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WEIRD HEROES™

A NEW AMERICAN PULP!

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ENGLEHART
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SWIFT

STERANKO
ADAMS
REESE
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MAROTO

EDITED AND DEVELOPED BY

BYRON PREISS

VOLUME 2

IN THE 1930's, THE OLD AMERICAN PULPS GAVE THEIR READERS SAM SPADE, DOC SAVAGE, SHEENA, THE SHADOW, CAPTAIN FUTURE AND THE LONE RANGER.

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WEIRD HEROES

VOL. II

UNITING THESE GENRES OF POPULAR FICTION — ADVENTURE, SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, DETECTIVE FICTION, AND GRAPHIC STORYTELLING — UNDER ONE COVER

WEIRD HEROES™

A NEW AMERICAN PULP!

FEATURING

DOC PHOENIX
BY TED WHITE • ILLUSTRATED BY FABIAN

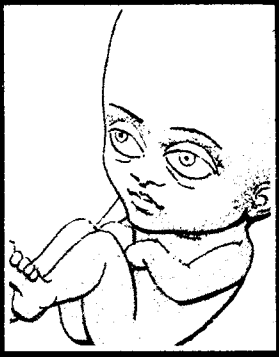
SPV 166—THE UNDERGROUND EXPRESS
BY ELLIOT S. MAGGIN • ILLUSTRATED BY REESE AND KIRCHNER

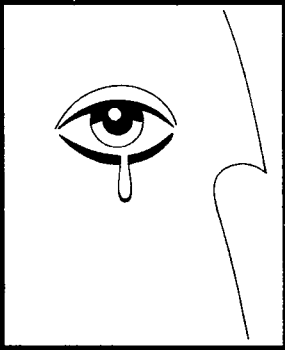
GREATHEART SILVER
BY PHILIP JOSE FARMER • ILLUSTRATED BY TOM SUTTON

THE CAMDEN KID
BY CHARLIE SWIFT • ILLUSTRATED BY STERANKO

VIVA
BY STEPHEN ENGLEHART • ILLUSTRATED BY ESTEBAN MAROTO

CORDWAINER BIRD
BY HARLAN ELLISON • ILLUSTRATED BY NEAL ADAMS





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Character, Text and Afterword to GREATHEART SILVER © 1975 by Philip Jose Farmer

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"The stories, characters, and incidents mentioned in this book are entirely fictional. No actual persons, living or dead, are intended or should be inferred."

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All art produced especially for WEIRD HEROES. All stories in this volume are being published for the first time. All stories complete in this volume.

WEIRD HEROES™

Edited And Developed By
BYRON PREISS

VOLUME 2

Pyramid Books ▲ New York

Produced by
Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc.

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Design Consultant/Logotypes—Steranko

Introduction

Weird Heroes is a collective effort to do something new: to approach three popular heroic fantasy forms—science fiction, the pulps and the comics—from different and exciting directions.

Each story in this book is experimental. There are revitalizations of classic fantasy themes such as time travel and jungle adventure. There is innovative use of some of the most dynamic graphic story talent in the world, from Philippino illustrator Alex Nino to American catoonist Ralph Reese. There is a strong and conscious effort to encourage storytelling which does not rely on violence as a primary source of drama.

Weird Heroes is a collective effort to give back to heroic fiction its thrilling sense of adventure and entertainment—the heartbeat of the old pulps. The pulps used heroes to bring fiction to a grand level of excitement—a level which incorporated the reader into the experience. *Weird Heroes* refreshes that concept of fiction as an adventure in itself, without relating to the new wave of violence and pornography in the production of exciting stories.

Weird Heroes is a collection of memorable firsts. It represents the first major publication of prose stories by both science fiction and graphic story writers. Within volumes 1 and 2 you will find the first published appearances of famous pulp biographer Philip José Farmer's epic pulp character, "Greatheat Silver." You'll be witness to the first major book publication of an interview with award-winning science fiction and fantasy writer, Fritz Leiber. You'll experience the insanity of *Superman* author Elliot S. Maggin's *"Gonzo Storytelling"* and discover the new hero by a literary desecendant to Dashiell Hammett on *Secret Agent X-9,* Archie Goodwin.

Weird Heroes contains the first American book illustration work by award-winning Spanish artist Esteban Maroto. Jim Steranko and Neal Adams, two titans of the modern graphic story field, appear for the first time under the same cover in Volume 2. Tom Sutton, an unsung hero of the comics with a comedic style that blends Kurtzman, Elder, and Eisner, also makes his book debut with five plates for "Showdown at Shootout."

Perhaps this book would be more appropriately titled *New Heroes,* but in their own ways the characters herein are all very *different* sorts of new heroes and heroines. **Different or, if you prefer,** *weird.*

The people responsible for these weird characters are no strangers to the world of heroes. The writers and artists involved with the book can take all or most of the credit for the chronicles of *Wonder Woman, Batman, Superman, Amos Burke, Flash Gordon, Nick Fury,* the old *Captain Marvel, Harlequin,* the new *Captain Marvel, The Avengers, The Avenger, The Beast, The Justice League of America,* the new *Manhunter, Doc Savage* and *Phineas Pogg.*

Why, then, our new heroes? Do we really need "heroes" at all?

Need is a strange word. Certainly we could do without Superman, Doc Savage or even astronaut Frank Borman; but these men were more than individuals doing some outstanding activity in the name of some cause. They were *symbols*—and that's what all America's lasting heroes are: *symbols.* Superman was and is a basic statement about humanity's ability to do the apparently impossible. Frank Borman was and is a symbol of humanity's ability to explore, discover, *expand.* Some heroes, such as Jack Kirby's and Joe Simon's *Captain America,* were symbols of their time. *Captain America*'s roots in 1941-vintage patriotism have since become the core of a new series of introspective adventures in which "Cap's" WW II ideals are interfaced with the skepticism and challenges of a post-Watergate democracy.

In a time when our supposedly "real" heroes—elected officials, peacekeeping world bodies, chiefs of state, and public administrators—are too frequently being revealed as fraudulent, incompetent, or unscrupulous, the

public affection for many of our fantasy heroes and heroines has remained intact. It has endured because those characters represent basic hopes and dreams which people continue to share. They represent peace, justice, tenacity, and freedom.

For this, they are "needed." It is a healthy and important indicator that these heroes persist. It is less than healthy to see the parade of many of the new heroes: the Destructor, the Baroness, the Penetrator, the Eliminator. Death. Violence. Symbols that "justice" can be bought with the muzzle of a gun.

So we return to our new heroes. They are an outcry. A statement of **"No!—that's not the only way things can be done." Weird Heroes** is one alternative to other new heroes. Our characters are symbolic of different ideals, or at least of different ways to reach the same ideals. Ted White's avocation of the sciences of the mind as a viable way to solve personal and social problems in "Doc Phoenix." Archie Goodwin's call for social responsibility and the recognition of the need for affirmative action in "Adam Stalker." Joann Korbin's delineation of the realization that old age does not always meen inactivity in "Rose."

A central message of some of the old pulps and many of the new paperback adventurers is: **Violence can solve your problems.** A central message of this new American pulp is **Respect life and enjoy it.**

If there is a common ground between this new American pulp and the old pulps, it is a feeling of enthusiasm. A feeling of fresh creative effort and a hope that what we are doing is exciting.

If you have gone to a newsstand in search of the whereabouts of wonder, I hope you'll find some of it here.

Ten Heroes, ten dreams, ten hopes.

Have a good time.

Byron Preiss
New York 1975

Introduction to Volume 2

Six heroes, all different, all exciting.

Six stories, all unusual, all complete in this book.

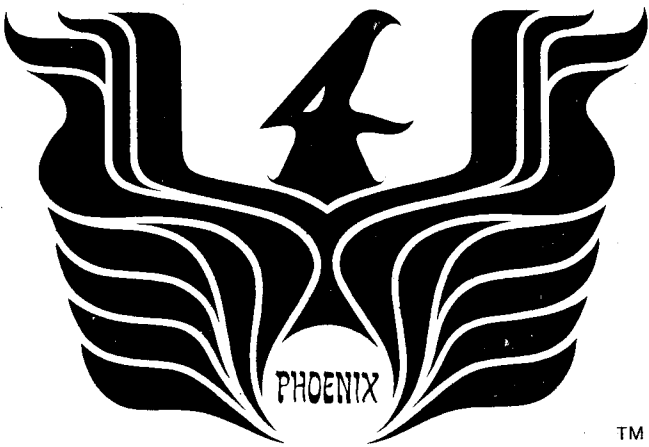
Twenty-nine pages of fantastic graphics.

That, in a nutshell, is *Weird Heroes, Volume 2.* A continuation of the hopefully innovative and entertaining approach found in Volume 1.

For the uninitiated, Volume 2, is actually Part B of Volume 1. "Too much material!" said Pyramid Books when the bulk called *Weird Heroes* arrived in their New York office. Yet this could not be resolved by an insensitive, unaesthetic hacking job. It was resolved by scheduling the book you hold in your hands, a book that holds one Philip José Farmer story, two Tom Sutton drawings and one Alex Nino spectacular more than was originally planned. They are the bonuses that resulted from the making of *Weird Heroes Volume 2.*

So let me give credit where credit is due. For sticking with and promoting the publication of *Weird Heroes,* hats off to the late Matthew Huttner, Norman Goldfind and Ron Adelson of Pyramid. For their extraordinary editorial assistance, and support, *merci beaucoup* to Mark Howell, Mary Traina, Steve Axelrod, Jim McIntyre and Lem Rouk. For being a friend, a world-renowned talent and a nice guy, my appreciation to Jim Steranko, who, with insufficient remuneration lurking around the economic corner, outdid himself as design consultant and logotype artist for this book. Finally, to the people who trusted the effort, who gave their time and talent to a new concept, thanks.

Prepare yourself for the combined fantasies of thirteen super talents. *Weird Heroes 2* is about to begin.



TM

Doc Phoenix
by Ted White
Illustrated by Stephen Fabian

You are about to read a grand heroic adventure. "Grand" and "heroic" because it supplies the elements of epic-scale entertainment—the cameraderie, the secret headquarters, the scientific background, the special talents, and the special hero. His name is Dr. Raymond Phoenix and his father is Ted White.

It seems fitting to open this book with Ted's work because he is one of a dwindling number of literary personae involved professionally with the old pulps. Ted is the present editor of the science fiction magazine that started them all, *Amazing Stories*, and he doubles as chief of its sister book, *Fantastic*. His informative and congenial editing make each issue of these publications an intimate link with the contemporary fantasy scene. Under Ted's helm, they have also become two of the sharpest looking science fiction magazines available.

During the sixties, Ted was responsible for the adaptation of "Captain America" into prose form. His familiarity with all aspects of heroic fiction makes him a likely father for "The Man Who Enters the Mind."

Stephen Fabian, whose incredible art complements and broadens the atmosphere of Ted's story, is a New England illustrator with numerous fantasy and science fiction publications to his credit. To say that Stephen's work is reminiscent of the late Virgil Finlay's pulp renderings would be compliment enough, but I must go beyond that and say that Stephen is one of the most exciting new talents to hit the field in a decade. His black-and-white interpretation of "Phoenix" will knock you out.

Sit back and flip the page. You are about to meet the "new" Doc Savage. Exciting, original, but warmly nostalgic in atmosphere.

This first episode of "The Man Who Enters the Mind" has four segments. As you enter the world of the first, remember that things may not be what they seem to be.

Make the discovery for yourself . . .

Phoenix stood on the bluff and stared down into the mists. What dangers, what phantasms did they hold for him *this* time? The worn path down was familiar now. He had followed its turns and twists six times. The seventh descent—his last? Too soon to tell.

Time to get on with it. He stepped out from under the shimmering arch and let his boots skid down the gravel incline to the first ledge. The weight of his backpack nagged at him—had he covered every contingency this time? There was no use worrying about it; he shrugged his shoulders against the straps and moved into the twilight mists.

Two hours of careful climbing brought him down to the plain. Measured vertically, the distance had not been far, but the mist had made it impossible to see more than a few feet ahead. Still, the descent had been without incident. *That was unusual.* He must not relax his guard, although the stress added greatly to his growing sense of fatigue.

He was below the mist now: it appeared as a low pearlescent ceiling, a threatening cloud cover through which the light was filtered into unreal tones, casting no shadows. Before him the trail was a faint track that made its way across a dry flat plain. The ground at his feet was cracked and dusty; already he was thirsty, and he had only just begun.

"You're back." The words were sounds of dry leaves rustling against each other.

He turned, without surprise, to regard the old crone who stood behind him, materialized from the hovering mist perhaps, or . . .

"Yes. Have you any advice, Old Mother?"

"Have you ever heeded my advice? It never changes, you know. Get back. Now. You're the intruder here."

"I know, but by invitation."

"You seek your own doom, boy."

"No, Old Mother. I seek yours."

She coughed, spasms wracking her bent body. "Too late, too late!"

"Have you no spells for me?"

"Ahh!" She spat into the dust. "None that you want, and none I care to spare."

"Yoou are as helpful as ever," he said in disgust. "Why bother to meet me?" But she was gone, the shifting light showing no trace of her.

Raising his left arm, he checked his chronometer. Six hours remained—at maximum. No time to be standing idly by.

The track wandered between coarse skeletal shrubs and over bare ground. A desolate place—one of the worst he had ever seen. Life seemed only a scant memory here, death ever present.

Although the plain had seemed flat, Phoenix knew better. Gentle ridges rolled over into deepening valleys and the land shelved away until at last he stood on the rim of a great canyon. Here, he knew, danger would be unavoidable. Relentlessly, he followed the rim to the narrow descent that breached its sheer wall.

He had gone only a short way down from the rim when a great gust of wind first slammed him against the wall and then plucked at his clothing to suck him outward. Dust swirled around him, blinding him, choking him and filling his mouth with sandy grit. He was balanced upon a narrow descending shelf hardly wider than the sole of his boot, leaning with all his weight against the bare rock of the canyon wall.

The wind gusted and battered him. Even with goggles over his eyes he could see nothing but gray-brown dust. Inch by inch he groped forward with his feet, his fingertips grasping at every crack, even the tiniest fissure in the wall at his side.

Soon, he knew—yes, there!—his foot found only empty space where the shelf had been. Now he must throw himself forward blindly and leap a gap of some four feet to gain the shelf again. The wind howled in his ears with maniacal glee, its darts and thrusts unpredictable, undependable. He paused and slowed his breathing.

Count. Slow breaths. One. Two. Three. Hold the breath for an equal count. Now, exhale: One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Lungs exhausted. In again: One. Two . . .

He forced himself to be calm, slowing his pulse with his respiration. Visualize the gap: see the distance—the wall at his left—the shelf, torn by some slide, an empty scar four feet three

inches wide. The wind: feel—*understand*—its pressures. Ignore the dust.

