with the same ideas and paradoxes, the same vision, incompletely appreciative of the effect of the passage of time, and that the rest of the world had moved on while he remained in a sense in 1945.

HOW GEORGES DUCHAMPS DISCOVERED A PLOT TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD

Georges was making love to Marie when he made his discovery. She was, in truth, a most piquant thing with black hair and black eyes and skin of pale ivory. But, it cannot be denied, she had a button in a most unusual place.

"What is this?" Georges said. "A button?"

"But of course," she said. "Continue to unbutton me."

"No, no," he said. "This button."

He touched it with a finger and she chimed gently.

"You are not human," he said.

She spread her hands, an enchanting effect. "But I feel human. Most decidedly."

"Nonetheless, it is apparent that you are not human. This is most strange. Is it, perhaps, a plot to take over the world?"

Marie shook her head. "I am sure I do not know."

Georges touched the button and she produced another bell-note, quiet, bright, and clear. "Most strange. I wonder whom I should inform? If there is a plot to take over the world someone should know."

"But how could I be unaware?" Marie asked. "I am warm. I am French. I am loving. I am me."

"Nonetheless..." *Did-ing.* "It is incontrovertible."

Marie frowned. "Pardon," she said. "Turn again."

"Turn?"

"As you were. Yes." She stretched an inquiring finger, and touched. There was a deep and mellow sound like a pleasant doorbell.

"And what is this?" she asked.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said in surprise. "Is that me?" He got up and went to look in the mirror, twisting somewhat uncomfortably, and sure enough, it was. He rang twice to make sure.

"In that case," he said, "it no longer seems important."

He kissed Marie and returned to the point of interruption. Skin of smooth pale beautiful ivory. I understand that if Georges receives the promotion he expects they are thinking of marriage in a year, or perhaps two.

A TIME OF CHANGE

In times of rapid change, static people and static forms become identified with yesterday and left behind.

DYLAN STIRS

In the fifth year since Altamont, there is the feeling of upturn in the air. There is anticipation. Something is going to happen. Ringo Starr is quoted as waiting for the musical phenomenon of 1974 to reveal himself. So are we all. We have no good examples, and we need them.

We have had no musical leaders since the Beatles and Dylan. There has been moral and artistic confusion in rock during these years of the Nixon Disaster.

But now the Demon Nixon is chewing his own guts. All that which was hated and protested to no seeming avail in the Sixties is discrediting itself. The institutions of the world are in shambles.

Part of our sense of anticipation is our conviction that flowers can grow freely among ruins. In the wreck of meaninglessness, meaning can be expressed.

Not all the young were burned out in the alterations of mind and the generation wars of the Sixties. Some retired from sight at the end of the decade to discover how to live in accord with their new visions. It is their return which is anticipated.

Have the caterpillars become butterflies? Have the hippies and flowerchildren transcended themselves?

Humanity is in a bind. If we are to survive, we must all

become butterflies and transcend ourselves. But if we are to become butterflies, we must have examples so that we may see how it is done. Not leaders, but demonstrators of possibility.

At the moment, however, there are few examples of creative evolution to be seen around us. One could think the anticipations were for nothing—except that Bob Dylan is making a move.

We owe it to Dylan to remember that he is a marvelous being. We have never fathomed him, as we eventually came to know the Beatles. He still eludes us. A bid for attention from Dylan should be commanding.

Late last year, Dylan published *Writings and Drawings,* a definitive collection of his work from "Talking New York" and "Song to Woody" to "Watching the River Flow" and "When I Paint My Masterpiece." A retrospective. An end to a period. A promise.

At the turn of the new year, Dylan came out on tour after seven and a half years of privacy. He played the full range of his old music and he transformed it. He was full of grace and power. He reminded his audience that he had invented rock music.

Also in January, Dylan issued *Planet Waves,* a record that has baffled reviewers and gone widely unplayed—even though it is clearly both a spiritual autobiography and a fulfillment of the promises of *John Wesley Harding.*

Whether Dylan is a poet or not has been argued. By the standards of contemporary poetry, Dylan is a crudity, a clown. But the standards of contemporary poetry are a joke themselves. Among other things, Dylan is a true poet.

A poet is an indicator of truth through words. Society finds poets uncomfortable and they have not been tolerated in the Western world these last three hundred years. They have had to retire to an island and speak privately, like Robert Graves, or they have gone up in flames like Ezra Pound or Byron.

If it once appeared that after near-disaster Dylan had chosen the way of retirement, we must know better now. Dylan is still a true poet. The old music that he played on his tour was compassionate truth. What other music of the Sixties is still truthful?

What is marvelous about Dylan is not only that he is able to survive and continue to speak truth in public—which has not been possible for others—but that he is a poet in a new and active way. He is not a poet for the printed page. He is a poet for the ear. He has to be heard.

This is new poetry—but it is also poetry in an older sense. Dylan's music is an instrument of his poetry, his truth speaking. His harmonica is played more as punctuation than as melody. Dylan constantly alters words, alters his voice, alters his delivery—to keep the truth alive in his songs.

One sign of the true poet is his spontaneity. He perceives the truth through his intuition and gives immediate voice to it—while others lack words. Dylan is known for making up songs on the spot and for not lingering in the recording studio. His music is immediate.

Dylan's way of making music is a challenge to those who play with him. Playing for themselves, The Band are cool and tightly structured. Playing for Dylan, The Band is loose and hot. He uses them as they cannot use themselves.

One of the beauties of *Planet Waves* is its immediacy. In a time when most records are elaborately arranged, built in careful layers of sound, *Planet Waves* is a reminder that the sound of truth comes otherwise: The raw immediacy of Dylan's piano and Robertson's lyric guitar in "Dirge", a song written during the recording session, which the *New York Times* reviewer thought sounded like a rough demo. The fluffed first line in "You Angel You", which comes out, "You angel you, you're as...got me under your wing." The sleeve

button on "Wedding Song", scratching and clicking, somehow adding emphasis to its personal challenge.

"I love you more than blood," Dylan sings. That's bald. It is an example of love and commitment that we cannot yet manifest in ourselves. You have to be certain to sing something like that. And Dylan means to be believed.

Dylan may be a poet, but he is more than a poet. After his near-fatal motorcycle accident in 1966, long before anyone else was beginning the reconsiderations that marked the end of the decade, Dylan began to remake his life. *John Wesley Harding* was an indication of his new determination. It presented his apocalyptic confusions. It culminated with the song "The Wicked Messenger", which concludes: "And he was told but these few words / Which opened up his heart / 'If ye cannot bring good news / then don't bring any.'" And, as an indication of what Dylan understood by good news, the album finished with two love songs.

How is good news to be brought? The dedication of a poet is to indicate truth with words—but that was no longer enough for Dylan.

Like so many of us at the end of the Sixties, Dylan was faced with the problem of indicating reality with his life and not just with his words. A good messenger is more than a mere poet. His life is his message.

While others were singing of evil, death and despair, Dylan was practicing more positive notes, generally out of public view. In these past few years, Dylan has been incredibly active—learning and growing. He exercised the higher and sweeter part of his range. He appeared in public for the sake of others—Guthrie, Bangladesh. While other children of the Sixties moved to the country to get their heads together in quiet, Dylan moved from the country back to the city. Many musicians played on his records. The songs he chose to cut and release were tributes, thank yous and gestures of respect. He released

a vision called *New Morning* when others could not yet glimpse a coming dawn. He sat in on so many recording sessions that he was ho-hum sideman of the year.

For those without direction in these stagnant Nixon years, Dylan's visible activity seemed weak and wimpy. But it was not primarily intended for the public that received it. It was by-product, scraps thrown off by Dylan in the course of his self-work. What is clear at this distance is that it was all new, necessary, positive behavior from Dylan. He was doing the work necessary to become the person he wanted to be.

Previous incarnations of Dylan were not so gentle, not so co-operative, not so selfless. Not so genuinely mature.

That it was true work and not a failure of nerve or character is apparent in *Planet Waves. Planet Waves* is an autobiographical reconsideration from Minnesota to the present—largely in sexual metaphors. Sex has always been Dylan's weakest point. If there was ever a place where Dylan uttered selfishness instead of truth, it was in his songs addressed to actual women, which tended to be posturing, self-puffery and recrimination.

There is none of that in *Planet Waves.* It is honest about Dylan and sex, Dylan and fame, Dylan and his true heart's desire. Dylan shows where he has been and where he is now. The record is about growth, and it is an example of its subject. It has a dimension that we are not used to in our music. As so often before, Dylan is ahead of us, and it is taking time for people to recognize what is implicit in *Planet Waves.*

Two things are fair to say:

One is that Sara Lowndes Dylan must be a remarkable human being.

The other is that some major part of the transformation we are passing through, this moment of human liberation, is a fruitful redefinition of the marriage of man and woman.

Planet Waves is evidence that that redefinition is both desirable and possible.

And even so, *Planet Waves* is but a harbinger—a reiteration of commitment, an intimation of new skills and new power. It ends a cycle for Dylan.

What is to be awaited is Dylan's next new record. It will be Dylan-beyond-Dylan.

Listen to Dylan. Listen to the good news.

Not a leader. Not a bugle-blower.

An indicator of attitude and direction.

An example of possibility.

THE MANTLE OF SHAKESPEARE

If this poem
lacks rhyme and meter,
and all the other outworn devices
like, for instance,
alliteration and assonance,
it's because I don't know
an anapest
from a trochee,
and my rhyming dictionary
was lent to a friend
who writes greeting cards.
He doesn't know an anapest
from a trochee
either,
but we admire each other's work
tremendously.

NOW I'M WATCHING ROGER

Now I'm watching Roger. Roger is hanging facedown in his ropes overhead and looking at me. He isn't saying anything and I'm not speaking.

I wish I had the time to spare in relaxation that he does but I'm kept constantly busy. There are a million things here to do. If I had Roger's free time, I'd know how to put it to good use. I wouldn't idle.

I wonder about Roger's experiments. The only time he ever seems to work on them is during our regular telecasts to Earth. I asked him about his experiments once, but he didn't take notice. He jumped up into his ropes. He's very well practiced at it now. If I had more time, perhaps I could make flying leaps to the top of the dome, too.

Roger is too silent. He never speaks up when Jack does something to annoy me, and this encourages Jack to take more advantage. Roger will never settle anything, and I've saved him from Jack I don't know how many times. But how do you ask a man to back you? He either sees the need or he doesn't. It isn't proper to ask, so I don't.

On the other hand, if he's going to play the silent game, there's no reason why I shouldn't play it, too. The only time I'll speak is when I stir from my silent work to drag Jack off his back. But I don't expect he will notice.

*

To taunt me Jack takes off his black hat during our telecasts. He's charming and plausible. If you believe him, we would be happy to stay another eight months on the moon. I'm not sure I could juggle things that long, though I'll grant that Jack might.

When it is my turn, I nod and wave to Earth. I tell them we're keeping busy. Roger works away at his experiments in the background. He waves to the camera but he doesn't say anything.

When the telecast is over, Jack puts his black hat back on again. He spent an entire evening making it out of paper and coloring it black with ink. I didn't watch because I was busy working. Jack knows the black hat annoys me, but I'm not saying anything or taking any notice.

He may be plausible in public, but Roger and I know him better. He only eats the good parts of things and leaves the rest. I imagine he was indulged. And he's a glutton. I pointed it out when he left the rind from the Christmas fruitcake and his antics lasted for a month. He started by leaving crusts and bits of cracker on my plate and grew even more blatant when I refused to take any notice. At the end he was gobbling with both hands and flinging food about.

I do have an audio of several episodes but it isn't easy to tell what is happening.

I have a number of recordings of Jack. None of Roger except for background.

In one recording I say, "Jack, you haven't been sterilizing." It is a point I am particular about.

"It's true, Clarence 'Clancy' Ballou, I haven't been. I've decided to give it up. I'll take my chances with the moon. Let the moon take its chances with me. I wouldn't mind giving it a dose of something."

"That's against policy," I say.

"Screw policy, Clarence. Maybe you're too nice for this work. There's the universe, as regular as a clock. Then there's us, life, an out-of-place accident. We're anarchy, disorder. No matter how tough the universe makes the rules, life will survive and spread. The moon is only the first step. Someday we'll spread to the stars and take over everything. We'll rip the guts out of the universe. We'll stripmine the stars. Life will prevail. It's our destiny to crap up the works."

"You make us sound evil. That's what the regulations are for, to ensure that we don't contaminate other worlds."

"You don't understand, Clarence. We are evil. And it's up to us to make the most of it."

"But I'm good. I've always been good."

"Learn better."

It was after that that he made his black paper hat. It's supposed to be a reminder to me, but it isn't really necessary. I know which of us is which.

*

Jack is outside. I've been counting our sacks of garbage. I believe that two are missing. I fear the worst.

Was it sterilized? Not if he didn't sterilize it.

I fear the worst.

*

Just before the telecast, I say to Jack, "What about the garbage?"

"What garbage?"

"I know about the garbage. Unless you stop burying it outside, I'm going to have to tell them back home."

He takes off his black hat. He combs his hair and practices his smile.

"I've been counting," I say.

On the telecast I'm cautious. I say that some garbage is missing.

They ask Jack about it. Jack is in charge of accounting for the garbage. He says that it is all there.

I call on Roger. Roger smiles and waves from the background for the camera.

Jack smiles and tells the audience about garbage accounting procedures. He is very plausible. He thanks me for raising the question.

After the telecast he says, "I have a higher loyalty." And he puts his black hat on.

What can I do?

*

Another sack of garbage is missing.

*

I don't know what to do.

Roger just fell off the bench. Since I enforced safety regulations and made him stop sleeping in his ropes, he has taken to biting his fingernails and falling off the bench.

I've been thinking about Jack. I've been thinking about the moon infected with life. I've been thinking about people like Jack overcrawling the universe.

Jack is larger than I am.

I've just made myself a white hat.

*

Another sack of garbage is missing. Sometimes I think Jack is not completely sane.

*

I have taken charge of garbage accounting. I think I'll rest easier now that it is in my hands.

In future I think that the answer must lie in unbreachable refuse containers. And a tight check system to see that every-

thing gets deposited. But even these cannot be enough if the irresponsible aren't weeded out beforehand. The power of life must rest in hands that respect it. I'm not sure how that can be ensured, but I will think about it until the rotation changes.

This new job means one more intrusion on my time, but it's necessary. Those who can do are condemned to do to the limits of their strength.

I explained on the telecast to Earth tonight as best I could. I told them the problem and how I had solved it. I'm sure I didn't tell it well—Jack was always the raconteur—but they seemed to understand. Roger looked up from his work long enough to nod and wave to the people back home.

I think things are under control.

*

Things are much smoother now. The change in Roger has been amazing. He is more active now. He works with greater concentration. He listens to my advice and nods. He has even been outside the dome for the first time in months.

That is the good side. On the negative side he has taken to his ropes again. I haven't the time or the heart to speak to him about it.

I'm very busy.

*

I just counted and counted again to be sure. One of Jack's fourteen sacks is missing; I believe a foot. I don't know how it could have happened. The right foot, I think. We must get unbreachable refuse containers.

Now I'm watching Roger. Roger is hanging in his ropes and watching me.

THE ARROGANCE OF EMOTION

I feel it; I will do it—
To hell with the facts!

THE PROMISE OF THE SIXTIES

How wretched and agonizing and lonely these past half-dozen years have been, particularly for those of us who remember the high promise of the Sixties' counterculture.

It's not just been Cambodian bombings and Kent State, Vietnam and Watergate. It's not just been the economic roller-coaster ride. It's not just been the sickness of Nixon and the stupidity and failed leadership of Ford. It's not just been good old innocent idealistic America acting as the bully-boy of the world. It's not just been the exposure of the cheap cynical corruption of the men and institutions we were given to respect as children.

All that's Them—and we rejected Them 'way back in the Sixties. They've just been proving that everything we thought about Them was true.

No, the really hurtful part has been Us.

Our clothes, our music, our art, our drugs have been co-opted, merchandised, trivialized, taken away from us and made into nothing. The singers and writers and artists we loved ten years ago have fallen silent, or sold out, or committed suicide. Burnt-out cases. The bullhorn voices who cried to lead us in the Sixties have sunk back into anonymity. We've been left without positive example in a negative time. And so many of us haven't borne the burden well. Friends have forgotten how to be friends.

Lovers have found it impossible to live together and support each other's best nature.

It's almost as though Altamont, in the last month of the Sixties, set a psychic tone for the years that have followed, and we've been living in some film-loop nightmare world in which Hell's Angels clubbed all innocence to the ground again and again and again, while all that we could do is watch helplessly, mouths open, with no conviction that this endless bummer would ever grind itself to a conclusion and enough would be enough.