Now!

He was across, his feet once more firm upon the narrow shelf.

The wind died.

When he reached the overhang, a shallow cave half hollowed from the rock, he took stock of himself. The goggles were useless now, their crystal lenses scoured and sandblasted into opacity. A memento—the seventh pair. His scalp itched with sand, his exposed skin felt raw, and his throat was impossibly dry. He looked at his chronometer. The digital readout gave him two more hours. Would that be enough? He unslung his pack and took out the flat canteen, allowing himself three sips, no more. His lips cracked when he opened his mouth to drink.

Then on once more. The shelf was wider now and the route unencumbered. He slid the last ten feet down the sheer face of the canyon wall.

"That took you long enough," said the bearded young man. He rose to sandaled feet and his robe hung loose around him. "I began to wonder if you were coming."

Phoenix nodded, wordlessly.

"Then the wind came up, and I knew you were making the descent. How much time have you left?"

Phoenix glanced again at his chronometer. "Enough. Where is he?"

"Down by the water. I told him you were coming."

"Was that necessary?"

"Was it wrong? I'm sorry if it was, but I didn't think you'd want him wandering off. You remember that time you couldn't find him—"

"Yes," Phoenix said, cutting him off. From experience he knew the earnest young man to be verbose; his apologies could go on and on. "Let's go."

"Sure. It's this way. How are you equipped? Do you think you have everything this time? Last time—"

"You never know," Phoenix said. "I hope so." And he hoped for silence as well. Everything in this place had its dangers; he wondered at times if the chattering of the young man was not simply a more subtle danger—diversionary, perhaps to dull his senses.

The bearded youth led the way past huge boulders strewn randomly on the canyon floor. They descended to a thin rivulet of water which made its way along a stone channel. Nothing grew at its edge. Squatting on a flat slab which overhung the

water was the figure of an old man. At their approach he straightened and stood, unkempt white locks falling to his waist, mingling with the hairs of a matted, yellowed beard. He too wore a loose robe, and in his right hand he held a staff, upon which he leaned.

He gave Phoenix an appraising nod. "You're here," he said. "Good." His taciturnity matched Phoenix's own.

"Has it moved?" Phoenix asked. Time did not function normally here; he had no way of knowing how long it had been since his last attempt.

"It remains," the old man said, gesturing around them with the sweep of his arm, "as you see."

"The Shadow of Death lies heavy over the entire land," the younger man added. The other two ignored him.

"The focus, I mean."

"As I said."

"All right," Phoenix said, once again glancing at his chronometer.

"You have the means with which to deal with it—this time?"

"I think so. We'll see."

"Very well." The old man leaned upon his staff and pointed. "We shall follow the canyon thus."

The canyon floor widened as they followed it downstream, and suddenly the sides fell away to reveal a vast natural amphitheater. Under almost any circumstances it would have made an imposing sight. Under the present circumstances it was arresting. In its center, at a point directly between the rock-strewn floor and the top of the canyon walls, was . . . *darkness*.

Like a drop of ink tossed into clear water, thought Phoenix. A spreading stain that hung in the very air. Impenetrable at its center, a black hole of darkest night, the Shadow attenuated at its edges, but had no edge as such. Vastly thinner, it pervaded this entire land, stifling light and life everywhere. Only at its focus, where it coalesced into tangible blackness, could the Shadow be perceived for what it was.

Phoenix felt a coldness within his body. He recognized the visceral reaction to the Shadow. He stood in the presence of Death.

"Six times, my friend," the old man said quietly, "six times it has consumed you."

"Phoenix nodded. "Six times it's killed me. And seven times I've come back. I don't know if I can survive the process again."

"If you fail," the bearded youth said, voice timid, "we shall

all die. We live on our expectations . . ."

Phoenix unslung his backpack and began taking objects from it, fitting each together until a strange construct began to take form. "I'm changing my tactics," he said. "Before I tried to do it with my mind. Theoretically that should suffice. I am as strong as it is. Objectively, anyway. But I've failed each time—perhaps because here I am diminished while it is not. So—" he snapped the final element into place—"we'll try something a bit more literal."

"What's that?" the younger man asked.

"This?" Phoenix smiled, a grim rictus that did not touch his eyes. "This is a nuclear device."

The other two betrayed no recognition of what he had said, but Phoenix had expected none. Nuclear devices were unknown here.

"Give me a hand, will you?" he said to the youth. "Pick it up by the handle there on the other side."

The young man did so and together they carried the device out across the floor of the canyon.

"I I'm frightened," the youth said.

"Nothing to worry about," Phoenix said. "I'll do it myself, but it's just too awkward when it's assembled."

"How far . . . how far must we take it?"

"Not much further." They were now almost directly under the Shadow. "Here." Phoenix set his side down gently. The young man dropped his hastily. "Okay. Go back, now," Phoenix said. Fortunately the device had been developed for "field use"—it could stand rough handling. Now it remained to be armed.

The youth was running now, already halfway back to the canyon mouth where the old man stood leaning upon his staff. Phoenix glanced up—and immediately wished he had not. The Shadow was a great weight which seemed to be balanced and about to fall upon him, about to crush him, *as it had six times before.*

"What is it like to die, only to be resurrected to face the same fate once more?" the old man had asked him upon their second encounter. Phoenix had had no answer for him then; he had none now. Life here was not the same for him as it was for them; death here might inflict upon him an inescapable trauma, but he would rise again from its ashes. Still, it was something he could not easily face. Well, this time would be different, in any case. He stooped and made the settings which armed the device. *Done.*

He looked up again at the Shadow, and felt a moment of boyish glee. This was the biggest damned firecracker he'd ever put under a can! Then he set out in a loping run for the canyon mouth, where the other two anxiously waited.

"Three things may happen," he told them. "Number one—the device will go off and the Shadow will consume it. In that case I've failed again. Number two—it will be successful . . . but it will destroy us as well. Number three—it will be successful and its energies will be used up and we'll be untouched. It's number two I'm worried about. I'm not concerned for myself, but I think you two had better retreat."

The old man nodded gravely. "I understand your concern. How long have we?"

Phoenix looked again at his chronometer. "I can wait just twelve minutes before I detonate it."

"Very well," the old man said. He turned to his young companion. "Come, let us make what haste we may."

"I—I wish you luck!" the youth cried back over his shoulder as he followed the old man back up the canyon.

Phoenix sat down upon a rock and waited, watching his chronometer. The canyon followed a twisting, back-doubling course. Its walls could provide adequate shelter if they got far enough back in time. The shock waves would be broken, the initial flash blocked. They should survive.

The time seemed to go slowly now. He reminded himself that time here followed its own course; his chronometer clocked the passage of time in another place.

Numbers shaped and reshaped themselves on the face of his chronometer until at last they showed only one minute and twelve seconds remaining. Best not to cut a fine line, he decided. He thumbed the small black broadcasting device and out in the center of the natural amphitheater nuclear fission occurred.

It was a "shaped" charge, pointing eighty-six percent of its energy directly upwards. The device was experimental and had cost its makers 1.2 billion dollars to build; it was unique.

Phoenix sat upon a rock and watched the creation of a miniature sun, a ball of expanding light so bright that even with pitch black goggles over his eyes he found it impossible to stare directly upon it.

The tiny sun seemed to rise gently, like a floating balloon, into the air—*and into the Shadow.*

As it did, it seemed to diminish its brightness, growing dull and red. To Phoenix the sun looked almost as if it were shrinking, consumed, while still in its birth, by the great Shadow into

Phoenix meets an ego

which it was penetrating.

Would it work? A long shot for sure. *What if the wily old bastard had picked this for the most spectacular suicide of all times*?

Then it brightened again, and Phoenix halted, hands halfway to his goggles. Transfixed, he watched.

Something was happening. Something was changing. He felt it inside of himself—a weight slipping out of his body, a weight he'd been unaware of until now, a weight he'd acquired upon first entering this place, a weight that was lightening now, diminishing . . .

Gone!

Phoenix tried to read his chronometer, forgetting for the moment the goggles which made that impossible. Could it all have been less than a minute? He stood up. There had been no shock wave, no impact for him at all.

He looked up again. The light was white and blinding, expanding, more sun-like than ever.

As he watched, the face of the nuclear sun became blotched and mottled, and, as Phoenix tried to understand, irregular shapes began to slide across its disc until they assembled into recognizable features.

Two great tired eyes looked down upon him, and a mouth opened.

Well done, Dr. Phoenix. I feel much better. Now you must die one last time.

-2-

"You mean that sonofa bitch really tried to kill you, Doc?"

Raymond Phoenix nodded. "That's my assumption. But he had no way of knowing the timing—how close it was—or my programmed emergence point. I'm not sure whether he thought he could get me while I was still Inside, or whether he had something set up for me when I emerged. It doesn't matter; I let him think I'd emerge at the same place I had before—inside his compound—so whatever he had in mind for me was forestalled when I emerged here." He turned his gaze away from his associate and stared for a moment out through the deceptively clear window. Beyond the window was a riot of green—a thicket of trees, brush and vines. The vines were honeysuckle, morning glory, and Virginia creeper; the morning glory was in bright bloom in the early morning sun. Grape vines hung like

thick corded ropes from the lower branches of tall white oaks and tulip poplars. Dogwoods nestled under the umbrella of the taller trees. The contrast, Phoenix reflected, was vivid. He had spent far too long in the lifeless wilderness of the Commander-in-Chief's mind. But that was now half a world away from this West Virginia fastness.

"What now, Doc?"

Phoenix returned his attention to the other man. Michael "Moose" Moynihan was a huge, bearlike man whose sandy hair and full bushy beard framed a perpetually smiling countenance. A systems analyst and computer man, his knowledge of both theoretical physics and rarified mathematics had been essential in the development of Phoenix's parapsychotherapy program—a program which had just met, and bested, its greatest challenge.

Moose was not the only one who had worked on the program. As Phoenix started to answer his question, another man came quickly into the room.

"Doc," he said, "problems!"

The new speaker was Daniel "Fingers" Steffan, Phoenix's attorney and close friend. A slender man who was given to the latest in fashions, he had earned his nickname in law school when it was rumored (but never confirmed) that he had on one occasion successfully picked the pocket of his opponent in an important debate, thus acquiring his opponent's notes and handily winning the contest. Now well known for his appearances before the Supreme Court in defense of civil rights cases, Daniel had joined the West Virginia staff at the inauguration of Phoenix's latest project, and was responsible for the contract which had just been fulfilled.

"There's your answer, Moose," Phoenix said quietly. "What's up, Steffan?"

"A call just came in on the scrambled line, Doc."

"Ankara?"

"Yeah. From our 'good friend,' the Commander. He's worried because you didn't show up on schedule. Wonders if you survived."

"What did you tell him?"

"Nothing. I said I'd check things out—that I didn't know any of the details of your project, or what your plans were."

Moose laughed. "Spoken like a true lawyer, Fingers."

Steffan scowled at him.

"Hey, fella," Moose said, still chuckling. "No need to get uptight about it. We all have our human fallibilities. Just happens

that yours is being a lawyer."

Steffan turned away from the bigger man and addressed himself directly to Phoenix. "Doc, is there any way we could have this oaf committed? I could have the papers drawn up and on your desk by this afternoon . . ."

It had been going on like this since Phoenix had introduced the two men to each other, and it showed no signs of letting up. Phoenix sighed. Sometimes it amused him. Now it didn't.

"I think we better get back to the business at hand," he said. "We haven't finished with the Commander, obviously."

"I told you we shouldn't have taken him on," Steffan said, his tone waspish with annoyance. "Even as a political exile, he poses too many dangers."

"That was half the reason we took him on," Phoenix reminded him.

"Wait a minute," Moose interjected. " 'Too many dangers'? What are you talking about? He'll never come back to this country—they'd slap him in jail the minute he set foot here. Why, he can't even show himself in most of western Europe, for fear of extradition!"

"It was a mistake," Steffan persisted, ignoring Moose. "A moral mistake. And now we're going to pay for it. He let you into his mind, Doc—he'll never rest until you're dead."

Phoenix nodded, slowly. "It was a challenge I could not resist. One of the world's greatest former leaders—the opportunity to see if I could deal with the emotional cancer that had destroyed his career—I knew it was a risky thing."

"What was it like, Doc?" Steffan asked. "I haven't seen you since you flew over there. What was it like, going into that bastard's mind?"

"Completely different from any of our test subjects. You know it's like entering a whole world—the subjective world of a person's unconsciousness. The Commander's world was a bleak desert in which not one green plant grew. It was dominated by what Jung would have called his 'shadow self'!"

"And you blew that 'ol Shadow self sky-high, right, Doc?" Moose chortled.

"It was my last hope," Phoenix agreed. "Everything translated into literal terms there, so I tried using the analog of a nuclear device. Apparently it was successful."

"The *analog* of a nuclear device?" Steffan echoed, uncomprehendingly.

"Sure, Fingers," Moose said. "He couldn't use a *real* device—it woulda destroyed the Commander—and Doc as

well."

"But I did use a mockup of the only existing device," Phoenix added, "which seemed completely real to the subjective reality I was inhabiting. In fact, while I was there even *I* thought it was real—a self-administered post-hypnotic suggestion . . ."

"Which leaves us—where?" Steffan asked. "If you were successful, what's the problem?"

"It comes down to this, I guess." Phoenix paused. "The shadow self dominated the Commander for most of his adult life—check out any recent history book—and even after it was destroyed . . . if it *was* destroyed . . . the old habits lingered on. The whole setup was wrong. He should have been *here*, under our supervision. But that, of course, was impossible. He's got a dacha there that's like—well, it beats anything he ever had here. He's like a little monarch with his own kingdom, and the *security*! He wouldn't let go of it, even if it meant the difference between failure and success.

"What I did was—or should be—just the beginning of the cure. He should have remained under our supervision for at least six months. With proper therapy, we could have helped him totally rebuild his psyche."

"He knew that, didn't he?"

"Of course. But 'knowing' it and accepting it as a program of events is two different things. He wouldn't surrender the power—as he saw it—to me or to anyone else."

"But he let you into his mind!" Moose exploded.

"Sure. Because it was unreal to him—like magic. But disturbing his daily routine, or putting himself under my care for six months—that was something else entirely. That was real—and unacceptable."

"So the job is half done," Steffan said.

"Exactly."

"What can we do now?"

"Wait. Perhaps he'll mend on his own—although his entire environment reinforces the old patterns."

"And in the meantime—?"

"We'll try to survive the assassination attempts he has undoubtedly initiated against me."

-3-

Dr. Raymond Phoenix's West Virginia hideaway headquarters are nestled between two ridges of the Appalachians,

totally inaccessible by road. Everything had been brought in by helicopter, and the helipad was the only real link to the outside world. Even the electricity was generated at the location.