In times like these, caught in the eternal unpleasantness of the moment as we have been, what hope can we have for the America of five years from now? What possible reason can we have for thinking that it won't be just more of the same, only worse?

Well, there is this. Present actualities may hold their own immediate conviction, but no moment lasts forever, however overwhelming it may seem at the time. Moreover, that which is publicly visible in society at any one time is only that which is noisy and noticeable. It may not be the true whole.

Five years from now could be immensely different in character from this agonizing present we've all been suffering for so long. Not only could be, but will be.

What is our best hope for the America of five years from now? It's this (and we wouldn't offer it if we didn't believe in our heart of hearts that it will be the truth):

In the Sixties, a visionary generation perceived the moral bankruptcy of American society and spoke and demonstrated against it, buoyed by the discovery that what each of us had taken to be his own individual secret conviction was in fact the common property of all those under thirty. But, in time, we also came to perceive that conviction and assertion were not enough, that it was necessary for us to learn how to live our alternative vision and bring it into actuality. At the end

of the Sixties, the generation dispersed itself. It retired. It moved to the country. It went off to the woodshed to get its licks together.

The kind of fundamental self-evolution we've all been engaged in doesn't actualize and fulfill itself overnight. It takes time and work. Much time. Much work. And neither is it anything that can be performed en masse, in the full glaring light of public scrutiny. Following a vision inward is private work, pursued by individuals experimenting alone in their alchemical laboratories. Each of us teaching himself.

Some of us have given up. Some of us have failed. Some of us have fallen. But not all. By no means all.

In the midst of public chaos, in this time of creative silence, working in our individual isolation for our own hypothetical goals, it has been possible for each of us to wonder if we stand totally alone. We don't. We are still the visionaries that we were in the Sixties—but now we have become older, more mature, more self-realized beings.

In our absence, the hollow men and empty institutions that we railed against so vainly in the Sixties have done us the favor of destroying themselves. Now, one by one—not yet visibly, unless you should happen to be looking in the right corner of our society at the right moment—we children of the Sixties have begun our return, the fruit of our separate searches in hand.

As we come together in these next five years, we will find to our surprise and delight that the individual pieces we bring, seemingly separate, fit together to form a new and radically different picture. The pieces will fit together because the vision that underlies the very private and individual efforts of these past half-dozen difficult years is a vision common to us all. We are pieces of a whole, and vast synergetic energy will be released by our coming together.

There are signs all about us of the coming of these new and fruitful times. But do we need signs?

What we need is for us to bring our hard-won gifts together, reinforcing each other, each of us doing his own thing, all of us forming a new ecological wholeness. New people. Earth Persons all.

Here's to the future. Here's to a new America.

NAKED IN A SNOWSTORM

In these days when any man can comfortably dance naked in a snowstorm (Imagine careering down a long and leaning hillside, knee-high in snow, free flakes swirling about you shank to thatch. You kick and scatter the snow, start slides, throw it over your shoulders in scattering double handfuls, hop and caper in the gray and white twilight.) it remains true that the general run of mankind is sufficiently attached to their clothing to forego the opportunity. Theirs be the loss; I am assured by those who know that it is an uncommonly rewarding experience.

Some—simple folk, mostly—plead the need for pockets. If they must carry their trinkets and knickknacks about even in the midst of an uncommonly rewarding experience, one would think they could wear a pack, or carry a poke, or hang a little bag around their neck. But they say it's not the same, and pass snowstorms by.

For many, clothing is style. Clothing is taste. Clothing is breeding, intelligence, pursuit, ambition. *Place.* Clothing defines, letting us know who and what a person is. But one naked man in a snowstorm is much like another, and these people are incapable of baring their anonymity.

And for others, clothing is identity. Without their single well-worn suit, they would have no idea of who they were.

Naked in a snowstorm, they know they would be invisible and become lost. There are many people like this, most of them very much in need of an uncommonly rewarding experience, but limited and fettered by their clothes.

Even more limited and fettered by the fact that they have stuck staunchly by the very first suit of clothes they ever tried on. If you are going to be what you wear, you should try more than one style before you settle.

As an experiment, try on something strange and wild. What sweet whirling thoughts unsettle the mind? Think about them. Now, who are you?

AN ERA OF CHANGE

In a century like ours of constant change, the relevant forms of art will not only reflect change, but embody it.

THE FUTURE OF SCIENCE FICTION

Science fiction is a means for writing our perceptions of the world around us in large, so that we may see ourselves and the implications of our thoughts more clearly. At its best, science fiction lends us perspective and guidance in shaping the course of our lives.

For the last thirty years or so, our assumptions in the United States have been that at worst we and the Russians would have an atomic war and destroy the world, and that at best we would run the world and attempt to bring everyone else up to our level of moral and technological perfection.

In this same period, science fiction has reflected these assumptions. On the one hand, it has feared Atomic Armaggeddon. On the other, it has hoped that Earthmen would go forth into an empty or backward universe, plant colonies, and eventually rule a Galactic Empire.

We have now come to doubt our own moral and technological perfection. We doubt that the future holds atomic war. We doubt that America will or should rule the world. We doubt, too, that the universe is necessarily empty or backward. We doubt the wisdom or the possibility of Galactic Empire.

The world around us is now in a state of chaos. It seems that in the next few years the present bases of international finance, trade and politics will all be remade. At the end of

this period of radical change, we in the United States will be but one state among many. We will have been convinced that we have as much to learn as we have to teach.

An altered science fiction will help us to accept and understand the new world around us. We will be reading stories of men more flexible and able to grow and change than the Nixons of Amerika and the cosmic engineers of Terran Empire. We will be reading stories of men going forth into an inhabited universe and learning to find their true place amongst alien races of varied nature.

Just as our minds and lives have grown cramped and unpleasant, so has science fiction recently become limited and boring. This will soon change. As we begin to sense the new possibility around us, we will be encouraged by a new and exciting science fiction telling us of unheard-of wonders.

In the next few years, science fiction will have the most fruitful days it has yet seen. There will be new magazines and new forms of magazines. There will be new editors and new writers. The audience for science fiction will expand radically.

We are about to enter a new era in world history. We are about to pass beyond the narrow constrictions we have suffered since civilization was invented some five thousand years ago. We are about to become posthistorical man.

What is presently called science fiction will be the major literature of the time.

COMING HOME IN THE DARK

As warrens go, Zuk Null is a place where the people don't give a shit. It is a minimal neighborhood, a warren of blackouts and raw areas, of leaks and seepages, of corridors and apartments only partially transformed from their former purely functional state. The only people in Zuk Null who go in for hall ornaments and light organs and the rest of the conventional display are those with intentions of moving elsewhere who are practicing the appearance of virtue, or those who have come from elsewhere so recently that they have not yet discarded their veneer of civilized respectability.

The people in Zuk Null are not linked by the commonalities of age, interest or friendship that bind so many other warrens. They are too dispirited or too preoccupied to bother with a Neighborhood Defense Committee—though by ordinary Ship standards one is needed here far more than in most other places. Loners, madmen, misfits, failures, and unusual people of all descriptions gravitate to these dark corridors.

The only thing on which the populace is agreed is that they like things this way. Other than that, they mind their own business, if they have any.

I moved to Zuk Null after I switched from the Encyclopedia Universalis Project to Independent Study and my ration was reduced to the point that I could no longer afford to continue

to live in my old apartment in Tendril Towers, overlooking the splendors of Amerique Verte. I had to move somewhere. I picked out Zuk Null as a place in which I could stand apart a distance from the on-goingness of the Ship—the daily insistence of duties, projects, schedules and expectations—and seek the reality of things in the dank deep darkness undistracted.

That's what I wanted, but Zuk Null proved to be a place both louder and quieter than I had expected. For the loudness, I had an irascible neighbor named Bartram that I hadn't come to terms with yet—if terms could be struck with him. And in the quietness, my thoughts had not yet clarified themselves. On the other hand, my dear old fungus garden was happy and thriving in the basement atmosphere.

I needed my aura in the darkness of the way through Zuk Null, but I had it turned low because I did not want to attract needless attention from Bartram or whoever. I tried not to cough, and then coughed. Despite myself, I looked behind me, thoughts of the Yellow Flower Fraternity in my mind.

I felt struck by paranoid fear. I felt pursued. I felt freaked and pushed too far. I wanted nothing more at that moment than to reach home, lock my strong door behind me, and relax in peace and safety.

I knew I was close to home when I passed the place where a seep stains the rock wall and floor of the corridor in a pattern of orange, yellow and blue. A point of recognition in the road.

Then I heard the noise of trouble and fuss coming from what seemed to be the vicinity of my door. I took it for Bartram, discussing his state of mind with another local. I set my fears and fantasies of the Yellow Flower Fraternity aside in the face of this reality. I was in no mood at all for an encounter with Bartram. No I wasn't—not unless he insisted on standing between me and my door. Then I might be.

I turned right at the junction of corridors. There were multiple flashes of light. I heard sounds of protest and fear and

little cries of animal excitement. Whatever that was, it wasn't Bartram.

The lights were not from an aura like mine. They were conventional directed beams. Through the blur of movement and the flicker of lights, I could see that the main focus of the beams was a heap of something white, writhing on my doorstep. I caught glimpses of red and glints of metal.

I couldn't be sure what was happening, but for a chilling instant I had a nightmare impression of barghests—demon dogs with metal teeth—leaping, snatching, ripping, tearing.

But this was my corridor and my doorstep. It was my own turf and I was not going to be turned from it. I increased the brightness of my aura and approached as boldly as I could manage in the face of demon dogs with metal teeth.

In the light of my approach, movement suddenly halted and matters resolved themselves. The heap of white became a man in Crewcuts. An Officer of the Ship under assault!

Not just any Officer of the Ship. My own uncle—Commodore Pablo Pabon, a man ten years older than me. His pants were down. His ass was bare. There was a knife pricking him and a trickle of blood running down his stomach toward his loins. All his usual accumulated dignity and seeming competence was gone and there was a shocked expression on his face.

The persons attacking him that I had taken for barghests were cloaked in red robes, hooded in cowls. There was a large insignia on their robes—a mushroom like a scarlet white-speckled erection. I didn't know what was indicated by the insignia, but I knew the mushroom instantly—*Amanita muscaria,* the fly agaric. A frantic intoxicant.

The last thing that I recognized in that stolen, timeless moment of clarity was that beneath the cowls were the faces of women. Young women. Innocent faces. There were knives in their hands and the look of demon dogs in the depths of their eyes. In that instant, they seemed to me like so many

frightful Manson Children come to life from the horror stories I was told as a child in the darkness of the dorm.

The she with the knife at Pablo Pabon's chest pricked him again as though she were testing his ripeness. She smiled to see the blood run, and then rose to confront me as I approached.

"Who is that behind the light?" she demanded. "I cannot see you clearly. Reveal yourself!"

The other bacchantes whimpered eagerly in their throats. I felt they might unleash themselves at any moment and rip me apart.

There was a strange emotional note in the air that was almost audible. Like a musical screech pitched at hysteria above high C. Like tortured violins. It pierced my blood and cried to me of danger!

But this was my own corridor, prepared to respond to me. With a wave of my hand, I made it sing. Voice after voice adding harmonies to make a single grand chord. Then I brought the volume down and said:

"I am the Archangel of the Corridors! This man is under my protection!"

They could not penetrate my aura. My music overswept their houndish hysteria. They fell back before me.

The chief barghest cowered and showed her teeth.

"Go away!" she said. "It's only a Ship's Officer. We mean to have his heart for a start and his liver for lunch. We're going to crack his nuts for the meat and munch his tiny prick for sausage. What's that to you? If you stay, we'll have two."

I increased the brilliance of my aura and swelled the sound of my invisible choir.

"Put away your teeth and curb your bitches," I said. "I tell you to harm this man no more—Ship's Officer though he may be."

I thought I might bring it off. I thought I might cool their fever with music and set them dancing to my tune—five bitch-wolf goblin women in scarlet circling in the hallway to the

swell of my great organ. But my Uncle Pablo ended that possibility decisively. He recognized my voice behind the impenetrable brightness of my aura, and called to me by name.

"Heriberto! Heriberto! Is that you there? Help me! Don't let her do what she said!" he cried.

He scrambled and struggled to get his pants up. One of the women kicked him and put him down.

The innocent-faced Manson Child standing before me licked her lips. She waved her knife in inquiry, eyes gleaming.

"Are *you* Heriberto Pabon?" she asked.

That high-pitched intimation of danger, hysteria and madness seethed and whelmed larger than the soothing sounds of my music. I could not hear the music at all.

I was given away. I knew the moment was lost.

She leaped for me. The wild bacchantes surged, their thirsty knives flashing reflections of my aura like magnesium fire.

The only hope was confusion.

I stepped aside from her leap, closed my eyes and gestured. There was a whistle, a bang, and the whole corridor flared bright as a sun and then went blindingly black. There were screeches, whistles and bangs from here and there. Music played intensely. There were sudden silences and strange people calling, and now and then the insistent sound of rattlesnakes rattling.

When I opened my eyes, the blood-cloaked women of the mushroom were wandering in confusion, unable to see, their beams flashing uselessly, dizzily, over the rock walls. They made strange cries and two of them were striking desperately at each other with their knives.

I grabbed Uncle Pablo and said, "It is me, Heriberto."

He surged in my grip. "I can't see!" he cried, still dazzled, and seized at me with his hands as though he were drowning and meant to pull me down with him.

"Not again!" I said, and knocked his hands down. "Follow me, and you'll be safe."

I shoved a barghest aside, sending her sprawling. I kicked another who seemed to see us and struck at me.

I called to my service to open the door. I waited for what seemed an agonizing time for it to recognize my voice, hum, and come to life.

"Open, you damned machine!" I cried.

At last, the door came open, dividing and sliding back. I grabbed Pablo Pabon and hauled him through the division.

"Close!" I cried. And the door slammed shut.

And we were in a new place. We were home.

The howling women raged futilely outside, but what could they do? They came and banged at my door, but it was fully proof against them.

I panted. My heart was racing.

"Safe," I said.

Then, in the darkness of my apartment, the televisor shrilled.

Do places dream of people until they return?

YOU ARE THE SEA

You are the sea
Not the shore
Ebb and flow
Ebb and flow

DOIN' GOD'S WORK:
a letter to *Hitchhike*

It was a happy surprise to see *Hitchhike* show up. Since this issue is bound to generate more mail, I can only be sorry you didn't publish all those other letters—the ones you say you are intending to print next time. I want those letters now. I want *all* those letters. I want to know what *Hitchhike* people are thinking and doing. In one sense, *Hitchhike* is the collective autobiography of a generation. It is a very sensitive and valuable source of information. At least as good as comic books.

I have no doubt that Jay Kinney is right in thinking that comic writers and artists are muted and ground down by corporate owners. I wouldn't want to suggest that commercial comic books are an ideal medium within which to work. Clearly not. On the other hand, I do want to say once again that a person uninvolved in the problems of making comic books can learn a lot from watching comic books. From watching price changes, changes in ad policy, experiments in format, changes in content, in art, in layout, titles begun, titles dropped. Comic books are artifacts that come to the consumer bearing all sorts of information. Comic books, like tv, are in this sense very responsive media. You can pick up a lot of information from them. I'm quite sure that for someone working in it, tv is a frustrated medium. The evidence is there for anyone who looks at tv, just as it is there for anyone who looks at

comic books. Nonetheless, the *fact* that it is frustrated is an important bit of information. Just as the total failure of 90% of the tv series brought on in the last year and a half is an important bit of information. There is a lot of ferment going on in both the comic book publishing and tv industries. Much visible failure. Much experimentation. Strange, wild successes. Change in progress. Places to watch.

I have great sympathy for Jay's problems. He is a comic artist, concerned with problems of quality in a medium controlled by commercial interests who care nothing for quality. I have exactly the same problem in science fiction. At a science fiction convention one week ago, Cory and I were taken to dinner by an editor who works for a long-established, well-respected publishing house. After dinner, the editor took us to his room, sat us down, and said, "And now to business." He proceeded to tell us for forty-five minutes that he has no control over quality, that the owner of his company speaks of the books he publishes as sardines, but that this place is better than the last publishing company he worked for because here they sometimes let him do something halfway right because he is a pleasant person and they respect his pleasantness. In short, he confirmed every suspicion we ever had that our concerns with quality are incompatible with so-called commercial publishing. I've looked for editors, agents, and publishers that I could work with. If I recognized a publishing situation I could be part of with pride, I would gravitate there instantly. But I don't see any. I wonder if my frustrations are shared by others. I think of self-publishing and look into costs of typesetting, book manufacture, and distribution. Worry about raising money for the venture. Dream and fret.

And even so, I would never deny that someone at a distance from these problems might find sf an interesting place of ferment and change, might learn a lot from watching it, might learn a lot from watching writers struggle with the unrespon-

siveness, the lack of intelligent appreciation of the nature of the work, and the money-oriented thinking of the publishers.

That's one of the reasons that I admire Dylan. Jay Kinney and Creath Thorne both seem to think that Dylan is a product of hype and a creature of the corporate interests. Not so. Not so. I admire Dylan because he has managed, as an artist, to speak clearly and to continue his personal growth *in spite of* corporate priorities, corporate values, corporate pressures, public attention, public adoration, public rejection, and public analysis of every eyebrow twitch.

I demand my right to admire Dylan without being accused of sounding like a publicist for Dylan (Creath Thorne) or, alternatively, sounding like one blinded by mythmaking corporate publicity for Dylan (Jay Kinney). I bought my first Dylan album in 1963, and I only came to my present opinion about the man as a creative artist in the Seventies—at a period when he was as lightly regarded, as Out, as he has ever been since he first caught public attention. My respect, my understanding, my admiration for Dylan as an artist of unique depth and power came slowly, and it is by no means complete. He has accomplished more than I have yet been able to appreciate. That's not hype. That is a simple and true factual statement.

I take Dylan's comments in *People* with complete seriousness. Dylan, speaking as one human to another, made several comments to a reporter who was intrigued enough by them to repeat them—along with a lot of other remarks, as interpreted by the reporter and stitched together and edited and edited again. Yes, there is distortion. Yes, there is media mentality. And yet, something does get through. Certain of Dylan's remarks strike me—as an artist who is trying to follow truth in the midst of a wicked, materialistic world—as just the sort of thing another artist who is trying to follow truth in the midst of a wicked, materialistic world might say.

Let me give the quotes again, a little more fully quoted:

"I didn't consciously pursue the Bob Dylan myth. It was given to me—by God. Inspiration is what we're looking for. You just have to be receptive to it."

"I don't care what people expect of me. Doesn't concern me. I'm doin' God's work. That's all I know."

"What I'm trying to do is set my standards, get that organized now. There is a voice inside us all that talks only to us. We have to be able to hear that voice. I'm through listening to other people tell me how to live my life."

I take Dylan to be sincere. I take his words with utter sincerity.

Dylan is an artist, attempting to do God's work, attempting to hear his inner voice, which is the voice of God. So he says.

I can just see Dylan, his eyes crossed as he attempts to hear the voice of God and follow it, reeling around the landscape, doing word-and-sound magic that leaves people reeling sympathetically as he passes. And as he passes, other people say: "It's all hype, you know. He does it for money." or "It's not the same as it used to be, is it? Why doesn't he sound like *Blonde on Blonde*?" or "I refuse to be impressed by a bad harmonica player."

But none of this has *anything* to do with what Dylan is doing and why he is doing it. And some people do pick up true vibes from his word-and-sound magic.

A couple of years ago, I picked up a book called *Bob Dylan: A Retrospective*, edited by Craig McGregor, that reprints just about every serious interview Dylan ever gave prior to 1972. Even in his most twisty and surreal mid-Sixties interviews, he alway took care to speak truth. The ring of truth, of sincerity, has always been perceptible in remarks honoring the inner voice and the pursuit of truth.

Dylan has always followed his innerness, and people who judge him from outward action, outward appearance, will invariably misjudge him. He is doing his best to do God's work and not to care what people expect of him. He is trying to set standards. To hear that voice. To be receptive to inspiration. He says so, and I believe him, because along with Jay Kinney I think that this is the wellspring of artistic creativity, to pay attention to the inner voice.

What is remarkable about Dylan is not that he makes mistakes. What is remarkable is that considering the heavy burden of public attention he carries, he makes so few mistakes. He seems to have heard his inner voice more clearly, and done the work of God more successfully than any other artist of his generation—and under more trying outward circumstance. That is admirable, by God.

Passing negative judgments on Dylan seems so fruitless to me. If you can, watch him. If you can, learn from him. If you can, enjoy him. If you can't, quietly pass him by. But don't discount him—especially not if you aspire to be an artist.

THE GREEN ELEPHANT

Once upon a time very recently, in Africa in a village where they still raise crops by poking in the ground with a sharp stick, only a sophisticated few toil with a hand-tiller, and most people are hungry, a husband and wife built a tractor in their basement. Or perhaps it was in their garage.

They accomplished this feat through the development and application of many new skills, through strange experiences, much thought, hints gleaned from a Sears catalog page that blew in one day, through intuition and seven years of toil. Their first working model was somewhat ungainly, built out of scraps and pieces, but it did operate.

While waiting for necessary gasoline to arrive so that the tractor might be put to work in the field, the inventors parked the tractor in the street for the village to see and become accustomed to.

The first to spy it was the village idiot. He went crying through the streets, "Beware the green elephant! Beware the green elephant! It will drive you mad to look upon it!"

The villagers who quickly gathered speculated as to what the tractor might be and what it was good for. A two-year-old thought it was a mountain and set out to climb it to the very top, standing at last on the seat and waving his chubby little fists in exaltation. A passing art critic took one look and hurried

off to write a review in which he was particularly proud of the phrase "displeasing cross between a rococo rollerskate and a pregnant warthog." Two teen-agers proposed to demonstrate their mastery of the object by toppling it over. When they found they could not, they pulled out their aerosol cans and spray-painted their private marks on it, and the graffito "King Dong." Opinion in the crowd became sharply divided on the question of whether the tractor's *ngkindinki* was *kalongo* or not. And there was even a fight about this. Eventually, however, the tractor's lack of responsiveness began to bore the people, and they drifted away in search of some new diversion to keep their minds off their hunger pangs.

This was at a previous time. Now the gasoline has arrived. Crops are being raised. Now that the principles have been discovered, other and better tractors are being built. And when little boys climb up to play on the very first tractor, they sit behind the wheel, make *putt, putt, putt, putt* noises, and look behind them to imagine the earth they have turned.

PROVERB AND COMMENT

The dogs bark; the caravan moves on.

Fold your tent; steal away.

THE SPECIAL NATURE OF FANTASY

Fantasy is plainly an outmoded literature. In this modern world of interdependent nation states, computers and television satellites, fantasy speaks of mythical kingdoms and magic. Science fiction, at least, may pretend to have relevance to our future, and so capture our attention. Fantasy speaks only of a yesterday that is nowhere to be found in all our atlases and histories. The question we have always asked ourselves is, what is the difference between science fiction and fantasy? Perhaps the question we ought to have been asking is why fantasy should survive at all in our times.

The fact of the matter is that fantasy does continue to be read. Even more important, it continues to be written. These facts cannot be quarreled with. By their existence, they justify themselves. All that we may fairly do is try to understand why these facts exist.

Fantasy endures in our time in spite of its anachronistic superficial trappings because it has a special character that human beings need and seek which cannot be found in any other contemporary fiction. Not in ordinary mimetic literature. And not in science fiction.

In extraordinary moments, we may have the sudden conviction that the universe around us is not inert, fragmented and linear, but rather is a responsive whole. We may look into our

past and realize that no simple chain of cause-and-effect can account for the miracles—the radical discontinuities—that have happened to us. We may even come to suspect that these miracles are more than accidental, that they are responses of the universe to our own moral conduct.

Fantasy is a reflection of these perceptions. The universe of fantasy stories is a responsive moral universe. In a fantasy universe, anything is possible. Any miracle may happen. Even the stones may speak. In a fantasy universe, all acts are significant. In our rush for personal power and success, there is no old man or little girl, no fox, no crow that we may safely ignore. All our acts must be morally pure. The whole universe is watching us and responding to what we do.

Mimetic literature does not reflect these perceptions. The universe of mimetic fiction excludes the transcendent, the miraculous. Only the accountable may happen. In consequence, whatever moral dimension there may be in a work of mimetic fiction will necessarily be constricted and rationalized. Mimetic fiction is social rather than moral in character. It is captivated by the superficial.

Science fiction, on the other hand, does permit miracles. In the sf of the last century, the miraculous was an invader of the rational cause-and-effect world. In the sf of our time, we have gone forth from our era and our familiar world to meet the miraculous. But the very fabric of the sf universe has not yet been demonstrated in story to be transcendent.

Moreover, in science fiction stories all acts are not yet perceived to be morally significant. In fantasy, magic is clearly white or black, moral or immoral. In science fiction, science-beyond-science—the contemporary equivalent of magic—is not so clearly defined. There are not white telepaths and black telepaths, even though telepathy does have a moral dimension.

Nonetheless, the trend of development in science fiction is toward the miraculous and the moral. Science fiction is striving to find contemporary terms which express the essential perceptions preserved for our time in fantasy stories. As this happens, science fiction and fantasy will tend to fuse. There will be less and less visible distinction between them. In our own lifetimes, pure re-creative fantasy will cease to be written. But sf will increasingly take on the character of fantasy.

ROCKWILD

When the planetary prober was installed aboard her ship, beautiful Lady Sunshine and the squat and lumpish Magoon of Beatus traveled through hyperspace to the nearest place of those selected for search by the ship's computer. They emerged from hyperspace near a sun that was living green fire.

Lady Sunshine pursued the directions indicated by her ship, and found a planet. An unknown world! A candidate for True Earth!

She settled the ship into orbit around the planet, and then with the advice of her computer launched the drone rocket. The Magoon looked down at the mystery that waited below them.

"This is more than I ever expected," he said. "And the very first try. At this moment, I can almost believe in your True Earth. But I will be more than satisfied if this world is the superior of the Mungly Planet."

But what they discovered was not equal to the Mungly Planet—not as a place of human habitation. It was not even to be preferred to Beatus.

*

The two mechanicals rolled forth from the drone. There

was nothing to be seen in the somber green light of the distant sun that was not rock or shadow. The shadows were ripe violet in color and strangely cast. There were no clouds in the sky. No wind breathed. All was silence.

Lady Sunshine wheeled slowly on her universal motivator, looking all about them. The Magoon stood still, but slowly rotated an eye.

The rock that surrounded them was brown, and green, and red-black and gray. In some places these colors were separate. In others they were streaked and intermixed.

The texture of the rock also varied, independently of color. In some places it was delicately roughened, like the hide of a beast. In other places it was as smooth as though it had been finished. And yet, as they looked about them, they saw that in still other places it was slick and polished, like a natural glass in which they might see themselves reflected.

There were no straight lines anywhere. All was curves and undulations. The rock was rippled in places like the surface of a pond, and otherwhere it was waved like the surface of an ocean. It was molded in many ways.

In the absence of other life, rock had grown here after its own ways, unmodified. It had slowly fashioned itself. It had made itself into fairy spires, into private abstractions and unknown plastic shapes. Or it brooded through time, considering what it would become.

It was many, but it was all one, for there was nothing in this world but rock, and the shadow of rock. It was natural, but its nature was strange to them. As they were strange to this place.

As they looked about them, they saw that the drone had landed on top of a great singular rock formation, so that they looked at the world about them from a height among heights. They were very near the brink of a smooth and graceful swoop to destruction.

They did not speak to each other, these two mechanicals. How much time passed as they looked about them they did not know, for they did not reckon time.

If this world was strange, it was all the stranger for being judged by the standard of True Earth. That standard was not applicable here. No computer could rectify what the mechanicals perceived, but only make their perceptions more singular and unique. Nothing here could be judged by any human standard. It had its own reasons for being.

At last, Lady Sunshine said: "This is not the world I seek."

She struck at the rock with an edged extensor. The rock gave forth a light hollow sound as though it were brittle. Then it chipped. Now there was a great visible mar in the perfect surface of the planet.

"Nor is it the world I seek, either," said the Magoon. His voice rang thinly, overwhelmed by the towering rock about them.

"And yet," he said, "to think that we stand here where no other sentient observers have ever stood before. Could there be a lonelier place than this? What we see now has never been seen before. When we leave, it will remain unchanged through the eons, never to be seen again."

But the planet gave counterevidence. Where it had been chipped, the rock healed itself. Where it was marred, it slowly grew smooth again. Where fragments lay, they were absorbed by the mother rock.

And then something most strange and awesome happened. The rock face shrugged beneath them. A great blind ripple passed through the surface of the rock as the hide of an elephant might involuntarily shudder to dislodge a fly.

Lady Sunshine was nearer the edge of the formation, close to the long shattering swoop to the lower rock. The surface beneath her motivator was slick and she could not gain traction. The rock undulated again, and she was skidded against her

will toward the great hurtling slope. She was helpless to stop her progress. She spun her motivator futilely.

The Magoon did not move to aid her. He watched her silently. And then as another wave passed, he fell over. She wondered why he made no effort to rise.

He was far away. She was helplessly sliding, falling, and destruction had her. It was like a slow and silent dream.

*

Then the helmet of the probe was lifted and she was free and safe. The Magoon, that brown and hairy creature with great large nose and deep sad eyes, looked down at Lady Sunshine. She was disoriented.

"I think the mechanicals were best abandoned," he said. "That world is no place for us."

"Yes," she said, still falling. "Yes."

They did not discuss the world of rock further then. It was too strange a place to be lightly spoken of and their experiences were too much with them.

It was only when they came to give it a name that they spoke their true feelings. The Magoon would have called the planet Rockwild, but Lady Sunshine preferred Eterna. She was captain, so it was entered that way.

"It was like a cathedral of some forgotten religion," she said. "It was awesome and majestic, but also incomprehensible and inhuman."

"Did you think so?" asked the Magoon. "I felt the same, but I thought it must have been a disappointment to you, since it was so clearly not True Earth."

"No," said Lady Sunshine. "That visit was not one I would repeat, but I would not surrender it. The slow power of that place overwhelmed me. I think it has followed another road than ours, one far slower and less headlong, one less improvised, one more well-considered. Even before life arose on Old Earth,

I believe that planet was making itself. It has never considered an alternative to being rock. If impetuous man and that which impetuous man becomes are not the true way of the universe, then the rock of that world may slowly demonstrate its own truth. It is an alternative to us. We may not criticize it, but only leave it abide."

"I am sobered by such patience," said the Magoon. "I wonder on what day we will communicate with that world?"

"And on what terms?" said Lady Sunshine.

"And to what ends?"

THE AMOEBA'S DREAM

The amoeba only knows as much of the universe as it can touch, and its direct image of the world is necessarily incomplete. But generation to generation the amoeba remembers what it has touched, and builds and builds its picture.

We know at first hand a bountiful universe beyond the amoeba's dreams. We are the amoeba's dreams, the result of its striving to know more of the universe. And generation to generation, we remember what we have touched, and build and build our picture.

When man first started counting, he thought he had five senses: hearing, sight, taste, smell and touch. On a recount he discovered that subsumed under touch were at least three senses, separate and distinct—pressure, temperature, and texture—and that subsumed under taste were at least two.

He kept counting, and added the vestibular and kinesthetic senses. And the so-called Synesthetic Gearbox, which added confusion to sense.

One count totaled twenty-six, and another thirty-two. The definitive study by DeJudicibus in 1107 of the Galactic Era listed seventeen common human senses, from sight and smell to esthetics and self-awareness, and twenty more senses as rare, indistinct or only rumored.

The seventeen basic senses appear in every combination and degree in humans, the variance accounting for so many of our everyday differences in opinion. Any one sense may be strengthened to impressive limits by attention, experience and practice. But even all seventeen senses at their limit yield an imperfect picture of the universe. Subtle harmonies lie beyond our detection. The stars sing songs no man has ever heard.

However, if man doesn't hear the songs the stars sing, there are those who do. The Bessain, for instance, have been engaged in an eon-long conversation with their star to claimed mutual benefit.

And we have our strengths. Our senses are more than receptors. They acknowledge the presence of other sensitive concentrations of energy. Without sight—and our appreciation—the stars would not shine.

The Bessain report their star is delighted that its theoretical efforts are appreciated. So ask not for whom the stars shine. They shine for thee, and they are glad to do it.

LIMITED KNOWLEDGE AND TEMPORARY EXPEDIENTS

In every age of the world, human beings have been faced by a universe too multifaceted and kaleidoscopic for reason to completely grasp. Every age has presented its own unique problems to men, and men have scrambled to solve these problems—applying the best knowledge of their day to the task. The problems are always new. The best knowledge is never quite enough. We are always challenged to make a stretch, to act in the dark, to deal with problems that knowledge and reason have no precedents for.