Moose liked the place, especially during the early morning hours before it grew really hot. There were trails which twisted through the cup-shaped valley and climbed both ridges, and he enjoyed strolling along them when his schedule permitted it. Today it was a relief to escape the dustfree, temperature- and humidity-controlled environment of Phoenix's computer center, to don a pair of cut-off jeans and a T-shirt, and wander out along the west ridge trail.

He was sitting on an outthrust shelf of rock near the trail's summit when he heard a gasp and a tumbling noise. Something was crashing down through the brush above the trail where the incline was too steep to climb. The next moment a body hurtled out of the thick undergrowth and landed almost at his feet. Arms, legs, and a tangle of hair resolved themselves as a groaning girl climbed to her feet. She turned a rueful face to Moose as she rubbed her left elbow with her right hand and said; "Hi there. Do you happen to have any first-aid supplies on you? Like maybe a couple of bandaids or something?"

Moose found himself blushing as he returned his appraising stare with equal frankness. She was small—maybe five feet tall in her bare feet. She was wearing a shapeless flannel shirt, loose blue jeans, and hiking boots. She looked perhaps twelve years old.

"I—lost my pack, you see, and—" she held out her left arm for him to inspect. Her elbow was skinned and bleeding.

"Uh, well, sure," Moose said. "I guess so. Not *on* me, but . . ." Suddenly he wondered about taking her down to Doc's headquarters. It was supposed to be off-limits except by invitation. But, after all, she was just a kid, and she *did* need washing up and looking after. . . . "Down the trail a bit," he mumbled. "This way."

"My name's Linda," the girl announced as they followed the trail down the hill. "What's yours?"

"Ah, Mike, Michael Moynihan. But everyone calls me Moose."

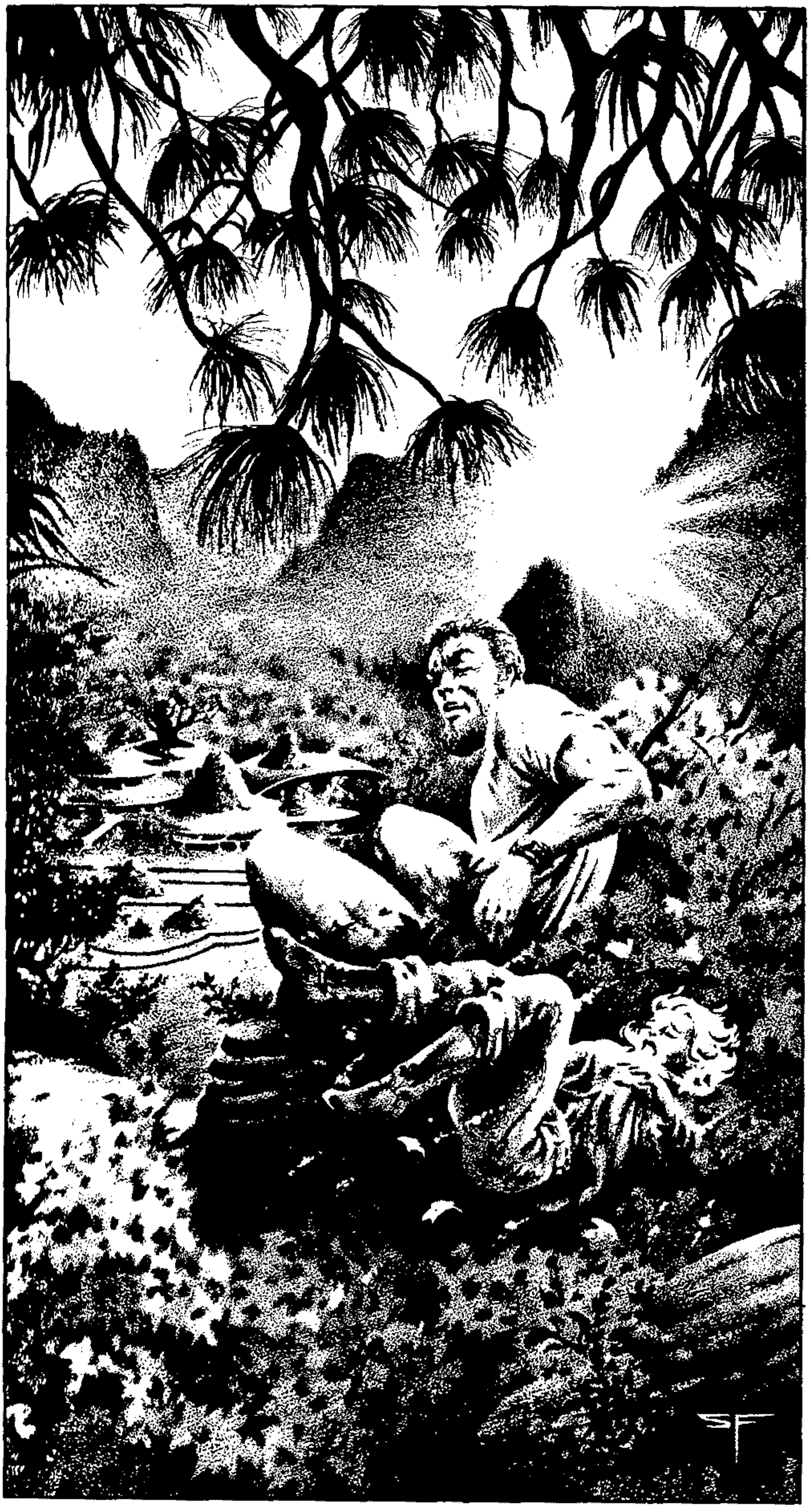
"Hey, Moose, huh?" She looked at him and grinned. "I can dig it, but how about you?"

"What do you mean?"

"How do *you* feel about being called Moose?"

"Oh, well," he grinned a little sheepishly. "I'm used to it."

They descended the rest of the trail in silence, Moose feeling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vaguely uncomfortable at the perceptiveness of the girl's questions.

When they came within sight of Phoenix's hidden headquarters, the girl stopped for a moment, and they said breathlessly, "Oh, wow! I thought you were taking me to your campsite. I never saw anything like this!"

There were several buildings, but unless viewed from direcly overhead, they blended into one sprawling edifice. Built of local stone and timber, the complex blended into the surrounding vegetation like a Frank Lloyd Wright creation, an outcropping of rock shelved into a semblance of buildings. The complex had been built in the open space around an ancient oak whose limbs towered over most of the structures. It was an impressive sight, and one which Moose found himself staring at through fresh eyes as he tried to imagine how it looked to the girl.

"Uh, yeah. Let's see to that arm of yours," he said, leading her to a side entrance. It was the door to his own living quarters. No sense bothering the others with this.

She seemed to follow him reluctantly, but her questions were eager. "Wow, what *is* this place? Is it yours? You some kinda millionaire, Moose?"

"Nah," he said, moving her brusquely into his bathroom, where he began rummaging in the medicine cabinet. "I just live here. Let's get that arm of yours washed up now."

The bleeding had stopped; a scab was forming. She dutifully ran a little water over it and suffered Moose to swab it with peroxide and put on a bandaid. Moose felt uncomfortable in the small room so close to this slip of a girl. He felt unaccountably shy and ill at ease. There was something about her that bothered him. He wondered if it was simply because he'd always felt shy around girls of her age—even as a kid—or whether . . .

He was putting the bandaid box back in the medicine cabinet, his back to her, when he felt a sharp sting on the back of his arm, near his shoulder. "What—?" he exclaimed, turning.

She had a lopsided expression on her face, half sorrowful, half gleeful. He tried to say something but it took forever to get his mouth open, and by then he'd forgotten what it was he'd intended to say. He stared into her eyes, his expression puzzled and sliding slowly into anguish. Her eyes looked full of compassion, but a smile still tugged at her lips. "Sorry, Moose," she said. "It's a lousy trick, isn't it?"

His knees collapsed then and he tumbled to the floor. She caught his head just before it struck the sink, and helped ease

him down to a heap on the floor, half wedged under the sink. He was too heavy for her to move.

Leaving him there she stepped out of the bathroom and closed its door behind her.

Moving purposefully, she found the corridor that led from Moose's quarters into the computer center. She paused before a glass wall and stared into the sealed operations room, but no one was inside, so she continued down the corridor.

"Looking for someone, young lady?"

She whirled, and stared at a man who had just emerged from a doorway behind her. "Uhh, you're Mr. Steffan, aren't you?" she asked.

"That's right."

"I thought so. I've seen you on TV."

He seemed to warm a little. "Is that right? Well . . . but, ah, perhaps you'd best tell me your business here."

"Oh." She dimpled and flashed him a girlish smile. "Mr. Moynihan said I should just go down this corridor and . . ."

"Moose? You're his, ah, guest?"

"Oh yes. He, uh, had to go to the bathroom for a moment and he said I should just go on ahead . . ."

"Had you a destination in mind?"

"Oh, yes! Mr. Moynihan said he would introduce me to Dr. Phoenix. Dr. Phoenix is one of my heroes!"

"Well, then," Steffan said. "I think I can assist you to that extent. I'm Dr. Phoenix's attorney," he added.

"Oh, I know," Linda said. "I know all about you."

"Moose been shooting his mouth off again, huh?" The grin on his lips belied the sourness of his words. "This way." He led the way into a large room whose picture window looked out upon a green wilderness.

"Doc," he said, "here's a young lady who wants to meet you . . . a, ahh, friend of Moose's." He turned to her. "I didn't catch your name."

"Linda," she said almost absently, her eyes on the powerful figure who had risen from the lounge in the center of the room.

Dr. Raymond Phoenix was not as tall, nor as large as Moose, but while Moose gave the impression of a large bear, Phoenix seemed more like a large cat—a leopard, perhaps. His eyes were golden-green, curiously pale in a deeply tanned face that had been scoured by wind and sand on more than one occasion. His body was large but lithe, his movements fluid yet precise. He seemed to waste no motion as he stood to face her.

"I wasn't aware that Moose had any female friends here at

the moment," he said. His gaze was penetrating.

"You were away," she said, as if in explanation.

Phoenix nodded. "Yes. You wanted to meet me, I believe?"

"Oh, I've heard so much about you," she said, her voice suddenly gushy.

"I believe I've heard of you, too, young lady," Phoenix said. As she stared at him, eyes widening, she also noticed that he had placed his chair between them.

"Doc!" Steffan interjected. "What's going on here?"

"Did Moose introduce you to her?" Phoenix asked.

"No. I just found her wandering around . . ."

"Attempt Number One," Phoenix said, nodding at Linda. She stood woodenly, as if transfixed by his unwavering gaze.

"*Her*? Jeesus, Doc! She's just a kid! Even the Commander—"

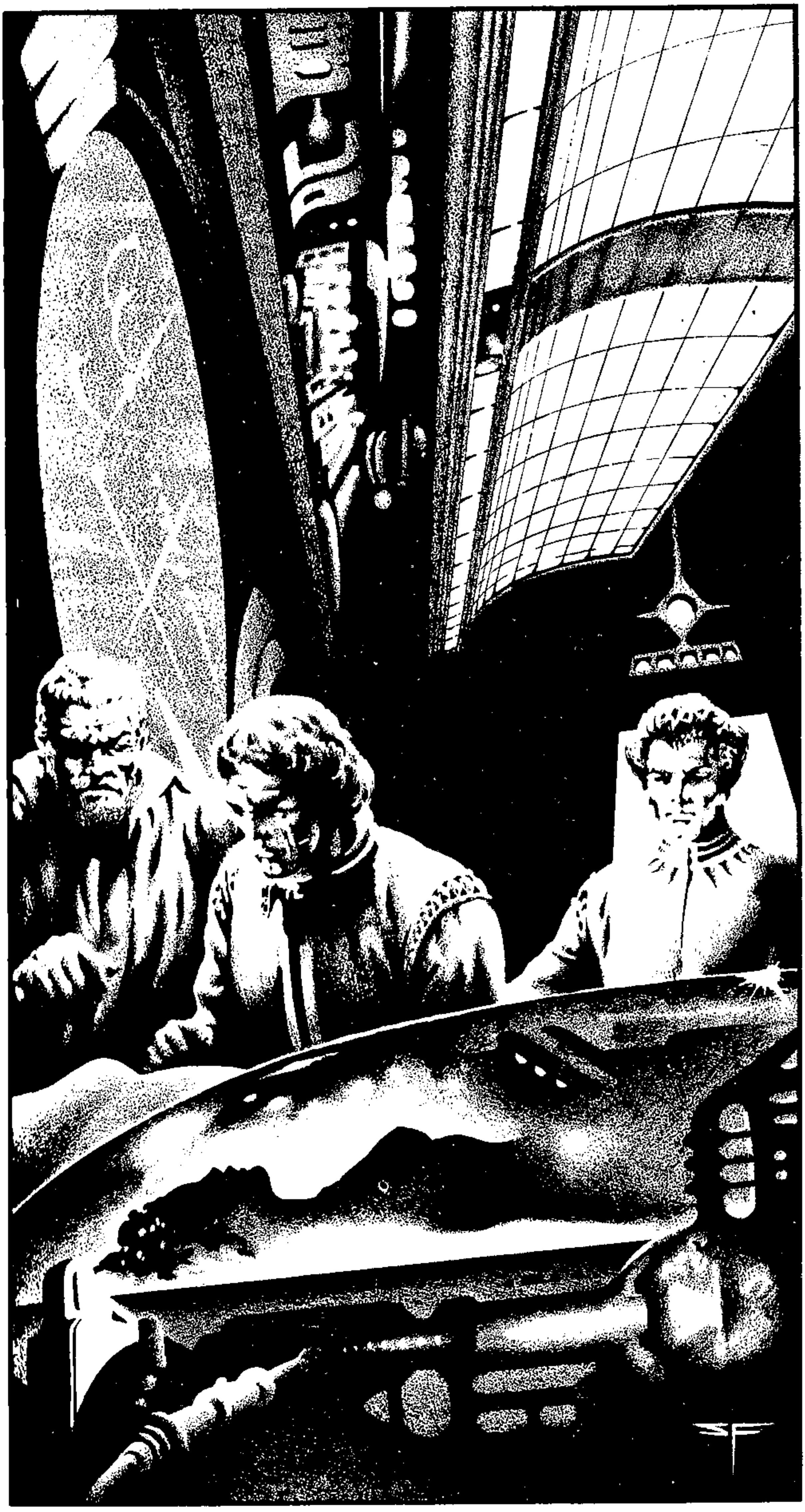
"Linda Monteleone," Phoenix said. "Apparent age—twelve to fifteen. Actual age—twenty-eight. Grew up in eastern Asia. Was orphaned at ten, and picked up and sold to a ring of white-slavers shortly thereafter. Surfaced at fifteen selling information to all interested parties. Was thought killed during the secret bombing raids on Cambodia. Turned up again in eastern Europe as an agent for Arab terrorists. Joined the Commander's staff about a year ago." For the first time in his recitation he spoke directly to her: "I wasn't aware that you'd added assassination to your list of skills."