An example from a distant period might be those special desperate circumstances that led men to domesticate animals. It is a problem present men and women wouldn't have a clue as to how to solve. But we don't have to. It is not our problem. It is a problem that was solved—somehow—by so-called prehistoric primitives in a long-ago day. Amazing men and women, able to convince animals to live with us, give up their autonomy, serve our purposes, when the animal-trainers of a present day cannot even induce many wild creatures to breed in captivity.

What is a problem and what is a proper solution? Every age thrashes that out for itself as best it can. World War II may be perceived as a contest between two proposed solutions to the great problem of the period, the unprecedented worldwide economic dislocation that lasted through the Thirties. The

answer worked out by Nazi Germany was to purify society, to purge it of those perceived as hostile, useless, inferior, and/or imperfect, so that the Reich might be a lean, clean, efficient machine. The American solution was more generous and inclusive. It was to make a blind bet that they could beat the Depression by putting everyone to work—be he a foreign-born, a Negro, a geek, or any other equivalent of the elements of society that Nazi Germany was finding it expedient to treat as waste, as non-human, as impurities preventing a clean burn in the engine of the machine society. The American answer might be said to be a machine for every man. For every woman. For every child. Many machines. Technology galore. The dream of a day when every American family might have its own electric can-opener, and everybody so busy making and using all those turbleburblent machines that the economy could sing. America didn't get its solution into full operation until World War II forced it into being, but at the conclusion of the war there could be no doubt that the American model solution to the economic problem posed by the time had prevailed over the German solution in a pure test of their respective generating capacities.

Note that both Germany and America saw the answer to the great problem of the era in a common image—the brightest and purest and most puissant magic that their science could present to deal with an unknown demonic influence that could not be touched, felt, smelled or tasted, but which stole men's jobs, eliminated the savings of a lifetime in a day and killed hope. How to tame the invisible, inevitable, gobble-gobble Depression monster? The common answer of Germany and the United States was to beat it to death with a machine, but the two societies applied the common insight in different ways. The machine, epitome of pure power: One society threw machines at every problem or non-problem in sight. The other attempted to pretend that it was a machine.

World War II was a contention of pure power, both sides being convinced that problems can be solved through the application of brute force. Two great blade-whacking super-dozers. Wham, wham, wham. Beat 'em into submission. Not by accident was this great contest of machine strength culminated by the big bang.

Weird! The whole thing is long ago and far away, and it all seems a very strange way to think. How mistaken, how unthinkable, how grotesque, how unimaginable the whole Nazi trip looks to a later time with a very different set of problems—and different best knowledge, different ideas of what solutions are like. And what could G.I. Joe have had in mind when he went off to Japan to drop atomic bombs on people to find out how big the big bang would be?

In the middle of our present on-goingness, with Vietnam and Watergate behind us, and the problem of coping with the excesses of the post-war machine people with their know-nothing power philosophy as one of the most central and pressing and frightening of the period, it is hard, difficult, nearly impossible to imagine thinking like that. The Nazi goose-stepping power trip is as bizarre and baffling as the stories we are told of Aztecs pulling the hearts, beating beating, from the chests of living victims for some flipped-out religious purpose or other. Or Mongols slaughtering the populations of whole cities and building pyramids of skulls as monuments to the power of the Mongol way of doing things.

What were any of these all about? What did they think they were doing? We will never know, but we have to believe that all of them were trying to make an approach to some perceived problem of the age. Fantastic contortions—but then, we have no way of knowing how bizarre, demented or even perverted the thoughts and actions of some by-gone problem-solver trying to buddy up to a wild hog or a proto-chicken would seem to us now could we but share them.

Or how radically mistaken, deluded or outright humorous our own attempts to cope with present problems may seem to future side-line quarterbacks with different best information than our own.

Well, to hell with them! They aren't here. They—whoever they are—don't have to cope with the overwhelming imperatives of the problems of the Seventies. We do. We're here and now and we can't get out of it.

If there is an answer to the hydra-headed monster of the Seventies that is equivalent to the magical machine technology that overcame the Depression bogey, it lies in the concept of ecology. And everybody in America knows it in the same way that everybody in America in the Thirties had an inkling that the answer lay in machine technology. Somehow. If it could only be hooked up, or hooked together, somehow. But how? And here best knowledge throws up its hands.

Who knows or could say what the actuality of it will be like, or could predict that we will apply our central concept-image of the universe as eco-system any straighter and truer than the Nazis applied their central concept-image of the universe as machine?

All that we can do is keep our heads as straight and true as we can and work on the unique problems served to us as our fare by a bountiful universe well-provided with appropriate problems for all times and places. We've got ours and we have to work at solving it—even though we lack the information and experience.

It all has to be worked out, hit or miss, in the dark. People with the concepts of ecology, or holograms, or whole systems theory will be trying to put their Whole-Earth-Catalog ideals and commitments into practice, apply them to the trash of the machine-for-everything society, and turn it into compost. Turn it into useful and decorative objects crafted by the hand and mind of human beings.

With the whole-systems/ecology idea in mind, with our best inadequate information and our best inadequate concept of what the problem is in the first place, and with intuition and improvisation, we shall probably muddle through our current crises. That's the way problems are met. It's the human way.

NIGHT THOUGHTS

Earth meditates,
Air questions,
Water dreams,
Fire lives and fire rules the night.

Earth mulls deep brown thoughts of time past,
While fire dances.

Air touches the world with pale wondering fingers,
And fire dances.

Water sings of freedom's illusion,
But fire dances.

Fire brief,
Fire bright,
Fire brilliant:
Fire inspires, and fire rules the night.

NIGHT PASSAGE

He stood alone. Jana, the moon, was rising, full and fat. The night was new. Haldane stood, bare feet spread, naked but for his smock, one who was stripped to nothing but his essential self, and tasted of the night's chill clarity.

Haldane thought then that he would make his way inside the land to Barrow Hill and there he would find Oliver, and together they would walk to Palsance. And so he set out along the path, for there was a way into the land immediately thereby behind a bush. The boy went along his way toward Barrow Hill through bright and flighty night, through calm chill under flying skies. All around him was infinitely alive, infinitely sensitive.

He had survived, and he had not thought he would. After all that had happened, he was still himself, and he rejoiced.

And then he began to notice the strangeness of the night.

The clouds ran wild across the sky, but the night was windless. The night air was cool, but it *was,* it did not stir about. He looked more and more to the skies as he walked.

Because his attention was in his eyes, he did not know when first the leaves in the trees about him began to shake and shiver. Now and then, the whispering rattle. The talk of leaves in wind.

But there was no wind. The night air was clear, and, but for the leaves, it was silent. It was so lucid that he could hear the throb of his shoulder in the silence.

He began to walk faster then, to leave the sound behind him.

The silent clouds hurtled overhead, and cast large shadows over the land.

The leaves clattered in the windlessness.

Was it before he began to run that the wind began to howl? Or did it first howl and the trees to lash about as he began to run?

But where he ran it was windless. The winds of the earth were loosed all about him and he could see their great force, and he could hear them like screaming birds, and waterfalls, and winter, but naught of it touched him.

The stormwind battered the land. It flung trees. It made his ears to ring as though great gongs had sounded but a moment before. But nothing of the wind touched the boy. He ran within the calm and silence of the night.

He ran toward Barrow Hill, which he saw before him, bald and alone.

As he came through the hills to the plain, light and shadow reeled beneath the moon.

Power circled around Haldane. It lashed at his heels.

He ran into the plain that lay before Barrow Hill. When he left the hills and set foot on the plain, clouds coasted over the face of the moon and all grew dark. In that darkness, the wind became silent and all was still. There was no howl. There was no clash of leaves. The clouds lay unmoving before the face of the moon.

In the middle of the plain, the boy came upon a standing stone. He was winded from running, so he paused to lean against the stone in the silence and in the darkness. He felt it a familiar thing, almost a place of safety.

He listened to the pulse in his shoulder, the pulse of his heart, the pulse of his breath, the pulse of the universe in his ears. And as he rested there against the stone, the moon suddenly shone again in its fullness, as though a hand had

swept the clouds away. Then, before him, he saw the rough place, Barrow Hill, like a boulder alone in a wide field.

Then he turned and there saw three riders. One was in link that shimmered in the light. One was in lacquer that threw the moon back to the moon again. The third wore no armor but carried a golden horn and blew at the sight of Haldane.

And before the riders came a monstrous black pig. Lather from its jaws snowed the ground. Its breath was so hot as to alter the coolness of the night. Moonlight reflected from its tushes would wound sharply.

The snort of the pig was like the sucking out of his bones. The cries of the three riders were nightfears given tongue. The calling horn struck him like the cold wind at last.

It cried: *Here is the quarry. Gather for the kill. Here he is. Gather quickly. Kill. Kill.*

It was the wind he had not felt before cutting lightly through his simple smock, cutting away skin, flesh and bone, flaying open the heart.

He ran and did not know why he was pursued. These men sought the son of Black Morca and he was not that anymore. He had no army any more to match against Ivor Fish-eye. He was small and never would be large. He would never play Deldring to Romund's Farthing. What were Farthing and Deldring to one like him who wished only to melt into the land? He would never return with men at his back to make Arngrim no more a Get. He would swear to it.

He was nobody. And yet Ivor, Romund and Arngrim pursued him through the night. They blew the horn after him. Why would they seek to kill him so hard, these three inexorables? Why was he the quarry? Why was he to be killed?

They came after him across the plain. The pig snorted and they cried halloa. *Ta-ta,* the horn, *ta-ta.*

All the Gets who hunted for Haldane through all the Gettish ways of Nestor were called to gather here as he, their victim,

was brought to bay. They would dismember him and silver his red blood with moonlight. They would throw the pieces of his body into the abyss and turn their backs on it.

And the monster pig harried after him to have its own desire. It meant to drag his body away from the huntsmen and devour it in greedy secret as a sow sometimes consumes her own farrow. And it would befoul his carrion bones with dirt and filth as it fed.

He reached the base of Barrow Hill and began to climb. Up the rocks and through the scrub. And then he clambered. All among the boulders, around and over, up the hill he went in his bare feet.

He climbed without looking since there was nothing that he might do but climb. He lost himself in climbing, climbing to climb. Where they were behind him, he knew not. Who they were, how many they had now become—he did not look to know.

He knew they followed him. He knew there was no hope for him. He climbed because he could still climb.

He would show them who he was, what little was left of him. They must climb this hill his way and his way would be the hard way. Then only might they have him.

And all the while as the boy climbed, he could hear the great black creature-pig slavering behind him. It touched his heel hotly and he wore its spume on his smock.

He came at last to a place where there was no more to climb. Only one final great block of stone overhead. When he was there, that would be the place they would tear him down and kill him.

The pig was close, and then he left the pig behind well below at the base of the rock to find its own way to the top. As he climbed his chimney, the fetid black animal trotted back and forth looking for another route.

At the top of the rock there were several small trees and

lichen growing on the rock face like a small landscape. The boy sat on the countries of lichen as though they were a carpet and looked at the many men scrambling up the rock hillside to be part of his death. He felt sorrow and infinite pity for them because they were only Gets when there were larger things to be than that.

The evil black pig squealed madly. It looked at him and knew him. It agonized at the rock.

In that instant, Haldane remembered the Pall of Darkness. It seemed to him that of course he must know it.

The one who could not remember the Pall of Darkness was the one who was son to Morca. He was not that one any more. He was not the son of Black Morca. Therefore, he could know the Pall of Darkness. Of course. Of course.

He knew the spell then. He remembered the words as though they were the Lineage of Wisolf. The gestures of hand were as familiar as those in training horses. It was all open to him.

Also open to him was the memory of the Night of Slaughter, the night of his betrothal, the night of Morca's death. He remembered the Chaining of Wild Lightning, and Oliver's failure. He remembered all: fighting, death, sickness and blood, and he remembered the Pall of Darkness. Now much was clear to him.

And here he was now on Barrow Hill with the Pall of Darkness again on his lips. And where was Oliver?

He stood and called, "Oliver! Oliver! I am here. Where are you? Oliver!"

But Oliver did not answer Haldane.

The eager creature-pig squealed in triumph as it found its own way up the rock.

The horn blew just below. It said: *The game is up. The game is up.*

But it was not, for Haldane could still pull the Pall of Darkness down around his shoulders and steal away down Barrow

Hill. No mortal eyes could see him. He could go away and continue to live as he was. He could be safe.

But for the pig! But for the black pig!

Haldane turned and looked away from the rock and over the moonlit country at his alternative. And before him, curving away, there was a stone bridge. It was clearly limned. Below it there was mist and voidness. The bridge was without foundation. Where the bridge led was lost to sight in the mist. He who fell from that bridge would be forever forgot.

Bridges may fall down, as all who know Nestor know.

The pig was upon him then, and he fell onto his knees before its power. It struck him with its heavy body and then it was past him. Haldane looked up and the pig grunted and trotted out onto the bridge as though it were substantial and might easily bear great weight. Haldane watched to see what the pig would do. It had lost all interest in him and it walked out farther and farther on the bridge that had no support. Haldane wanted to call to it.

He thought once more of the Pall of Darkness and looked out to see Arngrim, and Romund and Ivor. But he could not see them anywhere. Where had they gone? Where were the other Gets who had come from all Nestor? He could not see them around the base of the rock.

The mist circled the base of the rock now. Beneath it, there was great nothing. Haldane stood on the rock in the Void that supported the bridge over the Void. There was bright moonlight and there was mist clear as cloth.

Haldane looked to see the black pig. As he looked, the animal became a white wurox and disappeared into the mist.

THE CASE OF A.E. VAN VOGT

In the summer of 1938, A.E. van Vogt, a Canadian writer of confession stories, radio plays, and trade paper articles, was poking around at his local newsstand. He picked up a science fiction magazine and fell into reading a story. Van Vogt had read science fiction as a boy and then dropped it. Now he was hooked again.

The magazine was *Astounding.* The story was "Who Goes There?" by Don A. Stuart. It was not represented on the cover. It was tucked away in the middle of the magazine. Nevertheless, it was the right story for van Vogt to notice, and he found it:

"I read about half of it while standing there; then I decided that I'd better buy the magazine and finish reading it at home. Having finished it, I was struck with what a powerful story it was. I didn't know that Campbell was Don A. Stuart—that this was a story by the editor, himself, under a pseudonym. I sat down and wrote a one-paragraph outline of a story that was suggested to me, not exactly by this story, but by the mood and feeling of it. I sent him the outline. Now, I feel pretty sure that if he hadn't answered, that would have been the end of my science fiction career. I didn't know it at the time, but he answered all such letters. When he replied, he said, 'In writing this story, be sure to concentrate on the mood

and atmosphere. Don't just make it an action story.' I was pleased by his encouragement, and I felt I owed it to him to write the story, after he had taken the trouble to write."

Van Vogt's science fiction stories were unlike any others appearing in *Astounding.* Van Vogt was a vague and clumsy writer. He told his stories in awkward lumpish sentences that didn't always make complete sense. This did not unduly trouble John W. Campbell: Don A. Stuart wrote in agrammatical sentence fragments. Neither was it important that van Vogt was a ludicrous extrapolator, lacking completely in that fine sense of factual detailed actuality possessed by Campbell's engineer-writers. In his first novel, *Slan* (*Astounding,* Sept-Dec 1940), a story of a mutant superchild that was generally acknowledged to be the outstanding story of its year in *Astounding,* van Vogt showed himself capable of placing Studebaker cars alongside horse-drawn wagons and splendid palaces 1500 years in the future, without apparent recognition of the incongruity which a de Camp would have taken pains to explain and exploit. John W. Campbell even offered to print three novels a year by van Vogt in his fantasy magazine *Unknown,* but the rationalized, extrapolative fantasy that came so naturally to de Camp and Heinlein was foreign to van Vogt, and he wrote four stories for *Unknown* only with the greatest difficulty.

Van Vogt had other qualities to offer: A sense of process. A love of systems. An intuitive appreciation of the dynamic inner essence of Campbell's vision.

Van Vogt caught an image of eternal flux in the protean creature of Campbell's "Who Goes There?" and reflected it in his first attempted science fiction story, eventually published as "Vault of the Beast" (*Astounding,* Aug 1940). The protagonist of this story is described as both a robot and an android, as both living and a machine, a creature of formlessness forced to take on shape: "The creature crept. It whimpered

from fear and pain, a thin, slobbering sound horrible to hear. Shapeless, formless thing, yet changing shape and form with every jerky movement."

Van Vogt's first published story, "Black Destroyer" (*Astounding,* July 1939), was also influenced by "Who Goes There?" In van Vogt's story, the Campbellian sense of the interconnectedness and common cloth of the universe was expressed in the suggestion that a powerful, degenerate alien monster, encountered at the far ends of the universe, might still be subject to Spengler's ideas about the rise and fall of civilization.