"You seem to have me pegged," she said thinly. All trace of girlishness had vanished from both her voice and her manner. "But you overlooked one thing—" Her hand dropped casually to her belt. "—a suicide mis—"

Simultaneously Phoenix's voice rapped out "Grab her hands, Dan!" and she felt her wrists seized from behind in an iron grip that contradicted the lawyer's slight appearance.

Steffan forced her wrists up behind her back, keeping her hands well away from her body, but she threw herself forward, feeling the bones in her wrists wrench painfully as her weight pulled the lawyer off balance.

But there was no chance to follow up on this momentary advantage—Phoenix had crossed the room too quickly and now caught her shoulders, lifting her upright. Steffan's grip on her wrists remained unfaltering, and before she could kick out with her feet or raise a knee to Phoenix's groin, the big man had released her shoulders and applied a pressure behind her ears. Despite her struggles against it, a wave of blackness washed over her and made her powerless to resist any further. She felt



herself sagging, her arms twisting to take her body's weight, but the pain was distant and unreal, and she knew she had at last met defeat. Depression filled her and she surrendered to it, broken.

Paralyzed, she felt herself being lowered to a horizontal surface. A removed part of her mind identified it as some sort of couch.

Cautious hands explored her belt and her clothing; she felt as if upon an examination table in a doctor's office, and she flashed upon the indignities she had known on such tables in the past.

She braced for a wakening touch, but the hands retreated, finding their way instead to a panel on the side of the couch. Phoenix's fingers pushed a bar and within seconds a dark lucite dome began to form above her.

The two emerging curves sealed and Phoenix pressed another button. She felt a spectral sensation and to the men above, her body became shadow-like in appearance. With the movement of another bar, a green neon wave swept over the ceiling of the dome.

The wave continued its sweep in a repeating pattern. Phoenix scanned her body intently, compassionately, as he had done with others in the past. The patients had been addicts, insomniacs, alcoholics, and the waves had been able to detect the exact presence of foreign elements—heroin, barbiturates, alcohol—within their bodies.

The green wave was meant to detect the presence of explosives and Doc's eyes quickly registered the silver embers that appeared within her shadowed form. She heard the voices. Her curiosity screamed out for attention, but it was Steffan who spoke the words.

"What are they, Doc?"

"Tiny plastic charges."

"In her HAIR?"

"Combined, I guess they would have enough force to make a total mess out of this room."

"Why in the world would she allow them to do that to her?"

"Very likely she is unaware of it herself."

"How did you know that this girl was—"

Phoenix moved a bar to its original position. She felt the dome slowly recede.

"I saw her—at the Commander's compound. I don't expect he knew that."

"You saw her there?"

"I thought her out of place then—she does look incongruously youthful, you'll admit. I was curious. She disappeared Sunday—probably dispatched then. She was the backup unit—the contingency plan. I wasn't intended to live, whether I succeeded or failed. If I escaped Turkey, she was to take me out here."

"Wow. And herself along with you! I don't get it, Doc! How could the Commander be so sure—?"

"I imagine he had his ways. Mental programming—drugs—some sort of hypnotic thing."

Suddenly she felt a blinding realization, an awareness which triggered adrenalin through her system. *It was true!* The bastard had *programmed* her! The tricky sonofabitch had *used* her, like an expendable machine—and she hadn't known it until now! She felt the weight of depression slide away from her and she experienced a moment of exhilarating freedom. But she still could not move. She had traded one form of captivity for another.

"Doc! Moose! We forgot all about—!" She heard the lawyer's footsteps in hasty retreat, and then found herself opening her eyes. She looked up directly into those of Doc Phoenix.

-4-

"He was too tricky for his own good," Phoenix said.

"You mean, he programmed *himself*—?"

"As well as you. Yes. Or, more exactly, he programmed events. 'Game plans,' he calls—called—them."

She stared up at the large lazy summer clouds, white fairylands in the humid sky. She felt wonderfully at ease with herself here . . . and hated to think that she could not stay here like this always. "He wanted you dead—"

"Even before he knew that he might *not* want me dead. Yes. He could not foresee the changes which emotional health might bring to him—the changes in his own attitudes. He saw himself basically as a person with a minor problem, and he saw me as an expert called in to deal with his problem who could not be allowed to live with the knowledge of that problem. What he did not—*could not*—realize was that his "minor problem" colored every fact of his emotional existence. He's a very different man now, and the differences will increase as time wears on." Phoenix chuckled. "He actually put through a direct phone call to warn me about you—after we'd, ahh, disarmed you."

She flushed, but asked, "Will there be others, then? Did he

warn you about others?"

"No. You were the only one."

She frowned. "That doesn't make sense. How could he have been sure—when he was setting it all up, I mean—that I'd do the job?"

"He couldn't be sure, of course. But he was not a well man. His plans, his game plans, always had flaws in them. That's what brought him down, after all. I expect he assumed I'd never escape Turkey. He saw you as insurance against a longshot."

"You know," she said after a pause, "I envy him in a funny way."

"You do?"

"That he, ahh, had his 'problem' solved, I mean."

"It's a choice you can make too."

She turned to him then, looking directly up into his face and wondering what emotions really lay behind it, remembering the curiously soft expression which she had surprised upon it when she had opened her eyes and seen him there, days, hours, eons ago. "I—I know. It's been a long time since I've been offered my own choice. It really has me hung up. I'm not used to making decisions like that."

"It's hard to avoid saying something like, 'This is the crossroads of your life, Linda . . .' "

"I . . . yes, I know. But, well . . . it's a new kind of, uh, intimacy. I've never let a man—anyone!—into my, my *mind* before. . . ."

"It's like dreaming," Phoenix said. "Only I'll be in your dream with you."

"I don't have dreams. Not since—since I was a kid, anyway."

He smiled. "You have dreams. Everyone has dreams. You've just suppressed the memory of them."

"What's that mean? That my dreams are too awful—?"

He shook his head. "Not necessarily. Just that you've closed off a part of your life and denied it to yourself—probably because of the life you've had to lead. Your dreams could be full of the innocence and happiness you knew as a child—things you've had to deny in your adult life."

A tear slid down one of her smooth cheeks, then another. "Do you think so?" Her voice was small.

"It's not irretrievably lost, you know," Phoenix said. "You *can* have it back."

"But—but—the life I've had—the things I've done—you can't just wipe them out, like wiping a slate clean!"

"No. But they can be integrated. Right now they dominate you. They can become only memories, part of the suffering you've known, but suffering from which you've learned, from which you have been tempered—like fine steel. Emotional health doesn't mean reshuffling your memories or selective amnesia. It means integration—*wholeness*. It means strength. It means becoming your own person."

"Okay," she said, a smile on her lips. "You're the doc—you know best. Let's do it."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure. All my life—that I can remember—I've been somebody else's property. I want to find out what it means, what you said, 'becoming your own person.' " She stood up and looked somehow taller and straighter and no longer as much like a child.

Phoenix smiled back at her. "Good," he said.

Afterword

Throughout my high school years I was a fanatic fan of Doc Savage. I found my first *Doc Savage* magazine in a Washington, D. C., used book store, while rummaging for old comics. (Old comics went six for a quarter, old pulps three for a quarter, in those halcyon days.) It was one of the wartime digest-sized issues, and, in retrospect, not one of the best. But it turned me on to Doc Savage and during the next several years I put together a collection of the *Doc Savage* magazines which was nearly complete (lacking perhaps three). I collected other old pulps from the same period—*The Shadow*, Black Bat (in *Black Book Detective*), *The Avenger*, *The Wizard*, *The Whisperer*, *Phantom Detective*, et al—but Doc Savage was and remained my favorite. A day rarely passed that I did not read at least one Doc Savage novel—and if I had no new ones to read I'd reread one of my favorites (most of these came from the 1935-37 period, during which time Doc's adventures were at their most fantastic).

I attribute much of my enthusiasm to Lester Dent's fast-paced writing and plotting; by contrast Gibson's Shadow novels were dead bores (although I sought and have them all). When, in 1966, Bantam Books asked me for a Captain America novel (subsequently published as *The Great Gold Steal*), I turned to

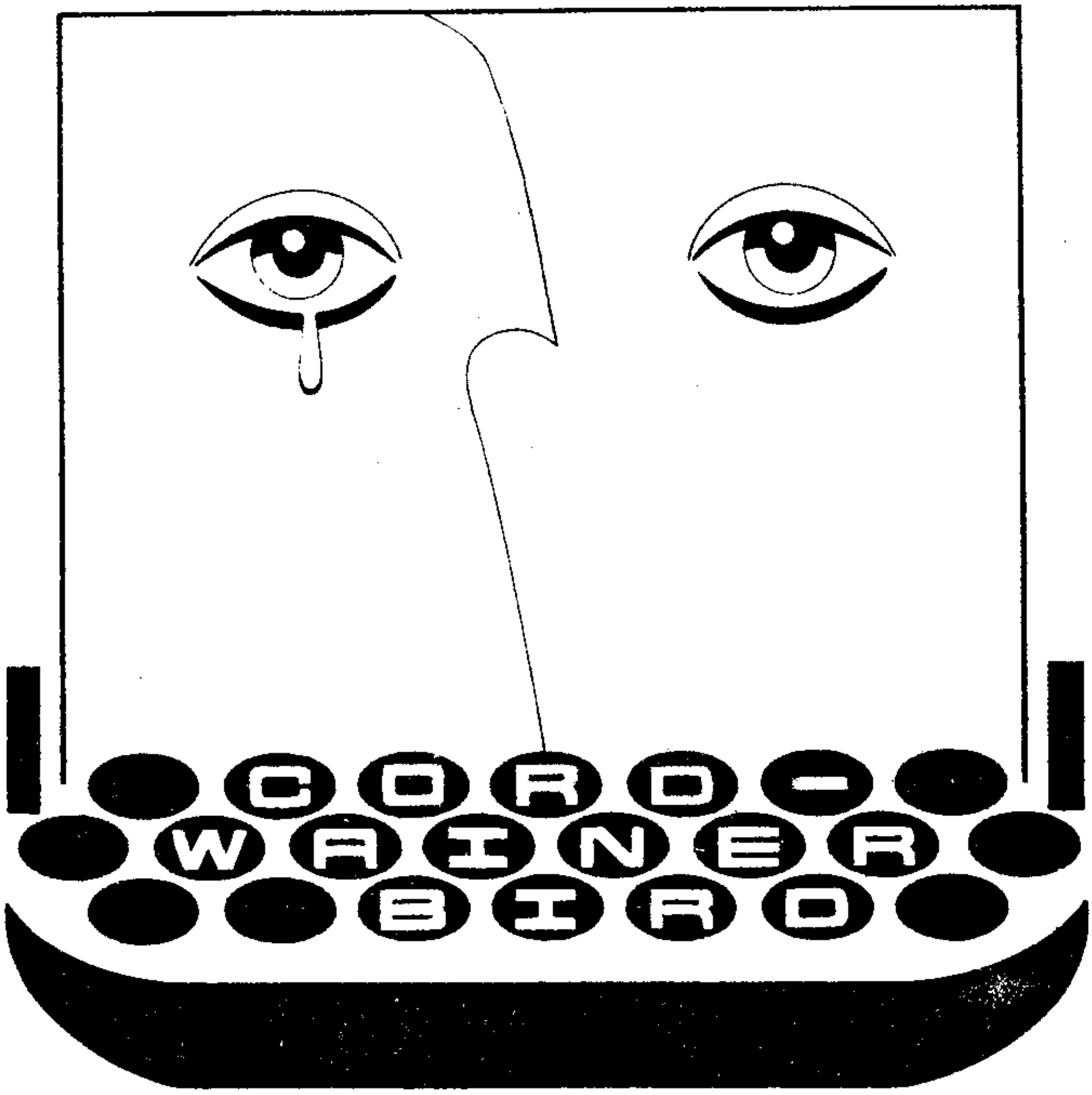
Lester Dent's taut pulp writing style for inspiration, blending it with the pseudo-realistic use of detail Flemming had used so effectively in his James Bond novels. It seemed the right way to bring a comic book character to the printed page.

My sources of inspiration for Doc Phoenix are several. The two that dominate are Roger Zelazny (especially his novel, *He Who Shapes* or *The Dream Master*) and Lester Dent's Doc Savage. Fans of either will find the influences and affectionate borrowings quite obvious, I'm sure. But I must also thank Ray Phoenix, a Chicago folksinger of the 1960's, whom I have not seen in years, for permission to use his name (a name I fell in love with when I first heard it)—permission he gave to me when I conceived a very different hero for it, back in the days when I was writing science-fantasy adventures for Lancer Books (*Phoenix Prime, Sorceress of Qar*, etc.) and naming my heroes Max Quest and the like.

One other source of both inspiration and needed criticism was a local writers' group to which I belong, from whose members I shamelessly stole the names for several of my subsidiary characters. Members of this group have mercilessly torn the story apart. shred by shred, to show me its strengths and weaknesses, and it has profited thereby.

It remains only to say that I found the length of this story an awkward one; I have tried to compress within it a complete "origin story," with introduction of primary characters and a demonstration of their characters and capabilities, something I really needed a book-length novel to develop comfortably. I should like to see this book become the first volume of a series so that I can explore more fully the many aspects of both Doc Phoenix and his crew and their work. There was simply too much for this first story to deal with. Still, it was a pleasure to at last create a "second generation" Doc Savage—and the fulfillment of a youthful dream.

And as a postscript, I must commend Steve Fabian for his superb illustrations, which perfectly capture the mood and characters of this story, almost as if he had been within my head as I wrote it.



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"THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BIRD"

by Harlan Ellison

Illustrated by Neal Adams

It would be folly to describe all of the accolades collected by these two men, these phenomenons called Ellison and Adams. The Nebulas, the Hugos (a record-breaking six for Ellison), the Shazams, the Alleys, the Foreign Cartoonist Awards are enough to fill one storefront window from ceiling to floor, left to right, East to West, North to South and back again.

Talent is not the only ground shared by Messrs. Ellison and Adams. Both men are vital members of their respective fields. Harlan's ground-breaking *Dangerous Visions* has opened new doors for the genre of speculative fiction. Neal's taut graphic style pulled the superheroic graphic story into a world of realities only hinted at in the comic books of the forties and fifties.

Neal and Harlan have also been instrumental in providing opportunities for new writers and artists to express themselves on a professional level. Through Neal's (and Dick Giordano's) Continuity Graphic Associates, many young artists are getting the chance to hone their already-evident skills through group efforts on a variety of paying assignments. Through Harlan's *Dangerous Visions*, personal tutelage, sympathethic encouragement, unflagging interest, unsurpressable ability as a critic and lecturer, many who might have put aside the pen for a less artistic pursuit have been encouraged to persevere. Through his Pyramid series, *Discovery*, Harlan is providing a major showcase for new writers that is graphically enticing, commercially viable and undeniably fresh.

As for the story you are about to read, it is also graphic and undeniable. Emotionally graphic and undeniably Ellison. It is outrage and pain stripped bare, channeled in the genre known as pulp hero fiction.

Here is Harlan writing a story about a writer and make no mistake about it, this is writing with a passion. A passion for literary justice from a man who most strongly feels that each book must be taken on its own merit, that the fluff and hype and hypocrisy must be erased from a noble profession too threatened by some tactics of the business that harbors it. Publishing is not writing and writing is not publishing, but the two are bedmates and if they are to have children, they must be borne out of love, not greed.

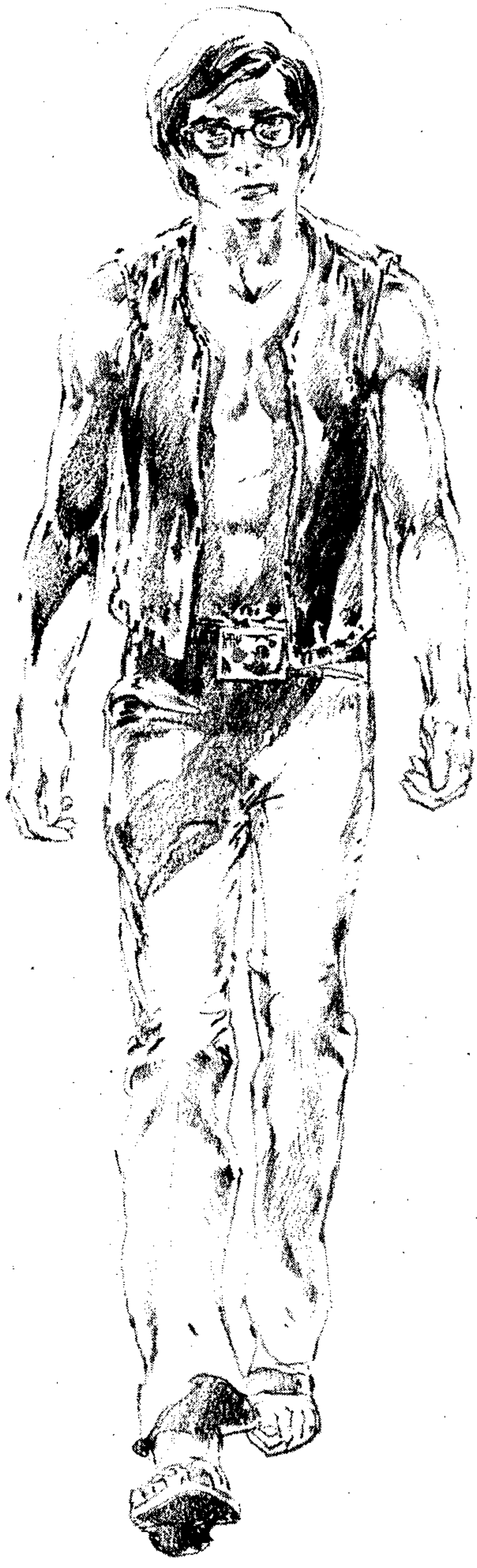
So here is "The New York Review of Bird," a fantasy about writers and publishers, humorous at times, tragic at times, *craz-*

ed at times, but unmistakably Ellison at all times. From the insane Bretano attack scene to the blasphemous ravings of a poor, lonely, sick woman (a terrible event which is based on a true incident witnessed by Ellison and Bob Silverberg), this is the story of Cordwainer Bird, a four foot tall writer. With eyes the color of robin's-egg blue.

The violent actions of Cordwainer Bird are not supported, urged or condoned by the editor or the publisher (or the author for that matter—see Harlan's afterword) of this book. In particular, Death by a minnow gumming has no basis in fact and if Benchley and Spielberg have any interest in following this up, I urge them to pick up copies of *Minnow Gumming: No Potential for the Cinema* by Philip José Linebarger, (Micawber Press, 1926) before devoting their talents to such a fruitless enterprise.

The New York Review of Bird

by Harlan Ellison



"Bird, Bird! That's all I hear from you creeps! Bird! I don't give a damn *who* he is, or where he's hiding! The great City of New York has no room in it for vigilantes; I'll find this goddam Bird no matter *where* he's holed up! My men and I, the whole goddam department, in fact, are working on this Bird thing a full twenty-four hours a day! All leaves have been canceled, special 'tac squads have been laid on, we've got our people in the streets following up every possible lead! We expect an arrest within twelve hours! Twenty-four at the very latest! Thirty-six at the most extreme outside estimate! You can quote me! And will you, fer chrissakes, learn to spell my name right in your goddam papers! It's *Pflockian,* not 'Fallopian'! Now get the hell out of here and go down to the morgue and take some more pictures of that dead publisher, if that's your idea of fun and games; and let me get back to work! I'll have this Cordwainer Bird by the heels within fifty-two hours, you can quote me!"

Excerpt of interview with NYPD Chief of Detectives Irving L. Fallopian; New York Times; 29 January 1976

"Oh, the poor little thing," the woman with the silver-blue hair said. "Arthur, give him a dollar."

The portly gentleman in the belted cashmere overcoat and caracul Astrakhan shifted the ziggurat of packages in his arms, managed to free his left hand, and reached into his pants' pocket. "Hurry, Arthur," the woman said, "it's snowing." He looked at her. He shook his head with mild annoyance. Of *course* it was snowing. It was coming down in great, wet, skimming flakes and covering Fifth Avenue in a coverlet of downy whiteness that meant—without argument—fourteen hundred pedestrians would slip and bust their asses by morning. Of *course* it was snowing!

And that was one of the reasons the woman with the silver-blue hair had stopped before the wretched creature at the edge of the sidewalk. He looked so pathetic. A little man, wearing only an open imitation leather vest, soaking wash'n'wear slacks and sandals. No shirt, no hat, no socks, no topcoat. His glasses were wet with snow, and a tiny mound of melting snow rested on the bridge of his nose. He looked like a beggar. To the woman with the silver-blue hair.

The formidable, portly gentleman continued trying to fumble a dollar from his pocket, juggling packages. Taxis shushed through the slush, making virtually the only sounds on Fifth Avenue. No horns, no sirens, no jackhammers, no police whistles, no conversation; the aluminum sky had closed down over the city and everything was hushed.

In the silence, the poor little thing spoke.

"Madame, why don't you take your fat-ass husband, your ghastly hairdo, your conspicuous consumption of the Gross National Product, not to mention the certainly ill-gotten dollar he's trying to pry out around his obesity, and insert them vertically where they'll do you simply a *world* of good. And then, if you carefully light them, you can provide yourselves with instant jet-assisted takeoff back to New Rochelle. In short, get the hell away from me before I dropkick you through the window of that bookstore."

The bookstore to which he referred was a multi-storied edifice which faced Fifth Avenue.

Even though lacking four legs each, in precisely the manner of the Langouste, or European Rock Lobster, the woman with the silver-blue hair and her pet Arthur with its hand still doing p.o.w. time in its pants' pocket, scuttled sidewise, away down Fifth Avenue, away from the wretched little man with the naked chest and the fierce glow in his robin's-egg blue eyes. "Anarchist!" the Arthur murmured, and then he suddenly slipped and bust his ass on the sidewalk.

The little man with the straight black hair and the face of a handsome eagle had dismissed them from his world-view immediately after he had verbally savaged the woman. His attention was now, once again, electrically fastened on the front window of the large bookstore.

There were eight stacks of books in the window, each stack having been faced with full cover display of the title forming the shaft. The titles were THE PASHA by Harold Robbins; RETREAT AND REGROUP by Allen Drury; ASIMOV'S GUIDE TO SENESCENCE by Isaac Asimov; PISMIRE'S PIQUE by Morris L. West; THE UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF JUDY GARLAND edited by Gerold Frank; LIVING FOREVER by David Reuben, M.D.; BEYOND REDEMPTION by Jacqueline Susann, posthumously completed by Eric Segal; and SAY HOWDY-DO TO GOD, CHARLIE BROWN! by Charles M. Schulz.

He stood staring into the window as an early dusk settled over the disenfranchised city. A Puerto Rican trying to look

like a Czech refugee in stocking-cap pulled down over ears and plaid duck-hunter's jacket, pushed a hot-cart of redolent chestnuts and millstone *bialies* past him, behind him, in the gutter. His galoshes made slurping sounds. The little man thought of Campbell's New England style Clam Chowder.

Then, quite suddenly, at precisely ten minutes to five, the little man left his position. He broke out of the mound of snow that had formed around his legs, stamped his blue feet in their sandals, and walked across the sidewalk, elbowing pedestrians to either side. He entered the bookstore.

A slim, polite young man wearing a name tag that said "Mr. Ingham" approached the little fellow, now standing in an ever-widening pool of water. He looked down at him. The customer was exactly four feet tall. "And may I help you, sir?"

The little man looked around. Everywhere he looked there were tables of books, stacks of books, pyramids of books. All eight of the titles in the window could be seen prominently exhibited on a counter, surmounted by a sign that read CURRENT BEST SELLERS. "Sir? Was there something you wanted particularly?"

The little man raised his eyes to Mr. Ingham. "Do you have BAD KARMA & OTHER EXTRAVAGANCES?"

Mr. Ingham's brow revealed itself into a topographical map of the Indus Valley. "BACKGAMMON and *who*?"

"Not *backgammon*, you thug. BAD KARMA. AND OTHER EXTRAVAGANCES. It's a book of stories."

"And the author?"

"Cordwainer Bird," the little man said, with just the vaguest echo of sackbut and lyre in his voice.

"Oh," said Mr. Ingham, a thin smile fluttering to rest on his lips like the faintest touch of dragonfly wings. "That would be downstairs in the rear, in the sci-fi section."

"The *what*?" The little man's face tightened, a muscle or possibly a nerve jumping at the hinge of his strong jaw. On the left. "The *what* section?"

"Sci-fi," Mr. Ingham said again, looking a trifle discomfited. "Just beyond the gothics, the nurse novels and the we-have-been-visited-by-aliens sections."

The little man's tone of voice abruptly altered. Where before it had been commanding and stern, it now became very nearly menacing. "It isn't a science fiction book," he said. "And it *certainly* isn't 'sci-fi,' whatever *that* nauseating neologism might signify. Why isn't it up here with the current best sellers?"

Mr. Ingham began to edge away.

The little man moved toward him. "Where the hell are you going?"

"I have a carton of books to unpack. THE JOY OF COOKING. They have to be handled gingerly or they won't rise." Jerkily, he kept moving away. The little man kept after him. In a moment Mr. Ingham was back-pedaling and the little man was closing in on him inexorably. The salesman found himself, finally, wedged into the corner where ART HISTORY and SELF-HELP confluenced. He had no idea how it had happened; the little man hadn't even raised his voice. It was as though he had been . . . *driven* . . . into the corner. By some palpable force.

A wash of terror brought tears to Mr. Ingham's eyes. He flattened against the wall bookcases, his back pressed so tightly against the barrier he could feel each vertebra through his skin. There was something relentless about the little man, something utterly overwhelming, as if he possessed an arcane gift of inducing fear, a power acquired in the Orient where, it is said, one can acquire the ability to cloud men's minds so they cannot see you. But that was ridiculous! He could see the little man clearly; and the terror of the sight rendered Mr. Ingham helpless.

The little man stood close, very close. He stepped up onto Mr. Ingham's shoes as a small child might when asking her Daddy to dance with her at an older sister's wedding. He put his prominent nose close to Mr. Ingham's chin and said, very softly, "Look at me." Mr. Ingham lowered his gaze. His eyes met those of the little man.

There is a scene in the 1939 Alexander Korda version of *The Thief of Bagdad* in which Ahbhu, the little thief, played with considerable ingenuousness by Sabu, finds himself inside a great stone idol in a forbidding temple set atop the highest mountain peak in the world. He is climbing up a monstrous spiderweb. He looks down and sees, far below, an enormous pool in which swim giant octopi. They are lit by an unholy light and they writhe and swirl in a terrifying manner.

Mr. Ingham looked into the robin's-egg blue eyes of the little man standing on his shoes. He saw writhing octopi.

"Tell me you aren't one of *them*," the little man said softly.

"I'm not one of them," Mr. Ingham said, in a croaking voice.

"Do you know who *they* are?"

"N-no sir, I don't."

"Then how do you know you aren't one of *them*?

"I'm not a joiner, sir. I'm even a trifle embarrassed to belong to the Book-of-the-Month Club."

The little man stepped off Mr. Ingham's shoes. He appraised him carefully. Finally, he said, "No, clearly you're just another wretched victim. I'm sorry I was rude."

Mr. Ingham smiled nervously. He said nothing.

"How do I get to that section with the name that will never pass my lips again?"

Mr. Ingham pointed to the rear of Brentano's, to a stairway almost hidden by cartons of stock. The little man nodded and started away. "Uh . . . sir?" Mr. Ingham was capable of bravery.

The little man stopped and turned his head. "Would you, uh, would you be Mr. Bird, by any chance?"

The little man stared at him coldly for a long moment. "Bird is a pseudonym. Native Americans have a sensible belief that it isn't necessary for others to know their real name. Knowing someone's real name gives *them* a weapon. Who I am, really, is something you or *they* will never know. But the pseudonym will suffice. Yes, I am Cordwainer Bird." And with that he turned back and moved toward the stairs.

The steps led down into the disturbing semi-darkness. Bird thought of the Castle of Otranto. He stayed close to the moist, slimy stones of the wall. Far below he could see the basement section of the bookstore, lit feebly by twenty-five watt bulbs nakedly protruding from the ceiling. Their withered illumination barely reached the display bookcases ranged in precise rows back and back into the darkness. The floor of the basement section was packed dirt and cobwebs hung everywhere in festoons like Belgian lace. As he reached the bottom Bird heard the squeaking and scuttling of rats and, from somewhere far back in the hidden depths of the basement, what sounded like the syncopated cracking of a bullwhip.

He paused a moment, shivering with distaste, and approached the first section of bookcases. He was startled to discover they weren't actually bookcases, but orange crates, stacked one atop the other, with hardcover and paperback books jammed in carelessly, dust jackets torn, packed as closely as files in a government office. Bird thought of Jews crammed belly-to-butt in boxcars, on their way to Belsen.