Like Campbell, van Vogt was convinced of the unknowability, the uncertainty, of the universe. Like Campbell, he was possessed of a sense of the potential of future man. Ideas expressed by other *Astounding* writers as conclusions were to van Vogt basic premises which he tried to express not in reasoned argument, but dramatically.

Ever since the Fifth Century B.C., when Greek philosophy rejected traditional Eastern conceptions of the universe as a place of flux and mutability, Western science and philosophy had sought to define a universe built of stable, indissoluble forms. The culmination and seeming vindication of this Aristotelian search for stability was Newtonian physics. But in the Twentieth Century, the best Western science has conceded that the long-cherished ideal of stability and form is an illusion.

The universe ultimately implied by the new physics studied by John W. Campbell was one of eternal flux, in which forms arise out of chaos, mutate freely into other forms, and sink back into chaos again. The science fiction thinking directed by Campbell also points toward this concept of eternal flux. Over and over, Campbell insisted that change is a constant and that science fiction is the literature of change. The tinkertoy chains of extrapolation built by Campbell's engineer-writers from a solid basis in contemporary reality were an attempt to

acknowledge and express the idea of change. In a speculative story like "Waldo," Robert Heinlein might even suggest the possibility that chaos is king. But that was as far as anyone but van Vogt was prepared to go. Van Vogt alone embraced these ideas, swallowed them whole, recognized their implications and expressed them in the very fabric of his stories. Van Vogt alone recognized that a consequence of these new scientific ideas was that contemporary "reality" can offer no solid basis at all.

Harrison and Aldiss remember: "There was a peck of Kafka in the early van Vogt, as well as a pinch of E.E. Smith. Paranoia and persecution were meat and drink to the raging young van Vogt of the period. Like some terrible fragment of one's own id, he came raving at you in story after story with something well-nigh incomprehensible—something just too big for you to ever get properly in focus. One thinks of the typical Campbell story as something compact and slightly chilled, like a Heinlein or a Hal Clement. But Campbell had the inspiration to give A.E. van Vogt his head, knowing surely that the man was not making sense on the Heinlein-realism level at all. But what music he made!"

At first, van Vogt was a part-time writer. In 1941, he only published two short stories. In the summer of that year, he quit his job at the Canadian Department of National Defense, retired to the woods and began to attempt to write his new brand of science fiction in earnest. Van Vogt's eyesight rendered him unfit for wartime service. As his production of science fiction picked up, Campbell wrote to van Vogt and offered to buy all the work that he could submit. Van Vogt wrote twelve to fourteen hours a day, every day, producing stories like "Asylum" (*Astounding,* May 1942), *The Weapon Makers* (*Astounding,* Feb-Apr 1943), and *The World of Null-A* (*Astounding,* Aug-Oct 1945). During the war years, he supplied one-eighth of the wordage printed in *Astounding.*

Van Vogt invented his stories out of his nightly dreams, out of his sense of mutability and potential, and out of the various thought systems he read about and involved himself with. In *The World of Null-A,* the system was Korzybski's General Semantics, which van Vogt has described as specifically non-Aristotelian and non-Newtonian: "Non-Aristotelian means not according to the thought solidified by Aristotle's followers for nearly 2,000 years. Non-Newtonian refers to our essentially Einsteinian universe, as accepted by today's science."

Van Vogt's stories had no social content. They were implausibly rationalized archetypal happenings. His characters had no individual psychology. They were psychology. His monsters were pure animal appetite. His protagonists were emotions modified by intuition. Van Vogt has written: "Science fiction writers have recently been greatly concerned with characterization in science fiction. A few writers in the field have even managed to convey that *their* science fiction has this priceless quality. To set the record straight as to where I stand in this controversy—in the Null-A stories I characterize identity itself."

During the war years, van Vogt was the most popular writer in *Astounding.* In 1944, he moved from Canada to California. In 1946, van Vogt and his wife, E. Mayne Hull, who also wrote science fiction in the early Forties, were joint Guests of Honor at the first postwar World Science Fiction Convention, held in Los Angeles.

Barry Malzberg has written: "Alfred Elton van Vogt may be the most difficult of all science-fiction writers to judge. What critical literature there is—Budrys, Blish, Knight, Russ, Panshin—has usually ignored or under-assessed van Vogt, preferring to place him routinely within the 'Golden Age' format and then dismiss the unique and individual impact of his work, which strikes me as having gone far beyond that of any of his contemporaries in its *uniqueness.* Heinlein, Asimov, del Rey,

Kuttner are marvelous writers making their contributions *as a group* to a *body of literature;* van Vogt is standing off by himself building something very personal and unique. His work is neither inferior to nor above that of his contemporaries; it simply cannot be judged that way. Above all, van Vogt is to himself. So much of van Vogt's work, reread after many years, seems to work in terms which are sub- or trans-literary; so much of his power seems to come not from sophisticated technique and/or pyrotechnic style as from his ability to tap archetypal power, archetypal 'them,' and open up veins of awe or bedazzlement that otherwise are found in love or dreams."

In 1950, van Vogt became fascinated with a new system. Fellow science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard called him for seventeen consecutive days from New Jersey to interest van Vogt in Hubbard's new psychological system, Dianetics. Both van Vogt and his wife became Dianetics auditors, and van Vogt grew so involved with this method of studying human behavior that he all but ceased to write science fiction for many years. Earlier novels did appear in book form, along with story collections and what van Vogt calls "fix-up novels"—stories, usually from the Forties, often unrelated, sewn together to make single novels, as though all of van Vogt's work were part of the seamless fabric of his mental universe and had no integrity of its own, cut here, stitch there.

During the Fifties, van Vogt's graceless approximate style, his lack of plausibility, his grandiosity, and his hot formless passion were all held as defects by the intellectual critics of science fiction. His reputation plummeted as he offered "fix-up novels" in place of his former white-hot creativity. In the face of criticism, van Vogt offered no answer—it was assumed because there was no defense for him to make. And yet, through the Fifties and early Sixties, van Vogt's influence obviously continued. Even his first and most powerful critic, Damon

Knight, tried to walk in van Vogt's shoes to discover the source of his power, in Knight's 1964 novel *Beyond the Barrier.*

Beginning in 1963, van Vogt once again wrote occasional science fiction magazine stories, and since 1970, he has been quite active, publishing more than half-a-dozen original paperback novels. These have largely escaped critical attention. Recently, however, van Vogt has spoken out clearly and at length about the state of his consciousness and the nature of his work. This apologia consists of two books, an oral autobiography, *Reflections of A.E. van Vogt* (1975), and *The Best of A.E. van Vogt* (1976), a collection containing much personal commentary by the author.

What van Vogt has to say for himself is surprising. For instance, he suggests that even his notorious murkiness has been a deliberately adopted technique:

"Each paragraph—sometimes each sentence—of my brand of science fiction has a gap in it, an unreality condition. In order to make it real, the reader must add the missing parts. He cannot do this out of his past associations. There *are* no past associations. So he must fill in the gaps from the creative part of his brain. This is what is required of the science-fiction reader: that he take the hints, the incomplete pictures, the half-suggested ideas and philosophies, and give them a full body. He must do so at the speed of reading—which is faster than the speed of writing. When he does his part of the job well—and the author has done his share—then the reader thinks he has read a good story."

If this is true about van Vogt's work, what else is true? In this time when so many inherited critical attitudes are being re-examined, it seems apparent that a complete contemporary appraisal of van Vogt's body of work—both the early stories and the overlooked recent novels—would be highly useful.

Van Vogt has written: "On the surface, being interested

in unreality rather than in reality writing looks irrational. In today's world, reality writing, well done, has ten to a hundred times the potential readership of unreality writing. I wish I could get interested in it. I believe I could make a fortune in a few years. It's so simple to do. But as I read the—to me—stereotyped lines about muscle aches and full-stomach breath and going to the bathroom and spreading a girl's legs; and about the sounds and the sights and the touch and taste and smell of going to a hotel, or a hospital, or witnessing a fire in a department store; and about taking off in a big plane with a cargo of conspirators aboard (they're going to hijack it and get a million dollars), and about how great it is to be a Gruk and speak Grukan, which is such a homey language and makes you feel all is right with the world whenever you hear its particular harsh intonations; and on and on...I just can't work up any enthusiasm.

"People *are* involved in such matters, and it's all right that they are. But man is not going anywhere on that level of existence. Individuals just do and have and are and feel—and it's okay. But, to me, it's the same wheels turning over, the same overall thoughts, as twenty thousand years ago. On this level, I never argue with the endless repetitions that feed back to me from three and a half billion human beings. I'm glad they're there, with their bright eyes and bright brains. And I'm glad they're keeping the place going. What bothers me is that they not only live these repetitions—they also want to read about them. I could understand reading about them *once*. But endlessly?

"I'm grateful to science fiction for changing my brain. For better or worse doesn't matter, just so it's changed. Reading science fiction lifted me out of the do-and-be-and-have world and gave me glimpses backward and forward into the time and space distances of the universe. I may live only three seconds (so to speak), but I have had the pleasure and excitement

of contemplating the beginning and end of existence. Short of being immortal physically, I have vicariously experienced just about everything that man can conceive will happen by reading science fiction."

A UNIVERSE OF CHANGE

In a universe where change is the primary fact, any viable art form must possess the power to alter, mutate and transcend itself.

A LETTER TO IAN WATSON

Dear Ian,

Well, mystery is added to mystery. It was not just that you wrote the central piece in *Vector* that made us think the magazine came from you. There was a handwritten return address on the envelope and it said: Watson, 37 St. John St., Oxford. Either the universe is a place of mystery and magic, or some person recognized our affinity, and without caring to be identified, sicced us onto each other—in which case, the universe is still a place of mystery and magic.

How wonderful that my letter found you with Rumi on your desk! Is it the Arberry edition that you are using? I have two quotes from Rumi on evolution, one of which is from the *Discourses,* I think, and the other from the *Mathnavi.* (I'm not certain of this. Idries Shah's translations resonate more than Arberry's; I'm quoting from the section of Rumi material in Shah's anthology *The Way of the Sufi,* and Shah is not concerned to identify sources.

(under the title) HOW FAR YOU HAVE COME!

Originally, you were clay. From being mineral, you became vegetable. From vegetable, you became animal, and from animal, man. During these periods man did not know where

he was going, but he was being taken on a long journey nonetheless. And you have to go through a hundred different worlds yet.

(and under the title) WHAT SHALL I BE

I have again and again grown like grass;
I have experienced seven hundred and seventy moulds.
I died from minerality and became vegetable;
And from vegetativeness I died and became animal.
I died from animality and became man.
Then why fear disappearance through death?
Next time I shall die
Bringing forth wings and feathers like angels:
After that soaring higher than angels—
What you cannot imagine. I shall be that.

Rumi speaks more clearly of evolution than any other of the classic Sufi masters, but the idea seems to underlie Sufism in general. O.M. Burke's *Among the Dervishes,* published in 1973, but apparently written in the mid-Sixties, quotes a Tunisian Sufi sheikh as saying: "We are doing something which is natural, which is the result of research and practice into the future development of mankind; we are producing a *new* man. And we do it for no material gain."

Your use of the word "Sufists" makes me wonder if your acquaintance with them is through academic interpreters like Arberry and Nicholson?

My own family background is utilitarian academic. My father was head of the Department of Forest Products at Michigan State University. My parents' tastes and attitudes are fossilized Good Taste from the Thirties. So I suppose I reacted against this by dropping out of school with only an M.A., rather than a Ph.D.; by having no love for opera; by watching tv, listening to rock, reading science

fiction; by leaving the cloisters and finding my truth in the streets.

I found science fiction in a racey place I wasn't supposed to go—a hangout joint with a pool table, a grill, and a newsstand across the street from the university. I stole sf paperbacks and magazines there—or bought them with my lunch money—neither of these being activities my parents would have approved. Sf was my chief growth food, and I read it insatiably. I knew full well that my mother had made my brother and me burn the comic books that my brother had bought at the end of his paper route unbeknownst to me and hidden in the garage. But I snuck my illicit sf into the house and hid it in my licit collection. And I cannot begin to imagine how my parents managed to overlook the fact that my "licit" sf collection was four times larger than it had any right to be.

Well, yes. Sf in itself turned them off. They really didn't want to know about it. While I, on the other hand, knew science fiction for the most magical thing in my life.

This continued to be true until I was about 27, that is, circa 1967, when I finally outgrew that particular kindergarten toy. This is to say that it began to become evident, at first subliminally and then consciously, that I was reading, writing and thinking on a higher level than the sf I was reading—and if I wasn't, that I certainly wanted to be.

I started getting my growth food elsewhere. And I started to think about the nature and potential of sf, about the necessity for an sf of a new and higher order, and about what lines of potential in the genre to follow. The wrestlings that Cory and I did on this subject are visible in our book *SF in Dimension.*

Our attempts to figure out the meanings of the mystery of sf intersected the Sufis about five years ago. My first acquaintance with the Sufis actually came a couple of years before that. In

1969, as I was grubbing in the gutters of pop culture, as usual, I fished up a paperback entitled *A History of Secret Societies* by Arkon Daraul—whom I now take to be Idries Shah or his invisible twin brother. This book had a fascinating chapter on contemporary Sufis in Britain and the book as a whole suggests many of the most high-powered secret societies in history either had Sufic connection or were debased Sufic imitations—along the lines of "counterfeit gold exists only because there is such a thing as real gold." As a result of reading this book, I looked around and found Idries Shah's *The Sufis.* But I was put off from reading it by the material on the Abjad enciphering system, which seemed arbitrary and dubious to me.

Then, in 1972, there was a review of nine books by Idries Shah in *The New York Times Book Review,* written by Doris Lessing, under the enigmatic title "What Looks Like an Egg and Is an Egg?" The review was very strangely written and I called it to Cory's attention. She agreed that it was strange. The next day, I found one of the Nasrudin collections in the public library in Doylestown. Then we bought several of the books in paperback—and, as soon as we could thereafter, all of them. On contact with the material, we recognized the Shah books as *food.* The Sufic material seemed as enigmatic, and mysterious, and magical to my 31-year-old self as sf had ever seemed to my 13-year-old self. But much much deeper and much much truer. And absolutely straight—no bullshit. In fact, one of the many wonderful things about the material was its suggestions on how to get rid of your own bullshit.

Our point of encounter with the Sufis has been through the Shah material. We've been reading the Sufis for five years now. We've read other material than Shah's, but always sought that magic, that electric quality, that feeling of being "alive" that we got from Shah. I'm speaking of a feeling that the material is endowed with contemporary significance, that it has application to present thought and behavior. I don't get this feeling

from Nicholson. I've found the 19th Century translations of Saadi and Rumi pretty close to unreadable. The most "active" academic Sufic translation that I have, I think, is Arberry's *Discourses of Rumi.* But most of the active Sufi material we've found has been through Shah or people connected to Shah.

The appearance of this material now—active, alive, present, relevant, electric, catalytic—seems to me to have been done with deliberation. The Sufis are stepping forward from the background and revealing themselves for present purpose.

I've used the extensive inter-library loan service of my local library, dug for myself in large libraries, read around the edges of my interest, visited occult and Oriental bookshops, and studied the Sufi material for five years. I've come to the conclusion that Shah is the public representative of a contemporary manifestation of Sufism, shed of religious trappings, aimed to have specific impact on the present moment of evolutionary potential.

It seems to have been Shah's task, starting when he was about twenty, to take the Sufis—thought of as Moslem mystics or whirling dervishes—and establish them as respectable in the West. He spent a dozen years from the middle Forties to the middle Fifties traveling in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Much of this time he spent in hard work in libraries and old manuscript collections. In the mid-Fifties, Shah began to publish books in England.

All of the books that Shah published between 1956 and 1964 were varying presentations of the same body of experience:

A travel book—*Journey to Mecca.*

A book containing the texts of all the genuine grimoires Shah uncovered in various European libraries. (A very curious book that I can make nothing of.)

Oriental Magic—a book on ancient and contemporary magical

practice in Asia and Africa, derived from library research and travel, along with an account of the Sufis and a scattering of other material that seems meaningful.

Two books by Arkon Daraul. (I take Arkon Daraul to be Shah. Daraul has been where Shah has been and done what Shah has done, and reprints photographs that Shah took for his travel book.) One of these, on European witches and sorcerors, is pretty superficial, but it does imply that there is a genuine tradition behind European magicians that is derived from the Sufis. The other Daraul book, the one on secret societies, is more serious. It's a tricky book that implies a lot more than it seems to say and that claims a great deal for the Sufis.