Genre designations had been scribbled on the sides of the orange crates with magic marker. He could barely read the handwriting. He finally deciphered *miztornz* as "westerns" and *slouglles* as "slaughter." The former orange crates were filled with paperbacks by people with such first names as Al, Lee, Brace, Prong and Luke. The latter crates seemed to be an

endless series of novels about people called The Butcher, The Executioner, The Tormenter, The Bloodluster and The Fink.

He kept walking.

Finally, at the extreme rear of the basement, beneath water pipes dripping into pits and pools formed by the continuous patter of rusty droplets of sewer overflow, he found a dozen orange crates hastily identified as "sci-fi."

And there, between a copy of THE GIANT RUTABAGA THAT PERFORMED UNSPEAKABLE OBSCENITIES ON PITTSBURGH and the Ballantine paperback edition of THE BEST OF ED EARL REPP, he found one copy of BAD KARMA & OTHER EXTRAVAGANCES. He bent toward the book and reached for it with the reverence of a supplicant at Lourdes. A spider clambered over the spine of the volume and raced away into the darkness.

Bird withdrew the hardcover book from the orange crate. It was covered with mildew. Silverfish had performed unspeakable obscenities on the pages no giant rutabaga could ever have imagined in its kinkiest moments.

Alone in the basement of the bookstore, Cordwainer Bird began to sob softly. He held the book to his naked chest and rocked it back and forth like a mother with a thalidomide baby.

Then, in the crypt-like confines of that basement, there was a soft trilling sound; an ominous note sustained beyond measuring; almost human, certainly not mechanical; the warning sound of powers about to be unleashed.

The blue of Bird's eyes seemed to darken.

Clutching the book, he spun on his heel and moved swiftly toward the staircase. By the time he reached the steps he was running. He took the steps three at a time, seeming to bound from riser to riser with the ease of an astronaut on a moonwalk. He reached the top at full speed and paused only a moment, legs apart, fist clenched, head turning this way and that as if seeking *them*.

Coming toward him, down an aisle from the ADULT GAMES and PLACE MATS section, an elderly woman leading a group of large, muscular men sporting eyepatches and tattoos approached rapidly. "That's him!" the woman yelled. The heavyweights moved past her and bore down on Bird. He recognized her: the book-buyer!

Instantly, he dropped into what seemed to be an incredibly relaxed posture. He placed the book on the counter nearby, and permitted his now open hands to fall to his sides. But his eyes were the color of the Bay of Mexico just off Madeira Beach,

Florida, at evening, with a squall approaching.

The first of the muscled men reached Bird and clapped a hand the size of home plate at the Polo Grounds on his shoulder. "I got 'im, Miz Stein," the behemoth said gutturally.

What happened next happened so quickly, no one was later able to describe the actual motion. But it *seemed* as if Bird laid his fist against the attacker's sternum, bent at the knees, and *twitched* his hips. The behemoth was suddenly catapaulted backward through the air, a scream torn from his throat. He flailed helplessly as his trajectory carried him over two tables of books of poetry by Rod McKuen. He thundered through the merchandise—which fluttered into the air as light as *beignets* from the Café Du Monde in New Orleans and settled like faerie snowflakes on a February morning in Vermont—and still screaming, he hit the far wall. He lay there in a hideously twisted pile of arms, legs and trailing visceral material. The surgeon's report later verified that the impact of Bird's movement had shattered the spleen, liver, gall bladder, pancreas, kidneys and pylorus. The heavyweight had also, inexplicably, contracted sugar diabetes. An interne suggested it was from the exposure to McKuen.

But at the moment, in the bookstore, no one laughed. The elderly woman began shrieking. "Take him! Take him!" And then three of her side-boys converged on Bird from three different aisles. He stood waiting, still loose-limbed in that relaxed posture preceding the flight of the phoenix.

"Huey, Dewey and Louie," Bird said, smiling tightly.

Dewey reached the little man a fraction of a second before his associates. With a windmilling motion so swift no actual pattern could be discerned, Bird broke *both* his arms. Huey and Louie came at him from either side even as Dewey staggered away sidewise, flapping his broken arms like a VFW poppy salesman. As they careened toward him, Bird gave a bound and rose above their heads. The two heavyweights crashed into each other and Bird came down on their shoulders.

Locking his legs in a scissors grip that pressed the faces of Huey and Louie together like young lovers, Bird tipped backward and applied pressure. The two attackers thrashed this way and that, trying to free themselves from Bird and from each other. Bird squeezed. In a moment both men turned blue and their legs gave out. As they fell, limp and gagging, Bird bounded free.

The other eleven thugs took one look and ran shrieking. In their flight they knocked the elderly Miz Stein to the floor.

When she looked up, Bird was standing over her.

"Permit me to assist you, madame," he said.

He lifted her overhead with one hand and held her there with her Lord and Taylor pantsuit jacket wrapped tightly within his fist.

"Explain to me why this book," Bird said, carrying her a few feet to the counter where he had placed BAD KARMA & OTHER EXTRAVAGANCES, "is not stocked in the hundreds of copies, why it isn't up front near the door where the best sellers can be found, and why it doesn't appear with banners in your miserable front window?"

Miz Stein's mouth tightened down into a thin, black line. Bird thought of Helen Gahagan Douglas as *She-who-must-be-obeyed* in the 1934 Merian C. Cooper-Ernest B. Shoedsack film; the best of the seven remakes of Haggard's SHE.

"It isn't a best seller," Miz Stein said. It was the first time Bird had ever seen someone speak and sneer at the same time. It was fascinating.

"Who says?"

"The New York *Times* Best Seller list says so. *Publishers Weekly* says so. *The New York Review of Books* says so. And *I* say so."

Bird's nostrils quivered. Unwittingly, in rage at being held aloft like a Hebrew National salami being inspected for mold or a *shochet*'s illegible signature, she had named some of *them*. For the first time since the fever had taken him, he had a clue to their names, to their secret identities, their holiest invocations.

Actually, she was only Helen Gahagan in those days. She later *married* into the name Douglas.

"Tell your secret masters their days are numbered," Bird said. His eyes were as black as raven wings. No longer a sweet robin's-egg blue. "Tell them one of the slighted and snubbed has finally risen from the dust-heaps of great wasted talent. Tell them to buy Fox Locks for their eyries. Tell them today is only the beginning. Go back to your puppet masters and warn them that no matter where they hide or run, Bird will seek them out and gift them with terrible justice!"

"Rodomontade," Miz Stein sneered, saying.

Bird reddened. She hung there from his fist, staring at him with nasty little wrinkles around her eyes. Cordwainer Bird. Four feet tall, thick black hair, eyes of robin's-egg blue radiating the charisma of a Napoleon Bonaparte, the face of a handsome eagle. "You think I indulge in mere shabby braggadocio, eh?" He carried her, swinging, toward the front of

the store. It was after-hours. She had made sure everyone was gone. The doors were locked. The bookstore was silent. "Then you shall see . . . and believe!"

"Do your worst," she said. "Whatever technique you used on those simple-minded thugs won't phase me. I'm made of sterner stuff, as you'll see."

Bird carried her to an eleven foot high replica of Giacometti's *Man Pointing* and hung her from the scythe-shaped left arm. "No," Bird said, "*jeet kune do* would hardly be appropriate for the likes of you, a willing mind-slave of *them*. You've probably been conditioned against simple physical pain." The scrawny arm of the Giacometti began to bend away from the body of the sculpture with the weight of the woman. Bird unhooked her and carried her across to a sturdier hook: Auguste Rodin's *St. John the Baptist Preaching*. He hung her on the upthrust forefinger of the extended right hand.

"When Bruce Lee and I studied together," Bird said, "he made it clear to me that even the advanced techniques of *jeet kune do* might not work against the true emissaries of darkness. We sat together many a night in that little treehouse in Beverly Glen and discussed alternatives.

"But first, before I extract from you the information I need, here is a demonstration of how Bird will cut the throat of the monstrous conspiracy you serve. . . ."

He went to the glass case on the wall that held the fire hose, the fire alarm and the huge double-headed axe. With one sharp blow he shattered the glass and withdrew the axe.

She watched him with growing horror as he moved toward her, past her, and stopped at the door that led to the front window. He used one of the blades of the axe to spring the lock. The door swung open. "You wouldn't dare!" she yelled.

But he would. As she screamed her hatred and defiance, the little man bounded up into the window of the bookstore and with the skill of a Matawatchan, Ontario tree-topper swung the fearsome axe over his head and buried it in a stack of Harold Robbins novels. There was an abortive shriek of pain as the blade cleaved the top half dozen volumes. A strange sound, akin to that of a blood-gorged Amazonian killer plant being cut in half. As though they had a life never granted by the Supreme Deity, the Robbins novels groaned and howled and spurted pages as Bird hacked them to pieces. Miz Stein set up a sympathetic wailing as he went from stack to stack, killing the Peanuts books, the Susann/Segal necrophiliac collaboration, the West bibble-bibble, the tomb-robbing exploitation of the

BOOKSTORE

Frank privacy-invasions. Miz Stein's eyes rolled up in her head, and from the front window came the gurgle and cacophony of dying trash.

And when he was done, and his sweat dripped to mingle with the green slime and ichor the books had spurted, Bird threw down the double-bladed axe and came to her. She was only semi-conscious now, but a dash of cold water from the drinking fountain brought her around. Now she stared at the little man with fear; a full and swamping realization that she faced a power as strong as the one she served.

"Now," Cordwainer Bird said. "Now you'll tell me where their headquarters is located. Not the mind-slaves, not the puppets like yourself . . . but the leaders. The head of the conspiracy."

"Never . . ." she whispered.

"Oh, yes. Now." And he went and searched out what he needed and came back to her, and held it up for her to see. Deadlier than any martial art, capable of extracting information from Mt. Rushmore. "Tell me." She said nothing, and he opened the book, and began to read.

Within a page, she was babbling, begging him to stop.

For an instant Cordwainer Bird's chill expression softened. "I understand. Consider this the first moment of your new life. Now, quickly, where do *they* headquarter themselves?"

"You'll find them under the lady—"

The first burst of machine gun fire tore away her throat. Bird threw himself sidewise, skidding through the snowflake mound of McKuen booklets, and came up running. Behind him he could hear the thunder of assault boots on the floor; he tried to separate the sounds and made an estimate of at least half a dozen attackers. There was nothing he could do for Miz Stein. Her own people had silenced her. He dashed for the front window of the bookstore, leaped up into the display case, grabbed the great axe and swung it at the glass. He needn't have bothered. A rain of machine gun bullets shattered the front window to his left and began tracking right to him. He flung himself down and rolled, under the trajectory of the slugs, straight out through the window and into the snow-filled avenue.

He cast one quick glance behind him. Yes, six of them. Hooded, carrying Brens and machine pistols, dressed in black-and-white. And Bird saw one other thing.

But the moment was done; he raced away down the silent, darkened length of Fifth Avenue.

When the hooded assassins leaped from the shattered window, scattering shredded, slime-dripping chunks of best sellers onto the sidewalk, Fifth Avenue was empty. It was as though the little man had levitated or dematerialized himself. But he still loomed large in their thoughts; they would remember him.

And Cordwainer Bird would remember the other sight he'd glimpsed in that stolen moment: the sight of *their* agent, the demonic Miz Stein, hanging like a slaughtered carcass from the forefinger of Rodin's masterpiece.

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"Cordwainer Bird's genealogy is in the inset (upper right-hand corner). E.B., as noted on the main chart, is the Earl of Burlesdon, Robert Rassendyll, the fifth earl. Two of his descendants were Ralph Rassendyll and Rudolph Rassendyll (of THE PRISONER OF ZENDA and RUPERT OF HENTZAU). Ralph and Rudolph were cousins. "Ralph married R.D. or Rhoda Delagardie. Rhoda's descent is more detailedly traced in the chart and Addendum 2 of TARZAN ALIVE. Her first, and brief, marriage to Lord John Roxton (of Doyle's THE LOST WORLD, *et al*) resulted in one child, Richard Wentworth or R.W., The Spider. She remarried, to Ralph, and the Rassendylls moved to New York, where Ralph managed the American affairs of a giant British firm. She bore him Allard Kent Rassendyll (A.K.R., The Shadow) and Bruce Hagin Rassendyll (B.H.R., G-8 of G-8 and his Battle Aces). Her youngest child, Rhonda, did not engage in flamboyant outlawry, but she was a family black sheep. Despite her parents' objections, she married Jason Bird, a part-Jewish acrobat and vaudeville night-club comedian. . . ."

"Jason's father was Richard Cordwainer Bird, an Irish photographer. His mother was Millicent, daughter of a Dublin Jew, Leopold Bloom. (See James Joyce's ULYSSES for a perhaps overly detailed account of Bloom. See also TARZAN ALIVE for his relationship to the Greystokes, of whom Tarzan is the most outstanding member.)

"Jason and Rhonda's only child was Cordwainer Bird. Cordwainer was born in 1934 in Painesville, Ohio in a rooming house near a theater. (Not, as some maintain, in the women's room of the theater.) Cordwainer grew up in Ohio, though not very far. His growth stopped when he reached the height of four feet. . . ."

"When TV producers and directors ruined his scripts, he punched them in the mouth and went on to write science fiction. He has gathered together more awards, Hugos and

Nebulas, in that field than any other writer. He was won the Edgar Allan Poe award from the Mystery Writers of America. He . . . then became a mainstream novelist and a militant foe of evil. Though he is nowhere near as tall as his ancestors and relatives, the Scarlet Pimpernel, Rudolf Rassendyll, the Shadow, Doc Savage, *et al*, he has their heroic spirit and their dedication to fighting wickedness. But, unlike these heroes of an earlier age, who fought to preserve The Establishment, he fights to *destroy* The Establishment. One of The Establishments anyway."

Excerpt from DOC SAVAGE: HIS APOCALYPTIC LIFE by Philip José Farmer (revised paperback edition: Bantam Books, 1975)

He needed help, advice; that was paramount and obvious. He decided to call on his Uncle Kent. The old man was still lucid, from time to time, and this *had* to be one of those times. He took the IRT uptown, spending his time in transit breaking the nose of a female dip whose hand kept wandering into his hip pocket, and reading the arcane messages left in orange, purple, black and green by RIKKI TIKKI 101 on the walls, deck, overheads and windows of the subway car. He disembarked at 116th Street, bounded up the stairs of the station, pausing only momentarily to kick senseless three Pedestrians of the Apocalypse who were mugging a seventy-year-old arthritic washerwoman, charged out of the subway kiosk, crossed Broadway through the speeding traffic, and headed for his uncle's apartment building.