But all of this is just the dross from Shah's major book, *The Sufis.* This is a strangely constructed book, with levels on levels of material in it. It's an elusive book, but if you are paying attention, it cites a great deal of evidence to the effect that the Sufis do, in fact, underlie Roger Bacon, St. Francis, Dante, the Knights Templar, witches, Rosicrucians, alchemists, troubadors, jesters, Masons, and much else.

And, apparently, the Sufis do underlie all of these. At least, in a review in the Spring 1970 *American Scholar,* the writer says: "*The New York Times Book Review* seemed to resent claims made: it does make large claims for influence on the West in places where traditional scholarship sees none. Well, I've had the experience of watching a dear friend, a Spanish and Portuguese scholar, flying into a rage with: 'What nonsense!'—then rushing off to follow up suggestions, and returning months later with: 'Good God, how is it we didn't see it before? It is lying right out there in the open.'"

Shah, it seems, has the facts. In his years in those libraries—and knowing where to look—he did better research than the scholars, pulling together a wide variety of material that no one else would have suspected belonged together.

Shah has altered reality and made an unassailable case that Sufis are progressive, contemporary folk with impeccable antecedents.

This was no more than step one. The real fruit of those years of travel and research came out in the later Sixties and early Seventies in Shah's numerous books of active Sufi material—the joke collections, anthologies, story books, and so on.

During these past twenty years, the existence of an active contemporary Sufi presence has been announced to anthropologists, readers of travel books, Gurdjieffians, students of psychology, joke book readers, occultists, folklorists, students of Islamic literature, students of magic, and readers of reviews by Doris Lessing in the *Times Book Review* like Cory and me. Shah has lectured on ecumenism and the surrender to God at the University of Geneva. In the last year, he has appeared at weekend symposiums in the United States for audiences of psychologists and educators. All of this activity has been very low profile.

Cory and I attended the symposium for psychologists in New York. It was held in a hotel ballroom. It was hot and stuffy and I can't say that I remember anything that Shah said. I do remember something that he did. He held a long, thin, aristocratic hand in front of the microphone and demonstrated the sound of one hand clapping. It sounded very much like the sound of two hands clapping.

To each of the audiences that Shah has addressed, he has presented exactly right *sui generis* credentials—the equivalents on the personal level, if you will, of that incredible pedigree for the Sufis that he conjured up out of thin air. The man is amazingly well-connected. As an example, when Shah began publishing his Sufi material in popular form, he apparently received opposition from certain Western Orientalists who felt they had a proprietary right to the corpse of Sufism. In 1973, these academics were trumped by a book entitled *Sufi Studies: East and West,*

edited by Professor L.F. Rushbrook-Williams, a *Festschrift* "in honor of Idries Shah's services to Sufi studies." The book contains essays and acknowledgments of Shah by Englishmen, Americans, a Pole, a Hungarian, and men of distinction from ten Eastern countries from Egypt to Ceylon. A very high-powered testimonial.

Of late, Shah has been covered in *Current Biography.* He is solidly established in *Who's Who, Contemporary Authors* and a dozen other rosters of eminence. And all of this while maintaining a general public invisibility.

At some point, enough of Shah's varied activities are going to fall together in public appreciation that Shah will emerge from the background and become visible. But when he does, he will not seem strange, a man from Mars, a whirling dervish, a mysterious occult figure, a moldy mystic, a cultist or a guru. Instead, he will seem a plausible, business-like, solidly established and highly recommended person, albeit one you cannot quite put your finger on.

I have the highest respect for the Sufis. They seem to know exactly what they are doing. They are straightforward and devoid of nonsense. I've never encountered that before, and it seems to me one of their evidences of genuineness.

The most remarkable thing about these Sufis is that they have left Cory and me alone. We have been reading Sufi material intensely for five years. Four years ago, we wrote to a British professor of electrical engineering at the University of Colorado named Leonard Lewin, author of *Theory of Wave Guides* and editor of *The Diffusion of Sufi Ideas in the West,* a book that seemed part of the contemporary Sufic manifestation to us. I cannot imagine Scientology, Seventh Day Adventism, Mormonism, Hare Krishnaism, Arica, Est, or any other religion, mysticism, philosophy, psychology, or head-bending system I know of *leaving us alone* if we showed an interest one-tenth as great as our interest in the Sufi material. But they haven't

enlisted us, directed us, taken money from us, schooled us, indoctrinated us, or put us on the streets with a bowl and tambourine.

Our occasional exchanges with Lewin over the years were very terse and to the point. We asked him for guidance on just one occasion. A year and a half ago, stuck in the slough of despond, our finished work unsold, our work-in-progress blocked, without money, without attention, without allies, without friends, without contact from the Sufis, without confirmation from any source, without any response to our years and years of work—with only our immediate sense of what we ought to be doing as our guide, and with that glowing dim—we wrote to Lewin. We said: "For the last year and a half, we have been thrown into a state of uncertainty by the impact of the Sufi material. It has seemed to us that the work we have been trying to write can be meaningful only if it is coupled to the Sufi activity, but that we cannot achieve this coupling by ourselves. We have been unable either to write fiction or to complete *The World Beyond the Hill,* our book on science fiction. May we have your guidance?"

Lewin's reply was to refer to a Nasrudin story, a page reference. The story is entitled "There is more light here."

Someone saw Nasrudin searching for something on the ground.

"What have you lost, Mulla?" he asked. "My key," said the Mulla. So they both went down on their knees and looked for it.

After a time the other man asked: "Where exactly did you drop it?"

"In my own house."

"Then why are you looking here?"

"There is more light here than inside my own house."

This reply suggested to me that we ought to look for our key

where we dropped it. If this is guidance, it is very minimal and subtle guidance. Like an *I Ching* reading, it is to be interpreted however you are best able to construe it. Cory and I took it this way:

The Sufis are patently not out to recruit anyone. But they are making a lot of catalytic material available, seeding it, scattering it—obviously knowing what they are up to.

Cory and I studied the Shah books for five years and can claim no mastery of them. But they have expanded our vision, been constantly suggestive, and affected our work, our thought and our goals. And, I would think, were meant to.

The question that we were asking Lewin is how we could bind our sense of sf as an evolutionary instrument to our understanding of the Sufi material as another and higher instrument of evolution. And the answer, as we interpret it, is that our best contribution to the Sufic effort is to take the understanding that we have derived from our reading of the Sufi material and to express it in sf terms.

Sf is in need of transformation. Sf is in need of values. Granted that whatever sf we manage to produce is going to fall short of the Sufic material we are catching fire from. But instead of being intimidated, we should be inspired. The Sufi material offers us a ladder by which to haul sf up to a higher level. We can have a shot at that. If that is as Sufic as we can be, it is surely challenge enough.

There is a mystery hidden behind the letters sf. "Science fiction" is not adequate to it. Nor are any of the other word combinations that have been proposed to fit the letters: science fantasy, speculative fiction, speculative fantasy, structural fabulation, or whatever. In your abortive Belgian Guest of Honor speech, one of the things that Cory and I picked up on was that you were using SF to mean something larger than science fiction. SF is a mystery. Anything that fills the letters is an approximation, but "Sufic fiction" is certainly

a possible candidate, or ideal. Stories that approximate to Sufic fiction would attempt to express and represent psychic growth, personal and societal and human evolution, and transcendence, and foster creativity and intuition. This is what Cory and I are aiming toward. And what I've read about your novels indicates that this is what you are aiming toward.

It would be contrary to my understanding of what Sufi means to attempt to steal the name and start a program. But my assessment of the relative stature of the Sufi tradition and contemporary sf is that the Sufi material is relevant to sf, needed by sf, and sets a standard for sf to grow by. Again, I say this is an inner understanding, an ideal, since each person sees in the Sufis what he is prepared to see.

The generation of people and the generation of sf writers before us are rationalists, materialists and egoists. They've grown old badly, soured and twisted by their limitations and defects of vision. They offer no viable standard, and no viable example of mature behavior and responsibility. In view of that, we must find our standards and examples where we can, in some gutter or other.

Yours,

Alexei

THE OLD SPACE RANGER

The Old Space Ranger came from a small planet where everyone thought alike. The Old Space Ranger left his planet and traveled around the Nashuite Empire. They say that after his experiences on the planet of Livermore—"the planet where anything can happen"—the mind of the Old Space Ranger was subtly altered and thereafter he became incapable of thinking or acting like anyone else.

After his adventures, when he returned to his planet to live, people did not know what to make of him. Some thought that he was a charlatan and had never been off-world. Some thought that he had been driven space-bonkers and pointed him out as an example of what happens to those foolish enough to leave home. Others, however, felt that he might be learned from.

Some of these persons approached the Old Space Ranger. They said, "Old Space Ranger, speak to us of where you have been and what you have seen. Tell us of the reputed wider universe."

"Very well," said the Old Space Ranger. "Do you know what I am going to tell you about?"

"No," said the people. "That's why we're asking."

The Old Space Ranger said, "Well, if you don't know, then I can't tell you." And he went inside his house.

Somewhat dismayed, the people decided to try again. They went to the Old Space Ranger and asked him once again to share his wisdom.

Again he asked them, "Do you know what I am going to tell you?"

"Yes," they said. "Yes, we do."

"In that case," the Old Space Ranger said, "there is no need to say more." And he went inside his house.

Once again they approached him, those who felt that eventually he must trip himself up and those who thought there might be something to be learned from him.

As before, the Old Space Ranger asked, "Do you know what I am going to tell you, or don't you?"

His listeners said, "Some of us do and some of us don't."

"Splendid!" said the Old Space Ranger, brightening. "Let those who know tell those who don't."

*

When he returned home to his planet, the Old Space Ranger claimed to have been to the center of the empire, the planet Nashua itself. Everyone was impressed. They gathered around to hear him.

"I'll be brief," he said. "I'll say no more than that my greatest moment was when the Emperor spoke to me."

The people were amazed that such a thing should happen to one of their own. They recognized a momentous portent, and they went their way to discuss what it might mean for them.

One driveling idiot hung around. He went up to the Old Space Ranger and asked: "What did the Emperor say to you?"

The Old Space Ranger said: "Plain as plain, where everyone could hear him, he said to me, 'Get out of my way.'"

*

The Old Space Ranger went to the planetary vibro-culture

center for a shake-up. Because he was dressed like a common trudger, the attendants treated him like one. They put him in a de-certified vibro-chamber, and they left him to his own devices. They didn't even tickle his belly.

When he left, the Old Space Ranger didn't complain. Instead he handed the attendants a tip of a royal each.

"Wow!" they said to each other. "Just think what he would have flipped us if we had given him a proper buzz-and-polish!"

The next time the Old Space Ranger came in for a shake-up, he was shown the utmost deference. He could not have been better treated if he were the Emperor himself. They gave him the best vibro-chamber in the hospice, and not only did they get his belly this time, they got him all over.

When he was buffed to a fare-thee-well and ready to leave, the Old Space Ranger handed the attendants a minim each.

"But what is this?" they said, looking at the paltriness.

"This is for the last time," the Old Space Ranger said. "The royals were for this time."

*

Once the Old Space Ranger was traveling between the stars when he saw a fleet of spaceships coming toward him.

Imaginings began to churn in his mind. He saw himself taken by pirates or inspected by the Navy and found wanting.

He panicked and ran. He went to ground on the local graveyard planet.

Puzzled at this strange behavior, those in the spaceships—a convoy of honest wayfarers—followed the Old Space Ranger.

They found him cowering and quivering.

"Are you in trouble?" they asked. "What are you doing in this pit?"

The Old Space Ranger now realized what had happened. "A simple question doesn't necessarily have a simple answer," he said. "It all depends on how you look at things. If you

must know, however, I am here because of you, and you are here because of me."

*

The Old Space Ranger offered to teach anyone who could bring him a something that was nothing, and a nothing that was everything.

*

One day the Old Space Ranger called up Catalog Central on his planet.

"Do you have bubble forms?"

"This is Catalog Central. If it is listed in your computer, we have it."

"What about life support systems?"

"Oh, yes."

"An engine. Do you have that?"

"Yes."

"Guidance systems?"

"Yes."

"In that case," said the Old Space Ranger, "why don't you build a spaceship?"

*

Most people were discouraged by the behavior of the Old Space Ranger, or were bewildered by him. But still there were rumors that he was living and operating on another plane than the ordinary. One young man decided to watch him, to see how he lived, and to learn his secrets if that was possible.

He followed the Old Space Ranger down to the river and saw him sit by a tree. The Old Space Ranger put his hand out, and out of nothingness took a cake, which he ate. And another. And another. Then he reached out again and picked up a glass and drank.

The youth was beside himself. He rushed up to the Old Space Ranger and seized his sleeve. "Tell me how you perform these marvels and I will do anything you ask of me," he said.

"Certainly," said the Old Space Ranger. "But if you wish to annihilate space and time and receive dainties from the hand of the Emperor's servitor, you must be in the right state of mind."

"No problem," said the young man. "Tell me what to think and I'll think it."

"I can only tell you one thing at a time. Do you want to start with the easy exercise, or the difficult one?"

"I'll take the hard one."

"Your first mistake," said the Old Space Ranger. "You have to start with the easy one. But now you've chosen and that's that. The difficult exercise is this: Make a hole in your fence large enough for your flock of vreebles to get into your neighbor's yard to peck—that large. But the hole must also be so small that your neighbor's vreebles can't get into your yard to peck."

The young man was unable to solve this problem. And when he came to tell people about what he had seen the Old Space Ranger do, they thought he was crazy.

"A start, a start," said the Old Space Ranger. "Someday you'll find a teacher."

Help me to know the truth
Help me to be of service
Help me to do what I can do
Help me to be what I can be

SKY BLUE

Sky Blue waits for Landlord Thing. He holds the most powerful gun Groombridge Colony can hand him. He sits on a small unnaturally comfortable rock in space.

Overhead the heavens wheel. Beneath him the brown planet whirls. Like a midge on a grain of wheat, he passes between millstones.

*

A fat spaceship blipping on business like a slickery black watermelon seed went astray one day between Someplace Important and Someplace Important and wound up lost on the great black floor of the galaxy. It was the pilot's fault, if you want to blame someone. He was stargazing at the wrong moment, misapplied his math, and then fritzed the drive in a fruitless attempt to recoup.

The ship came to drift without power in a place where the stars glittered nervously and all the skies were strange. It was weird there, and after one look the curtains were hastily drawn. Nobody wanted to look outside except one boy named Harold who held the curtains in his hands and peeked.

The pilot killed himself in another fit of overcompensation, but nobody noticed. They were all dead men in their dark powerless ship in that strange icicle corner of the universe,

but nobody would say so. They huddled together in various parts of the ship and talked of usual matters.

Now, this wasn't just any old ship. This was a big-deal colony ship on its way to settle Groombridge 1618/2, a planet foredoomed for importance. It was so juicy a place that you had to pay high for a slice of the pie.

The passengers on this ship had all paid. They were men of moxie. They knew the answers. Here's a topper: Triphammer and Puddleduck, who had more answers than anybody, were aboard, too. They were along for the dedication ceremonies and a quick return home. They moved in high circles.

Being lost so suddenly was as painful and frustrating to Triphammer and Puddleduck as an interrupted fuck. Suddenly their answers were of no use to them. Oh, it hurt.

Triphammer, Puddleduck, and Mount Rushmore were the highest huddle of all. They gathered by a candle in one room. Triphammer paced frantically, Puddleduck nodded at appropriate moments, and Mount Rushmore loomed toplofty. Harold looked out through the curtains into the universe.

Triphammer said, "Oh, losings. Screamie! The action, pop-a-dop." Her face could not contain her regret.

Puddleduck nodded. "Misery," he said.

"Misery," said Mount Rushmore.

Harold said, "There's somebody walking by outside."

He was the son of Triphammer and Puddleduck. They hadn't given him a proper name yet, and he wasn't sure they meant to keep him. He needed them, so until he discovered their intention he was playing it quiet.

"Out of mind," said Puddleduck, beating his brow. "Replebed and forgot."

Triphammer held a sudden hand before her mouth. "Oh, speak not."

"Misery," said Mount Rushmore.

Harold waved. "Hey, he sees me." He waved again.

Triphammer and Puddleduck didn't hear what Harold said. It was his fault. He didn't speak up. They had told him that it was his fault if he wasn't heard.

Great Mount Rushmore pounded himself on the chest. "Gelt gone blubbles. Misery. Misery."

Puddleduck said, "Misery."

"Miz," said Triphammer.

There was a tug at her sleeve and she looked down. It was Harold waiting for her attention.

"Again?"

Harold put on his best face and straightened to the full extent of his undergreat height, which was what he had been taught to do when he asked for things.

"Can I go out and play, Mama? Please?" he asked, waving at the window.

Triphammer's expression made it clear that any request at this moment was a fart in church, and that the gods were displeased with the odor.

"What what? Bird twitter while empires fall? Shame and a half, Harold, you nameless twirp. (Forbearing, but not much.) Forbidding."

"I'm really extremely sorry I asked," Harold said.

There was sudden consternation in the room. Out of nowhere—certainly not through the door—had come a being altogether strange. And here it was, making five now around the candle. It had pseudopods and big brown eyes.

"Wowsers, a creature!" said Mount Rushmore. He backed away. "Bling it."

The creature looked at Harold and said, "Are you coming or not?"

Triphammer had a tender stomach. She tried without success to stifle a retch.

"Faa," she said. "Bling it."

Harold said, "I'm not allowed. I asked already."

Puddleduck looked around and around the room, nodding furiously and muttering constant instructions to himself lest he forget, but there was nothing ready at hand to bling the creature with. Puddleduck waved his arms like frustrated semaphores.

"But of course you are allowed," the creature said. "If you want to come with me, you may. I don't forbid anyone."

It broke off abruptly and looked around at Mount Rushmore, Triphammer and Puddleduck as they recoiled.

"Is something the matter?" it asked, flexing its polyps in wonderment.

Triphammer looked at it with a glance like a pointing finger and vomited reproachfully.

"I beg your pardon," the creature said.

It gathered itself together, contracting its pseudopods into the main mess of its body. Its brown eyes bulged hugely and then blinked. And, speedy quick as a hungry duck, its appearance was altered. Where there had formerly been an—ugh—amorphous monster, now there stood a dark sweet old man with a short brushy mustache and a nose like a spearhead, as definite as geometry. He was dressed in a khaki shirt and shorts to the knee and sturdy walking shoes.

"Is that better?"

"Oh, scruples!" said Triphammer.

And it was better. Triphammer and Puddleduck knew how to deal with people. Creatures were another matter. They brightened to see him, for the old man looked like a mark, and they desperately needed someone to take advantage of.

The sweet old fud looked around that dim room there in the dead and silent spaceship as though it were a very strange place.

"Pardon me if I'm being overcritical of your favored pastimes, but is this really what you like to do? It seems limited. You could be outside on a day like this," he said.

Mount Rushmore shook his head like a rag mop. "Not happy, not happy," he said. "Oh, not. Gelt gone blubbles, you know."

"Lost and out of it," Triphammer explained. "Unjuiced, weenied and paddleless."

"Screamie-a-deamie!" said Puddleduck. "Massive frust! In the name of our importance, unpickle us."

"I had the feeling things weren't just right," the old man said. "Don't ask me how I knew. I have an instinct for these things. Well, I'll help you as much as I can. Come along with me."

He turned and walked abruptly through the wall of the ship. Gone. And no one followed him.

He stuck his head back into the room, looking like a well-seasoned wall trophy.

"Well, come along," he said reasonably.

Harold, smiling brightly, took a happy step forward. Then he noticed that Triphammer and Puddleduck were standing stock still. Above all else, he desired to please them and be kept. He couldn't help himself. He stopped and wiped his smile away, and then he didn't move, he didn't breathe. He did check to see what his parents did, eyes flicking left, eyes flicking right, under their eyelash awning.

"Aren't you coming?" the old man asked. "I am willing to help you."

Mount Rushmore boggled at him. Triphammer and Puddleduck, with infinitely greater presence of mind, shook their heads silently.

"What's the matter?"

"Nary a feather to fly with," they said. "We *told* you that, pooper. We're stuck, that's what."

The dear old goat stepped back into the ship and nibbled his mustache.

"Are you sure you can't follow me?" he asked.

"Can't."

"You could if you wanted."

"Can't."

"Why don't you just give it a try?"

"Can't, and that's that."

"Well, what are we to do, then?" the old man asked. "It seems we are at an impasse."

He thought. They all thought, except Harold. He watched. He witnessed.

Then the old man said, "I have it. I knew I'd think of something. Mechanical means."

And hardly were the words out of his mouth when the lights came on in the room, at first flickering as dim as the candle, then coming up strong and smiling.

The phone rang. Puddleduck answered.

"Quack?"

"Kiss us," the excited face in the visor said. "We've made the auxiliaries putt. We can limp to haven."

"Grats," said Puddleduck. "But can't we blif for home?"

"No way. The mains will have to be made anew."

"Oh," said Puddleduck, and rang off.

"Can you come along now?" asked the old man.

The ship limped where he directed, and in time they came to a planet, green as Eden. It wasn't half bad, except that it wasn't near anything. They went into orbit around it, keeping close company with a small pitted whizzer of a satellite.

"That's my seat, that rock," said the old man. "That's where I sit to oversee when I visit. This is one of my planets. It's small, but it's a good home. If you will love it well, nurture and tend it, and take good care of it, I'll lend it to you. How about that?"

"Done," they said.

"Done it is, then," said the old man. "Well, I must be about my business. I'll check back shortly to see how you are getting

on. If you need me, sit on my rock and give me a call. I'll show up in no time. Now, if you will excuse me."

"Wait, wait," they said. "Before you tippy along, we must know—who are you freaky old pooper?"

"You may call me Landlord Thing," the old man said. He turned to Harold. "Are you coming?"

Harold looked at his parents with one quick sweep of his eyes and then he shook his head as fast as a suckling lamb can shake its tail. "No," he said. "Thank you."

Landlord Thing took a hitch on his shorts and stepped lightly through the wall into space. Then, just as they were opening their mouths to speak of him, he stuck his head back through the wall one last time.

He said, "Mind you, take good care of my world."

And then like a guru skipping barefoot through Himalayan icefields he was gone.

*

Sky Blue waits for Landlord Thing. He has a heavy gun in his hands and he means to bling the Thing good and proper. That's what he is there for, sitting on that dinky rock in space.

His mind wheels with the high heavens above. His mind whirls with the bare brown planet below. His mind is ground to flour between great stones.

He thinks, "Come. Come. Come and be killed."

*

They called the planet Here or East Overshoe or This Dump. They didn't love it. They didn't take care of it. They didn't nurture and tend it, or any of the other stuff they promised. They didn't plan to stay, so why should they?

They called themselves Groombridge Colony. As soon as they fixed the drive, they meant to tippy along. They meant to blif. They meant to go. Onward to Groombridge 1618/2

and the way things were supposed to be. After all, they had paid good money.

Since Triphammer and Puddleduck wanted to get back into the galactic big time worse than anybody—quack, yes!—they were in charge. Like proper leaders, they exhorted everyone to do his utmost.

Recall: to fix the drive, the mains had to be made anew. To do the job, they needed some of This, some of That, and some of the Third Thing.

They didn't wait a moment after they set down. They dug shafts like moles. They built towers like ants. They hammered and smoked and smelted and forged. They electrolyzed and transmuted. They ripped and raped and turned the planet upside down in the search for what they needed. They turned the green planet brown, these Groombrugians. They really made a mess of things.

Here's the hard part. This is rare in the universe. They came by it in no time. That you can't just buy at any corner store. They found twice as much as they needed. But the Third Thing, which everywhere else is common as dirt, was elusive as the wild butterfly of love. After years and years they had barely accumulated a single pood of the stuff, and that wasn't nearly enough.

When they were planning to leave East Overshoe come morning, the Groombridge gang cared naught a tiddle what they did to the planet. When it sank in finally that they weren't leaving all that soon, there were some who began to worry what Landlord Thing might make of their handiwork.

It wasn't anything you could sweep under the carpet and smile about. It was more obvious than that. Well, yes.

It was Triphammer who began to fuss about it first. And Puddleduck caught it from her. But it was Puddleduck who thought of the answer, and Triphammer who found it worthy. It often worked out that way. They were a team.

Their answer was to set Sky Blue on that whirling rock to slay their monster for them. Within their terms, it was a perfect solution. Puddleduck remembered that Landlord Thing had said he would come instanter than powdered breakfast if he were called from that rock. Ha! at their beck, when they were ready for him, and then, bling! Then they would have all the time and peace they needed to rip the planet to the heart. And Sky Blue was the man.

They shook hands on it, and set out to look for Sky Blue. That was what they called Harold now. They called him Sky Blue because he was so out to lunch. But they had need of him now. He could shoot.

Yes, he could shoot. It was one of the things he did that no one else would think of doing. Sky Blue had grown up eccentric.

The heart of it was that he took responsibility seriously. He had been there when the agreement with Landlord Thing was made and he had said, "I promise," in his heart. And like the loser he was, he wasted his time trying to live by his word.

Where things were brown, he did his best to green them again. Futile. When the Groombridge gang pared and cored the planet, he repaired and corrected. Outnumbered. Where they ripped and raped, he nurtured and tended. That is, he tried. Every day he fell further behind.

When it was necessary for balance, he shot things. He would think, "Come. Come and be killed." And because all of Landlord Thing's planet knew he had their best interests at heart, they would come, and he would kill them with love and sorrow.

If Triphammer and Puddleduck were not consumate politicians, hence tolerant, and if they hadn't enjoyed the fresh meat he brought home from time to time, they would have disowned him. They probably should have anyway. As it was, they named him Sky Blue and allowed him his amusement.

And because Triphammer and Puddleduck were Triphammer and Puddleduck, Groombridge Colony went along.

As Mount Rushmore said, speaking for the community, "Pretties need dippies for contrast, nay say?"

When Triphammer and Puddleduck found Sky Blue, their boy was up to his ears in dirt, beavering away making a large hole smaller. In the time it would take him to fill it, three more would be dug in search of the Third Thing, but he was not one to complain. He knew his obligation, even if no one else did, and he lived by it.

"Hey there, dull thud, child of ours," they said. "Muckle that shovel for the mo and hie thee hither. Busyness beckons."

Sky Blue did as he was directed. He stuck his shovel in the sand and hurried over to them. He still yearned for their good opinion whenever it was compatible with what he thought was right. Oh tell the truth—he might even strike a compromise with right for the sake of their good opinion. They had him hooked.

"Yes, yes," he said. "Progen lovies, put my knucks to your purpose."

"Oh best bubby, trumpets for your eagerness," they said. They produced the gun, Groombridge Colony's most powerful splat-blinger, and placed it in his hands. "Elim Landlord Thing for Mum and Dad, that's a good dumb-dumb son."

"Bling Landlord Thing? Where? Why? Oh, say not!" And Sky Blue tried to return the gun to Triphammer and Puddleduck, but they would have none of it.

"Yours," said Puddleduck.

"Yours," said Triphammer.

"Nay, nay, not I," said Sky Blue.

Triphammer said, "Do you treacle-drip for This Dump, nurdy son of mine?"

"Certain sure, I do."

"One boot, two boot, when the rent is due, and out go you. You lose."

"Misery mort," said Sky Blue. "Me, too? But no—holes ubiquate. I'll screege from view."

"Ho, ho, Hermit Harold, all by his onesome," said Puddleduck. "You lose."

"Unhappies," said Sky Blue. And he looked at the equalizer in his hands. "What what? Oh, double what what?"

Triphammer drew close and whispered sweet in his ear: "Bling him to frags, and lovings and keepings."

How's that for a promise?

*

So Sky Blue waits for Landlord Thing. Above above. Below below. He sits on that rock, the call gone forth, and waits.

And there Landlord Thing is! The old man wades through space toward the rock where Sky Blue sits.

Trembling, barely able to control himself, Sky Blue raises the gun in his hands—butt coming up to his shoulder, muzzle swinging down to point. The gun is aimed, centered on the brushy mustache. And Sky Blue pulls the trigger.

A beam lances and there is a blinding flash. The face piece of Sky Blue's spacesuit polarizes at the glare.

He casts the rifle from him into space, sobbing. His eyes clot with tears. He cries harder than he can remember, as though he has lost forever his last infinitely precious hope.

But as he sits there desolate, a pseudopod wraps comfortably about his shoulders, and a warm voice says, "How have things been? Tell me about them."

Sky Blue turns his head and opens his eyes. There, sitting beside him on that unnaturally comfortable rock, is Landlord Thing as first he saw him through the tight-pinched curtains so long before. Warm brown eyes and pseudopods.

"Nothing is right," says Sky Blue. "Look down there at your planet. It's been turned to brown. Nobody likes it there on your

world but me. Everyone else wants to get away and no matter how I try, I can't clean it up."

"That isn't the worst thing in the world," says Landlord Thing. "We'll see what can be done. Follow me."

He shifts around to the other side of the rock and Sky Blue follows.

"This is the top side," says Landlord Thing. "Now look."

Sky Blue looks up at Here. It fills the sky above him. He is overflooded with a great warm wave of mystery and awe. It is momentarily too much for him and he must close his eyes and look away before he can look back again.

"I never realized," he says.

Landlord Thing says, "You can heal the world. You can make it green again."

"Me?" says Sky Blue. "No, I can't."

"Oh, but you can," says Landlord Thing. "I have faith in you, Sky Blue."

Sky Blue looks at him in astonishment. He hasn't told Landlord Thing his new name.

"How can I do it?" asks Sky Blue. "I don't know how."

"You must take yourself out of yourself and put it in the planet. Nurture and tend the planet. Make it well again. Concentrate very very hard. Look at the planet and spread yourself so thin that you disappear."

Sky Blue is unsure. Sky Blue does not believe. But Sky Blue is determined.

He looks up at Here, dominating the sky like a great mandala. It is a wave—he drowns. It is a wind—he dissipates. It is a web—but he is the spinner, spinning thin, spinning fine, losing himself in the gossamer. He handles the world tenderly.

Landlord Thing watches. Landlord Thing witnesses. And above them in the sky, the world turns green.

When Sky Blue reassembles, he is not the same. He looks once at Landlord Thing and smiles, and then they sit there in

silence. They have called. They wait for their call to be answered. And after a time a ship lifts from the planet and comes to the rock.

It is Triphammer and Puddleduck. They wave to Sky Blue as though he were alone. He and Landlord Thing go aboard the ship. Triphammer and Puddleduck act as though they are blind to Landlord Thing's presence. Sky Blue removes his spacesuit.

Triphammer and Puddleduck say, "Gasp, splutter, quack! No, no, no! The frust just must bust—screamie-a-deamie!"

Sky Blue is bewildered. He turns to Landlord Thing and says, "I don't understand a word of it."

Landlord Thing waves a sympathetic polyp. "It can be that way at first. Listen to them very closely. Concentrate on every word and some of it will come clear."

So Sky Blue cranes an ear to the words of Triphammer and Puddleduck and concentrates harder than when he healed the planet. And, just barely, meaning filters through. They are nattering about the sudden return of the planet to its original condition. In the process, it seems, their castles have all been thrown down. Their mines are theirs no longer. Their stockpiles of This, That, and the Third Thing have disappeared in a lash flicker. They quabble about what has happened and what they should do.

Sky Blue listens to them until they run dry. Then he shakes his head in wonder.

"Offense. Unfair. Disrespect," says Triphammer.

Puddleduck nods. "*Wanh* for our importance," he says. "All toobies."

Landlord Thing nods. "All toobies, indeed," he says. "Tell them they are being given a second chance. Their only hope is if they take good advantage of it."

Sky Blue relays the message. "Return to Here," he says, "and learn to live there. It's your one life. Use it well."

Triphammer and Puddleduck are astounded at these words. Their jaws drop like a gallows trap. Their nurdy son has never spoken to them like this before.

Landlord Thing says, "Come along, Sky Blue. I have some people to introduce you to. I think you'll like them."

He passes through the wall as though it were nothing to him. Sky Blue looks at his parents one last time, and then he follows. He steps through the wall of the ship and into space.

"I'm coming," he says to Landlord Thing, striding the stars before him.

Sky Blue has held the curtains clutched tight in his hands this long time. Now he throws them open wide and peaks.

Tend your garden

WHY I NO LONGER PRETEND TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION: a letter to *Foundation*

Ian Watson has written to me on behalf of *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction,* asking me for a contribution. I wish I could write one. I've had tremendous respect for Watson ever since I read his Belgian Guest of Honor speech in a fanzine sent mysteriously to me a year or so ago. But the letter has arrived too late. I no longer live at the science fiction address. I no longer think in science fiction terms. Much as I might like to oblige Ian Watson, I don't think I can take part in a debate on science fiction within the context of a review of science fiction. Perhaps the best thing that I can do is to write this letter and explain why.

There was a time when science fiction frightened, awed and attracted me like nothing else I knew. It was the nearest thing to a wellspring of magic in my life. If I had been told then that one day I would grow up to become a writer of science fiction, that would have seemed to me a fate marvelous beyond belief. I'm sure I could not have imagined God being so good to me as that.