Allard Kent Rassendyll, who had long ago changed his name to Kent Allard, and then changed it again a hundred times—depending on what case he was involved in—but who had always been just one man—The Shadow—was now eighty-one years old, and fallen on hard times. On several occasions, when his nephew Cordwainer discovered that the old man had hocked his fire opal ring, the mysterious Girasol, he had scraped together the money necessary to reclaiming it, and had returned it, taking special care to leave it in a drawer or under a sofa pillow so the old man would not realize how much in Cordwainer's debt he was. He was a proud old man, and deserved—Bird firmly believed—nothing but honor and dignified twilight years, in return for the decades he had spent as America's foremost arch-enemy of evil. It was fortunate his

memory was spotty: pawning and finding the ring ten times in six years might otherwise have seemed odd to that once razor-sharp analytic mind.

Under the name Phwombly, a variation on one of the aliases he had employed in the Thirties, he lived in one awful room in an apartment building on West 114th Street between Broadway and the Henry Hudson Parkway. About this building, the kindest description that could be summoned was, perhaps, that it had known less crummy days.

In the early Twenties it had been an elegant example of gracious Uptown West Side Manhattan living. Ten stories high, four huge apartments to a floor, with a common foyer decorated in the then-stylish manner of *L'Expósition des Arts Decoratifs* in Paris, it had been a residence of wealthy and graceful society *mavens* whose descendants had inevitably moved downtown to Gracie Mansion and other loci of power.

Now, as Bird approached the structure, it looked like nothing so much as the fever-dream of an architectural Quasimodo. It was dark and weathered, beaten down, street level windows boarded and barred. What had once been a canopy was now a tattered battle flag of a war no one had even known was being waged. But the impecunious Columbia students, the penniless Puerto Rican immigrants, the frustrated blacks and the gone-to-rot septuagenarians in what The Great Society called "their sunset years," had won that war. Uncle Kent's building was a wreck. A shambles. A prison of dead dreams.

As Bird stepped into the dingy lobby through a leaded glass door hanging on one ornate hinge, he was assaulted by the piping shrieks of old women. *A stridency of termagants*, he thought. *A daisy chain of shrews. A spike of shrikes.*

The lobby was jammed with ancient, withered, tiny little women, all of them in bedroom slippers and faded wrappers. Their voices crackled and shattered against the marble walls of the lobby. They seemed to be knotted up around one man, a figure in blue, wearing a cap. It took a moment for Bird's eyes to adjust to the dimness of the lobby—all light bulbs in the ceiling had been broken out eternities earlier—before he realized it was a postman.

He was in his middle twenties, a long-haired, bespectacled street type obviously working the Christmas overflow for a few dollars to supplement what he earned at some honest job downtown. And now he stood with his back to the wall, letter box receptacles behind him, a double-tiered unit set flush with the wall and referred to, in postal parlance, as a gang box unit. The

old women had caught him as he'd begun to disperse the mail. His postal key on its long chain was still inserted in the lock of the master door of the upper tier. The master door had been pulled down but before he could begin to drop mail into the receptacles from above they had swamped him. Now he was pinned flat.

Bird edged around the mob, stood half-concealed by a marble pillar, and tried to decide whether to help the postal official or not. His mind cast back over all the *do not roll, fold, crush, crease or bend* mail that he had received rolled, folded, crushed, creased and bent. Also dropkicked. In the moment of hesitation, the postman screamed, "Ladies, ladies! I'm not going to deposit this mail till you all get the hell away from me! Please!"

There was panic in his face, and his voice labored to sound commanding, but there was a discernible crack in every syllable. The old women pressed closer for a moment, swaying in on him like telegraph vines aching for a message; spittle and madness were everywhere. Then, abruptly, there was a chilling sound that filled the lobby. It came from nowhere and everywhere, according to tradition. A voice as menacing, as sepulchral, as a cry for revenge from beyond the grave. It rose above the babble and its timbre held the vibrations of supernatural authority (though Bird detected a faint croaking far back in the glottis). WHO KNOWS WHAT EE-VILLE LUUUURKS IN THE HEARTS OF GRUBBY, VENAL OLD WOMEN WHO WEAR SUPPORT HOSE? THE SHUH-ADOW KNOWS! And there was a chilling laugh that rose and rose and spiraled and soared and twisted like smoke from a pillaged city; a laugh that penetrated marble and steel and human flesh and froze the thoughts in the brain. One of the lenses of the postman's eyeglasses cracked.

Bird did not move. The old women, many of them clutching their cats, did not move. The postman did not move. Then, slowly, with fear, with the caution of a lemming herd brought to awareness at the final fatal moment that it was about to tumble over a cliff, the throng moved back gingerly. They cleared a space around the petrified postman.

"What the hell kind of nuthouse *is* this?" he mumbled, lens shards tumbling down one cheek. There was no answer. So he began to tremble. GET ON WITH IT, NITWIT, the voice said, and it was a command not to be ignored. The postman pulled loose the key from the master door, inserted it in the lower tier door, opened the metal plate, and began very quickly depositing social security checks in their proper receptacles.

Bird watched; not the postman, or the old women huddling together, but the darker corners of the lobby. He thought he detected movement, a swirl of smoke, a whisper of dark cloth, an eddy of wind, a substanceless substance coming in his direction.

Finally, the postman finished his chores, locked the tier doors, and bolted through the mob and out the open front door, into the Winter chill, even as the old women surged forward. Bird thought of the scene in *Zorba the Greek* where the old ladies wait for Bouboulina to die so they can confiscate her possessions: black-clad creatures crouched in bright-eyed mercilessness. They rushed the gang boxes and opened them hurriedly, withdrawing the checks that would permit them to have one meal of hamburger and onions tonight instead of canned pet food. One by one, then in clots, then in large groups, then again one by one, they rushed away from the mailboxes, clutching their cats, bedroom slippers making whispering sounds against the marble floor. Doors slammed and the sounds of skeletal shufflers climbing the stairs were all that remained . . . save for one old woman.

She stood in front of her open mailbox, her stick-thin hand inside the aperture, feeling, feeling. Her hand came up empty. Her check was not there. The beneficient government had fucked up. Tears stood in her tired eyes. Her body slumped into an exhausted S. Her shoulders trembled. She dropped her cat. It slipped around her feet and looked up at her. Bird felt helpless; he clenched his teeth; an auto graveyard junk compacter squeezed his insides. Who had brought this old woman to this place, this condition? It wasn't just age and being useless and unwanted, it was some entropic force, some nameless conspiracy of inarticulate inhumanity that reduced people to being open bird mouths, raw nerve ends, naked animals, husks deprived of visions, flesh waiting to rot. It wasn't just that some bureaucratic fiefdom had slipped a cog. That could happen. No system is perfect. It was that this lined and discarded creature had been brought to a final state of subsistence where one day's delay of her check could render her helpless and terrified.

At that moment, Cordwainer Bird swore that if he could purge his soul of the hatred for the particular group that had crushed *his* soul so effectively, if he could bring *them* to their knees, he would devote the rest of his life to wrecking these other conspiracies of corporate and governmental complexity whose only purposes in life were to preserve and maintain power at the level they'd attained and to beat down human

beings to the *service* of the systems.

He remembered a quote from Brendan Behan. "I respect kindness to human beings first of all, and kindness to animals. I don't respect the law; I have a total irreverence for anything connected with society except that which makes the roads safer, the beer stronger, the food cheaper, and old men and women warmer in the winter, and happier in the summer." It was a flawed philosophy, and there were parts of it Bird did not subscribe to—there were too many roads already, and not enough land unflawed by concrete—but the tone was there; the tenor was right; the message was clear. Yes, from this moment on he would be considerably more than a writer, or a Fury bent on reclaiming his soul for personal reasons. From this moment on he would take up the mantle of Uncle Kent and Uncle Bruce Hagin, who had gone under the name G-8 when he had fought with his Battle Aces; and to some extent—though with greater sanity—Uncle Richard Wentworth, The Spider.

From this moment on the Bird would fly against the *new* forces of evil in the world.

His reverie was shattered by the shouting of the toothless old woman. Frustrated beyond endurance, she shrieked her hatred of the impossibly gigantic forces that had brought her low. As she scuffled back toward the door to the corridor down which her bleak room lay, she cursed them, without knowing who they were. She gummed her words. "God damn the Post Office! God damn the Social Security administration!" She reached the door to the corridor and kicked it open with strength Bird could not have suspected lay in such a fragile body. The door banged against the inner wall of the corridor and hung there on its pneumatic door-closer. She staggered down the corridor toward her room, the cat padding at her heels. "God damn you Government! God damn Herbert Hoover! God damn you Franklin Delano Roosevelt! God damn you Harry S. Truman! God damn you Dwight D. Eisenhower! God damn you John F. Kennedy, may you rest in peace! God damn you Lyndon Baines Johnson! God damn you, God damn you, God damn you Richard Shit Nixon! God damn you Gerry Ford!" Bird's view of the old woman was steadily being narrowed as the door closed with a sigh, but in the final instant before it closed completely he saw her shove open the door to her room, the cat got underfoot, she kicked it viciously, sending it out of sight through the inner doorway, and the last thing he heard, in an anguished howl, was, "God damn you . . . *God*!"

Bird stood trembling uncontrollably.

Then he heard a faint, cackling beside him.

He was alone in the lobby.

"Uncle Kent?" he asked the emptiness, looking around.

"Huh? Who's that?" The voice came out of nowhere.

"It's me, Uncle Kent. Cordwainer."

"Who? What? Are you The Black Master? Zemba? The Cobra? Who sent you? I have weapons, I still have weapons!"

"It's *me*, Uncle Kent . . . your nephew, Cordwainer Bird."

"Oh, you. What the hell're you doing skulking around here? You out of a job again? I always told your momma you'd amount to nothing."

"Uh, listen, Uncle Kent, I need your help."

"Just what I thought, you little turd. Tryin' to make another touch, eh? Well, forget it. I snitched my social security check before those damned old biddies could get at him. Heh heh, filched it right out of that damned hippie's mailbag. Didn't even see me workin', did you? Heh, did you?"

"No, Uncle Kent, you were very subtle. I never saw a thing."

"Damned right you didn't. I'm as good as I ever was. I can *still* cloud men's minds so they cannot see me! Wish it worked as well on those be-damned cats. One of the little monsters pissed up my pant leg."

Bird could hear the sound of fabric rustling, as of someone shaking a leg. Still he could see no one.

"How's chances we go upstairs to your room and talk, Uncle Kent?" Bird suggested. "I don't need any money; I'm working on a case and I need some advice."

"Well, why didn't you say so; you take the elevator. I'll just fly up."

"You can't fly, Uncle Kent."

"Oh. Yeah, yeah, right, I forgot. Okay, we'll *both* take the elevator."

"Uh, Uncle Kent?"

"What now? Boy, you have become one be-damned nuisance, always asking stupid questions, why is the grass green, how many grains of sand in the Gobi, how high's the moon."

"You once told me how many grains of sand there were in the Gobi."

"I did? Hmmm. Well, what is it this time? Can't it wait till we take the elevator upstairs and get settled?"

"Uncle Kent, this building doesn't *have* an elevator."

"It doesn't, that's peculiar. I could have sworn it had an elevator. What floor do I live on?"

"The tenth."

"Well, you take the elevator, and I'll just fly up."

• •

"I knew this Bird fellow had been a tv writer who punched a lot of producers because they *allegedly* altered his work, but as far as I knew for *certain*, he was just another of those hack sci-fi writers. We were doing a book of his called WHERE DO YOU HIDE THE ELEPHANT IN A SPACESHIP? It was a paperback original, a bunch of his stories. George, his editor, was off to the National Book Awards in Washington, D.C. and I got a call from this Bird nut, and he wanted to see the galleys of his book before it was printed. Well, for God's sake, I'm an *executive editor*, not some lackey; so I told him I couldn't be bothered sending out galleys to just *any*one who called up and demanded them. Then he started screaming that he was the *author* and he used the vilest language I've ever heard. Why, I didn't even know such things *could* be done with a vacuum cleaner. So I just hung up on the little twerp; I mean, I had a handball court reserved at the N.Y. Athletic Club, I couldn't be hanging around the office all day listening to that kind of abuse! After all, I'm an *executive editor*! How did *I* know the copyediting had been farmed out to one of our 100 Neediest Cases at the Menninger Foundation? It wasn't *my* fault the book was set in Urdu."

Excerpt from diary notes of the late Bob Thomas, former Executive Editor, Stratford Books, New York; used as source material in the New York Magazine *article, "Portrait of a Publishing Punk: The Four-Storey Swandive of Li'l Bobby T.; Did He Jump or Was He Eased Out of the Industry?" 16 February 1976*

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Kent Allard's room was bare. Spartan. The walls had been painted dead white. So had the ceiling and floor. Also the inside of the door to the corridor and the inside of the empty clothes closet. Also the windows. Light from the bitter Winter's day outside barely filtered through the paint.

The Shadow had once told his nephew he liked it that way. "Spend so damned much time in the dark, hanging out in alleys and doorways, always sitting shivering on fire escapes, jumping out be-damned windows, never really had a chance to get to use a door in my adult life, I want it white in here. White!" His nephew understood the urgencies of Uncle Kent's declining years. He never thought it odd.

Now they sat on the floor, facing each other, cross-legged. Bird had a vagrant wish that Uncle Kent would put at least a stool or campaign chair in the room, but the old man had acquired his abilities in the Orient, and he practiced self-denial, even at the age of eighty-one. Bird put the wish out of his mind; it was the least he could suffer, to get some help from this once-great champion of Good and Truth and Decency.

"You still ticked-off at me for not showing you how to cloud men's minds?" The Shadow asked.

"No, Uncle Kent. I understand."

"Heh. *Sure* you do! *Sure* you do! Every time I showed someone I trusted how to do it, he turned into a creep. That be-damned Oral Roberts, for instance, and his buddy, what's his name, Willy Graham . . . *Billy* Graham! That's it, Billy Graham! Pukers, both of 'em. But they sure can cloud men's minds. Don't do too bad with women's minds, neither. And what about those Watergate tapes. Mind-clouding if I ever saw it! If I were fifty again, hell, if I was *sixty* again, even *seventy*, by damn! I'd have had that Ehrlichburger and Haldeburger by the heels." He paused in his ranting and looked at his nephew. "Cordwainer? What the hell are you doing here? Did you learn to cloud men's minds? I never saw you come in."

"We came in together, Uncle Kent. I need your help." He hurriedly added, to forestall a familiar conversation, "I don't need any money. I need some advice and some good solid Shadow-style deductive thinking about a clue."

"A clue! By God and Street and Smith, a *clue*! Feed it to me, boy! Just drop it on me! Let me have it! A clue, by damn, a clue! I *love* clues." And he began coughing.

Bird slid across the floor and clapped the old man on the back. After a few minutes the coughing subsided, Kent Allard wiped the tears out of his eyes, pushed his tongue back into his mouth and whispered, "I'm fine. Just fine. What's this clue you've got?"