I remember when the bond between me and SF was made. Like so many crucial experiences, the surrounding details escape me. I remember the essence of it—that one central moment, how things looked, what I felt. But to tell of it now means that I must fill in the year and the circumstances by guess and

reconstruction. It's as though in my mind, the experience was timeless, an essential part of me my whole life long, and therefore not to be burdened with irrelevant specific detail.

It was about twenty-five years ago, and I was twelve. The place was Detroit, the metropolis. The journey was unusual—to shop at a major Detroit department store. In earlier years, my parents didn't drive to Detroit to shop at Hudson's. In later years, they used a suburban branch. But for a short period, we made an annual drive down Grand River Avenue to the heart of Detroit, put the car in a parking lot and did the Hudson's thing, and then off to Briggs Stadium to watch the Tigers in a big league ball game. This was the first time and the baseball game was a surprise. Oh, to watch Ted Williams, last of the .400 hitters, wiggle his ass as he settled in to the plate! I never thought I'd see *him.* A dangerous and magnificent man, an epitome of power and concentration, even at the end of his career, even skying a harmless fly ball to center.

Wonderful as the ball game was to my twelve-year-old self—a sudden recompense for the drudgery of travel and hours of hanging around in a department store on a beautiful summer Saturday—it was not what was most wonderful to me in this venture into unknown Detroit. That was arranged not by my parents' contrivance, but by the most fateful powers of the universe.

The parking lot my parents were guided to in downtown Detroit was across the street from an upstairs bookstore. In the window, among other things, it said: "Science Fiction." I'd never seen a sign that said that before. Having seen it, I knew that I desperately wanted to go inside that store.

I can't say for certain now what was the first science fiction story I ever read, but I do remember reading the serial version of Robert Heinlein's *Farmer in the Sky* in my older brother's *Boy's Life* when I was ten. I had read all the juvenile science fiction I could find, what little there was.

I spotted Fredric Brown's *Space on My Hands* among the books available through the school paperback service, and picked it off. What a bizarre book that was! I still have the same battered paperback all these many years later. *The Puppet Masters* was given to me to read by my Patrol Leader, one day in Boy Scout Camp when I was feverish with sunburn. I read it outside the tent in a deserted camp in broad daylight, near out of my mind with terror and delight.

Adult science fiction disturbed me and drew me. I'd been taking adult Westerns out of the library since I was eight. I ventured deeper into the adult section of the East Lansing Public Library looking for science fiction, but mostly I didn't find it there. Very little science fiction had been published by respectable New York trade publishers, and the library only had a few titles lost among the general adult novels. Michigan State College, where my father taught, acknowledged no science fiction in its library. However, the State Library in Lansing did list some science fiction anthologies in its card catalog. I ventured back into the stacks and dug them out—fat books of short stories edited by Healy and McComas, Conklin, and Derleth. I read them through, making what sense of them I could.

I was avidly hungry for science fiction. I felt drawn to it by an affinity I couldn't name or explain. And very simply, I didn't know where to find it.

Where I might have found it at the time was in pulp magazines, but I didn't know that they existed. I was sheltered. Had I known, I would certainly not have been allowed to have them. My parents' tolerance of vulgarity was limited. It would never have extended to breast-plated space maidens.

This sign in the bookstore window was my first clue as to where science fiction might be found. How could I have been kept away? At some point during the lunch hour, after the shopping and before the ball game surprise, I was able to steal ten minutes and lunge free.

Up the dim stairs I went and into the mysterious store, like an attic filled with dust and treasure. Wild and shy, I looked around, half afraid that someone would see me and ask my business. Then I saw the science fiction books. They were in two glass-fronted bookcases there along the top of the stair.

I'd never *seen* so many science fiction books. I didn't know that many science fiction books existed. It was a revelation.

I didn't open the glass. I was too overwhelmed. In fear and trembling, I bent and looked at those strange alluring books. Colorful spines on which could be seen flashes of mystery and the names of publishers I'd never heard of before: Prime Press, Gnome Press, Fantasy Press, Shasta.

My future was there before me, but at the moment I couldn't touch a book. I could only stare at them in wonderment. At last, even the very fact of their existence became too much for me, and I had to turn and plunge away down the stairs to join the ongoing sunlit world and learn of impending baseball games.

Wonder on wonders! But today, I don't remember who won that Tiger-Red Sox game. It was an event without consequence. But that timeless stolen moment before the glass bookcase lives with crystal clarity in my heart.

That day in Detroit, I felt the sense of wonder.

The sense of wonder has been a matter of concern to readers and writers of science fiction. What was it that Damon Knight said the sense of wonder was? Oh, yes—"some widening of the mind's horizons, no matter in what direction—the landscape of another planet, or a corpuscle's-eye view of an artery, or what it feels like to be in rapport with a cat...any new sensory experience, impossible to the reader in his own person, is grist for the mill, and what the activity of science fiction writing is all about."

This definition covers one part of my experience that day in Detroit—the sudden widening of horizons that I felt sitting behind third base and watching Ted Williams at bat. It may be

an accurate description of the limits within which wonder has been constrained in science fiction writing. But it doesn't begin to account for my experience before the glass bookcase.

I thought that it did for the longest time. But I was wrong.

When I returned to the bookstore in Detroit a year later on a trip that was a duplicate of the first—same parking lot, same shopping, same ball game—I was less frightened. I had money in my pocket, and more autonomy. I had some time in which to choose. I opened the bookcase and bought three books, the foundation of my science fiction collection.

And what opportunities I had to collect science fiction—that one touch of magic in the unmagical Fifties. All the old science fiction pulp classics, and new novels, too, became available in paperback form, and I bought or stole them. Science fiction was the only thing I stole as a teen-ager, the only thing I had to have and couldn't pay for, and I stole a lot of it. And there was the vague promise of some science fiction magazines to be passed on to me from the son-in-law of a friend of my mother's, which in the event proved to be two large boxes filled with years and years of *Astounding* and *Galaxy.* One way or another, over the years, I must have owned or read all those books that I once saw behind glass, or if I didn't, I could have.

It was five years before the bond between SF and me manifested itself as a sudden irresistible conviction that I ought to be writing stories. I sat down immediately and wrote a science story, more or less. It was a crude imitation of what I read.

I apprenticed myself to the writing of science fiction, and little by little my imitations and attempts to approximate got better. My crowning piece of apprentice work was my first published novel, *Rite of Passage,* which I labored over for years. It used the materials of Heinlein and the inspiration of Heinlein and the example of Heinlein to take exception to Heinlein and find my difference from him. And the novel was certified by an award as Best Science Fiction Novel of the Year.

So my attempts to write science fiction must be valid. I must be a science fiction writer—that which was beyond my wildest dreams at twelve.

I was so wrapped up in my learning program that I only came to recognize some significant facts very slowly. One was that I no longer enjoyed reading new science fiction, this at the very same time that I was so earnestly attempting to write science fiction. I found current science fiction unwonderful, no matter that it widened the mind's horizons in some direction or other. *Rite of Passage* fulfilled Damon Knight's definition of the sense of wonder—but in my heart of hearts I knew that it did not fulfill mine. It was up to the standards of wonder of science fiction—that which I had been struggling to write—but not up to the standards of wonder that I once felt in that attic full of treasure in Detroit.

Somewhere in the two issues of *Foundation* that were sent to me for familiarization, there is a telling comment made by Ian Watson. It is, in fact, a rip-off of a paragraph in that Belgian Guest of Honor speech—the very remark by Watson that first won my attention. Watson says:

"I suggest (perversely, it may seem) that SF is a way of thinking which should be trying to put itself out of business—because one day SF will be as obsolete as a stone axe—because it has fulfilled its specific role, thrown up by the present stage in historical, cultural, mental development, of creating a climate of thought and feeling about Future Man who awaits us; and because there will be other, finer tools. But meanwhile there is SF—and let's at least fashion that stone axe as well as we can!"

What I came to feel after *Rite of Passage* was that science fiction was a stone axe. That when I was younger, I had perceived within the stone axe a mighty power to transform. I had labored to learn to make the stone axe, shaping it as the elders shaped it, working within the forms they had set forth, extending the art of the stone axe to its last implication. But

while I was doing this, stone axes lost their mystery. They had become ordinary. Now I was a licensed axe maker with a shaped stone in my hand, and in my heart the conviction that what I was holding was not what first inspired me.

What first inspired me was the sense of wonder, and the sense of wonder is not merely what Damon Knight and science fiction have held it to be. Only time could reveal that to me. Only time could show me the difference between the ephemeral wonder of a big league game and the eternal wonder that I had felt before those bookcases of science fiction. I am still led by the second one—even though science fiction is a dead lump of stone to me now.

It was Sam Moskowitz, writing about the sterility of Fifties' science fiction, who first brought up the sense of wonder. Moskowitz borrowed the term from the psychologist Rollo May: "Wonder is the opposite of cynicism and boredom; it indicates that a person has a heightened aliveness, is interested, expectant, responsive. It is essentially an 'opening' attitude...an awareness that there is more to life than one has yet fathomed, an experience of new vistas of life to be explored as well as new profundities to be plumbed."

It was this that I felt that day when I was twelve. A sense of a different dimension of being asserting itself and erupting into ordinary life. It was a revelation of new vistas of life to be explored, an awareness that there was more to life than I had yet fathomed.

It was not Knight's mere "widening of the mind's horizons, no matter in what direction." It was not merely that the amount of science fiction that I knew to exist became fifty times larger in an instant.

What I felt was something else. It was awe, and fear, and power and truth, as though a goddess had for a brief moment lifted her veil before me.

It is that wonder that I must reflect, not the outward form of

the books that I saw. The container is not the content. Science fiction is not the same as SF.

Only time could reveal that to me.

I may have served my apprenticeship in science fiction, but there is no way that I could ever have grown up to be Robert Heinlein and to write science fiction, however much I may have wished it. No more than Robert Heinlein in his time could have grown up to be H.G. Wells and to write scientific romances, however much he may have wished to when he was young. The world moves on. There is no going back.

SF is a snake. Science fiction is a skin that it is shedding.

Or, to put it another way—yes, science fiction is a stone axe. But SF is a stone implement of another sort, a wheel, fire, the concept of the tool, and more. I can drop my stone axe.

I cannot be a science fiction writer. I have to be a writer of the form of SF that comes after science fiction.

I haven't written a science fiction story in five years. I haven't written a complete new story of any kind in five years. I have been busily engaged in trying to reason my way to what comes next and failing again and again. At the same time, I have never lost my conviction that I ought to be writing SF. The result is that I have written nothing.

But now that I am clear of it, I have noticed a number of things about science fiction that have confirmed my intuitive conviction that the days of the stone axe are past.

Typical techniques of science fiction like extrapolation are not SFnal any more. They are the common property of thriller writers and mimetic novelists.

Typical symbols of science fiction like robots are not SFnal any more. They are co-opted instead to sell office equipment and household cleanser on television.

Typical story materials of science fiction like galactic empires are not SFnal any more. They are pasted together into movies that are not so much of the present as homage to the Thirties.

Older writers of science fiction—the pioneers of the form—are dying. Younger writers of science fiction are claiming that the rewards of the form are limited, or that they are exhausted, and retiring from the field.

What is apparent to me now is that the form of science fiction, its concepts and parameters, were based on the science, the facts and the assumptions of 1940. And these are no longer valid. They are not our science, our facts, or our assumptions. Therefore we cannot believe in science fiction, or pretend to, and we cannot write it.

I don't think that anyone has fully believed in the premises of science fiction who came to write it during these last twenty-five years. We've all been imitating those who did believe, like Asimov, Heinlein and van Vogt. But we ourselves have all been pretending. Playing the science fiction game.

But what a limited game it actually was—narrow, crippled, materialistic. Science fiction was the best vehicle for the sense of wonder that the time could produce, but it was always more of a lump of stone than an effective tool, no matter what wide-eyed dreaming boys may have seen in it.

I still don't know what comes next. I'm not at all sure that it can be reasoned out, except after the fact. The path to follow, I see now, is the path of intuition.

Before me there is not just "wider" but "level on level". The bond between me and SF was not an accident. The apprenticeship I served in science fiction was not an end in itself, but only a predicate, a necessary preliminary. What comes next is whatever is appropriate, expressed whatever way I can find.

As matters sort themselves out, as science fiction fades away just as the lost race story did before it, as the new form manifests itself more and more clearly, I think we are going to discover that the ancestors and forerunners of the new form of SF have been hidden invisible within the great body of work

that has been pretending to be science fiction because it hasn't had anything else to claim to be.

It may be that I and others who always thought that we were writing science fiction will eventually prove to have been writing something else from the very beginning.

At this moment, all that I can say for certain is that I am ready to write a story again. An SF story, but not science fiction. I'm not quite sure what it will look like when I am done, or what anyone will call it. What is clear to me is that it won't be science fiction—and it won't pretend to be. It will be an expression of the sense of wonder in a new and contemporary form.

It will honor the original bond made between me and SF in that bookstore in Detroit twenty-five years ago.

For the first time.

AFTERMATH

You all know the story of Humpty Dumpty, of how he fell and could not be put back together again.

What is not generally reported is that shortly after this tragedy occurred, the chick of a roc bird was seen wandering in the vicinity.

PRECIS

some fun

sane fear

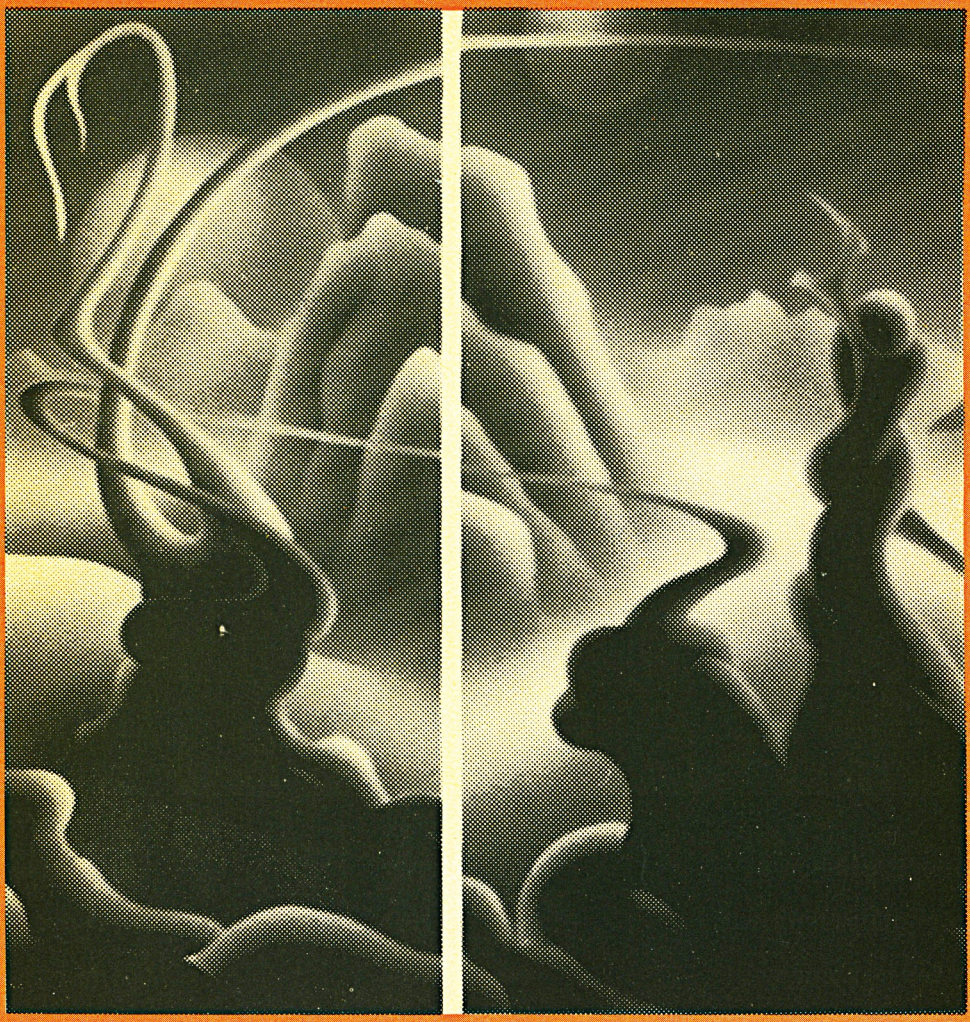
sand fleas

snappy fables

something fine

spooky fantoms

semper fidelis



subtle fire

suave farts

sad farewells



science fiction

supernal fandangos

strabismic forecasts