Quickly going over the events of earlier that day, the insidious placement of his latest effort in the bookstore crypt-like basement, the attack by Miz Stein and her thugs, the revelation

of the clue to their whereabouts, the seek-&-destroy team that had butchered the unfortunate pawn Stein, the escape . . . Bird capped the recapitulation with a repeat of the whispered words that had been the last gesture of *their* mind-slave, Miz Stein. "She said: 'You'll find them under the lady . . .' and she was cut off in mid-sentence. There was more. What does it mean to you, Uncle Kent? You know New York better than anyone."

"Well, Billy Batson knows the subway system better'n me, but I know everything else, that's for certain."

"So what does it mean to you?"

"Pornography, that's what it means to me, boy! Under the lady, indeed. That's what's wrong with the world today, too damned much smut. Why, when I was your age, Margo Lane and I had a nice, clean, decent relationship. I'd take her out to Steeplechase Park every once in a while and we'd go in the tunnel of love, and that was as close as *we* ever got to all this jiggery-pokery."

"Whatever happened to Margo Lane, Uncle Kent?"

He looked bitter. "She ran off with Bernard Geis."

He would talk no more about it, so Bird let it drop.

"I don't think it was a smutty reference, Uncle Kent. I think she was talking about a location. What does 'under the lady' bring to mind besides pornography?"

The old man thought for a moment. His tongue slipped out of his mouth.

Suddenly, his face lit up. His weary old eyes sparkled. "By damn!"

Cordwainer sat forward. What've you got?"

"It *wasn't* Bernard Geis, it was one of his associates."

Cordwainer slumped back. It was no use. The old man simply couldn't keep his thoughts together. He started to get up. "Well, thanks anyway, Uncle Kent."

The Shadow stared up at him. "Where the hell you think you're going, boy? I haven't told you the location yet!"

"But . . . I thought . . ."

"You thought the old man simply couldn't keep his thoughts together, didn't you?"

Cordwainer sat down again. He looked humbled.

A soft smile come to the old man's face. "Well, I'm a bit fuzzy, nephew, that's for certain. You don't have to be kind about it. I know. It's hard being old and useless, but I love you, you little twerp, and I'm not so fuddled I don't know you've been getting my ring out of hock all these years. So I owe you a big

one. And I'm going to tell you something that no one else knows. But it's the answer to your problem."

Cordwainer stared intensely at his uncle. There was an ineffable sadness in the old man's face that he had never before seen. And The Shadow began to speak.

"It was, oh, I guess the Summer of 1949, just after I finished the case of 'The Whispering Eyes,' when Margo started *nuhdzing* me about getting married. Well, I was set in my ways, I wasn't home much, she was always complaining about my coming in and out through the windows, and I just couldn't see it working out. So we started tapering off. That went on for about eight years. We did things slower in those days. Then Geis started up that gawdawful ballyhoo press of his in 1958, with non-books by Art Linkletter and those other mushbrains, and Margo had been doing some public relations work for him, and she met one of his Associates, a clown named Bruce Somethingorother. Started seeing him on the sly. When I found out about it, she was already pretty much under the spell of all that glamour and glitter. She was out every night doing The Twist and hanging around with all the people we'd spent years whipping and imprisoning."

He was staring at the white floor, now turning gray as the dim daylight faded into dusk outside.

"I found myself getting jealous. It never happened before. I . . . I never really knew how much she meant to me. She was always just good old Margo Lane, friend and companion; we used to do the town when I was in my Lamont Cranston disguise; she looked really terrific in an evening gown . . ."

He paused to collect his thoughts. It was almost dark in the empty room now, but Bird thought he saw tears in the old man's eyes.

"I trailed them one night. They went to a secret place where they met with others in the publishing business, and there was . . . there was . . ." He found it difficult to even speak the words. Then he straightened, snuffled loudly, and said, "There was an orgy. I slipped in and . . . and . . . dealt with them."

He stopped.

Cordwainer stared, not believing what he had heard. Then he whispered, "You killed . . . Margo Lane . . .?"

Bird was horrified. And yet . . . Perhaps the old man was phantasizing again, creating in his mind an event that had probably never happened. Bird knew a man, named Kent Lane, whose existence proved that The Shadow had ridden more than a boat when he was with Margo in the Tunnel of Love.

The old man nodded. He started to flicker in Cordwainer's sight, as though trying to find some hiding-place in the power of his invisibility. But he found the courage to stay visible, firmed up and said, "They were in a secret lair built under a lady. That was when I retired. I wasn't fit to carry the battle to evildoers any longer. I was one of them."

Cordwainer waited.

"The lady is the lady with the lamp. Whoever it is you're after, nephew, they've taken over the hideout under the Statue of Liberty. It's the only thing that makes sense."

They sat that way for a while.

Finally, Cordwainer Bird stood, placed a hand on the old man's shoulder and said, "They've corrupted thousands of good people, Uncle Kent. I'll make good for you. And for Margo Lane."

He started for the door. The old man's voice stopped him. "Who are they, Cordwainer? Who are they, these utterly evil corrupters of truth and good? The Mafia, the military-industrial complex, the telephone company?"

"Far worse, Uncle Kent." And for the first time he spoke *their* name. "They're the New York Literary Establishment, dedicated to polluting the precious bodily fluids of all right-thinking readers and anyone else they can sink their diseased fangs into."

He opened the door. Turning back, he saw the old man vaguely, sitting on the floor alone and helpless, there in the final darkness. "But they've ruined their last writer, Uncle Kent. They've published their last non-book. Now they will feel the claws of . . . The Bird!"

And he was gone. In the silence of the white room there was only the pathetic whisper of an old man crying for times that were gone, never to be reclaimed.

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"In one evening, the entire New York literary scene was decimated. The unknown avenger who left only a single black raven's wing feather found his victims and meted out what some have called a peculiarly appropriate kind of justice for each one. A major East Side publishing figure was found on a bridal path in Central Park, crushed beneath his horse. The editor who cobbled up "Jaws," was discovered nearby in the Central Park Weather Station pond, gummed to death by a school of minnows. Two upper-echelon members of *The New York Review of Books* were found manacl-

ed to the wall of their posh apartment, hopelessly insane from having been forced to listen to a Dwight Macdonald lecture playing over and over on a tape loop. The proprietress of a famous New York literary saloon was found stretched out on the bread-cutting board at a rival restaurant, stuffed to bursting with *chicken al limone.* A former and current editor of the *New York Times Book Review* had been stripped naked, put in a storage shed where the *Times* stockpiled its newsprint rolls, and had—on threat of what terrible fate we'll never know—been forced to fight it out with deadly pica rulers. Neither survived. But it was a massacre on Liberty Island, in a secret crypt beneath the Statue, that was most violent and terrible."

Excerpt from a news story
The Village
Voice; 10 February 1976

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The little man with the robin's-egg blue eyes and the straight black hair stood on the deck of the Upper New York Harbor Ferry, watching the Statue of Liberty grow closer. He stood near the prow, knowing that in a few minutes he would be diving overboard, knowing that he would be swimming toward a fate and a future that destiny had marked for him.

His thoughts fled backward. To the days in Hollywood and the terrible experiences with illiterate producers, cowardly network officials, tasteless censors, rapacious studio negotiators. To the day when he had done the awful deed that had sent him forever from the Coast and scriptwriting.

He dwelled on the foolish innocence that had led him to believe writing science fiction books was the answer, the release, the freedom. To the disillusionment. And then the attempt to break into what they called "the mainstream" of American literature. To the way they had held him down, paid him insulting advances, buried his books with terrible cover art and a two thousand copy sale to libraries. He thought of it all . . . the publisher who now lay on a slab in the morgue . . . the butchered book-buyer hanging from a Rodin sculpture . . . the editor thrown from a fourth floor window . . . and what lay ahead.

But the time for being beaten and used was gone. Now he was committed. What lay ahead, in all its finality and vengeful bloodletting . . . could not be avoided. They had gone too deep, had entrenched themselves too well. If even The Shadow had been broken by them, it would take a younger, stronger, less

squeamish, *new* kind of Fury to set things right. The list was long, and only a few of them would be there, under the Statue. There would be more days, and more encounters.

But all that was in the future. The first step was *now*!

As the ferry neared the island, the little man stepped to the railing in the darkness, lifted himself, stood poised for a moment, then dropped smoothly and swiftly into the foul waters of New York Harbor, into the maelstrom of a destiny that would certainly be recorded by other writers, perhaps better writers, but writers who would know that Cordwainer Bird was their guardian angel.

Afterword

What's the point of lying about it? I am supposed to be Cordwainer Bird. No, correct that: I *am* Cordwainer Bird. Uh. Well, I *am* Cordwainer Bird and I am *not* Cordwainer Bird. Hmmm. This will take some explaining.

Back in 1950, the final issue of a short-lived magazine (a mere six issues between 1947 and 1950) called *Fantasy Book*, published by William Crawford, one of the pioneering sf fans who risked everything to put science fiction between hardcovers, featured a story titled "Scanners Live in Vain." It was written by someone using the obviously pseudonymous byline Cordwainer Smith. It was a super story, and it attracted some small attention in the microcosm of sf fandom, even at that time. But it was not to achieve "overnight fame" until 1952 when Frederik Pohl, editing a now-almost-forgotten Permabooks paperback anthology called BEYOND THE END OF TIME, exhumed the story and reprinted it. This time, for some odd, unexplained reason, the time to appreciate it was right and the superior imaginative qualities of the story, and the undeniable craft of its author, caused a minor whirlwind in the genre of imaginative literature. Everyone wanted to know who "Cordwainer Smith" was. Clearly, he or she was no amateur. This was the polished, wildly inventive work of a literary professional: wholly integrated, suggesting a new universe of stories lying just behind this first effort, filled with depths and tensions that no first-time writer could have manipulated so stunningly. I remember well the belief, common coin at that time, that "Smith" was in reality A. E. Van Vogt or George O. Smith.

But no one stepped forward to claim credit. If Bill Crawford ever really knew who Smith was, he never said. (As John J. Pierce has noted, in his excellent introduction to THE BEST OF CORDWAINER SMITH (Nelson Doubleday, 1975; available through the SF Book Club), the story had been written in the mid-Forties, had been submitted to every sf market and had been rejected by every sf market, and had finally been submitted to *Fantasy Book*, in the "slush pile," or unsolicited submissions manner. The magazine was such a marginal enterprise that Crawford never paid for it. And so it is possible Crawford never knew "Smith's" real identity. Pohl no doubt found out who lurked behind the *nom de plume* when he paid the reprint fee for his anthology; and that brings us logically to the next step in the mystery story.)

A mystery. One of those great unsolved literary mysteries to which the science fiction in-crowd would make references when they were sitting around juicing, just talking all those hip things in-crowds talk about.

Then, in the September 1955 issue of *Galaxy* magazine, editor Fred Pohl announced he would publish, the following month, a *new* Cordwainer Smith story, "The Game of Rat and Dragon." The waves of astonishment went out and for the next thirty days the greatest treasure any fan of sf could buy, beg or steal was an advance issue of the October *Galaxy*. I was blessed: I was in New York at that time, having only recently been thrown out of Ohio State University, having gone to Manhattan to begin my professional career as a writer; and I copped a copy. With fear that I'd find it a bad story, I opened the issue and began to read.

It was as miraculous as "Scanners Live in Vain." And I was a devout worshipper of Cordwainer Smith, who*ever* that might be.

In the next few years Pohl published a score of Smith stories, all of them brilliant; and *everyone* became fans of his/her work. But Fred never revealed who Smith really was, and conjecture rose.

But in 1956, when I was beginning to be published here and there, the conjecture was partially tinged with amusement because many of us writing and fanning in the sf medium thought it might be another pen-name trick of Pohl or Lester del Rey or Cyril Kornbluth or someone equally as talented. And so, as a tribute and as a friendly bit of joshing, when it was necessary for me to use a pen-name on a story in the July 1957 issue of *Fantastic Universe* ("Song of Death," the editor's retitling) and the August 1957 issue of *Super-Science Fiction* ("Invasion Footnote"), because I had more than one story in each of the books and it was considered poor form to have the same name twice on a single contents page, I came up with "Cordwainer Bird." Ironically, the editor of *Fantastic Universe*, Hans Stefan Santesson, thought there might be some confusion with the names, so it appeared on the title page as "C. Bird," and Bill Scott, editor of *S-SF* got the spelling wrong and it turned out as "Cortwainer Bird."

It was not till many years later that it was revealed that "Cordwainer Smith" had been Dr. Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger (1913-1966). There isn't room here to go into a full recounting of the amazing life and career of Linebarger, and I commend to your attention Mr. Pierce's introduction in the

aforementioned BEST OF volume for a full detailing of same; but suffice to say by the time it was no longer a secret that Smith had been a famous and distinguished world traveler, professor of Asiatic politics, writer on Far Eastern affairs and even presidential advisor . . . my pseudonym Cordwainer Bird had become a fact of life, and I hoped people would understand it was used as a *homage* to Smith and his work.

He was the author of numerous extremely soft-core stories in magazines like *Adam, Knight, Adam Bedside Reader* and other Los Angeles-based girlie magazines. Between 1963 and 1969 he had his byline on the following sensational winners: "The Girl with the Horizontal Mind," "The Man on the Juice Wagon," "Walk the High Steel," "Tramp," "Goodbye, Eadie!" and "The Hungry One," "The Bohemia of Arthur Archer," "God Bless the Ugly Virgin," "The Fine Art of the 15¢ Pick-Up," "The College Bohemian," "Make it an 'L' and it's Luck," and "Portrait of the Artist as a Zilch Writer." Many of those were reprints of stories I'd written in the late Fifties, and while they could bring me a desperately needed two or three hundred per appearance, they were—how shall I put it—less memorable works than what I was at that time building my dubious reputation on. And so Cordwainer became the author.

It was not till 1964 that Cordwainer switched to television writing, and had it not been for Irwin Allen, the King Croesus of the Disaster Flicks (in many senses of the word disaster), good old Cordwainer might well have passed into the musty files of old magazine collectors.

But Irwin hired me to write a segment of *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* during its pre-airing stages, and though I was one of the first scenarists to work that show, Uncle Irwin managed to confuse himself so thoroughly as to what the direction of the series should be, that he collapsed the minds of all intelligent writers unfortunate enough to fall within his sphere of influence. In the process he managed to collapse the quality of my script and I, in one of my well-known and *wholly* justified fits of pique (agree with me or I'll punch out your fucking heart, as George Segal said to his mother in WHERE'S POPPA?), invoked the clause in the Writers Guild contract whereby a scenarist can use a pre-registered pseudonym on any script he feels has been butchered.

When the time came to tell Irwin what name I wanted on it, almost without thinking I said, "Cordwainer Bird." The bird, of course, is a double-denigrating reference to "for the birds" and "flipping the bird," which is the fine American equivalent

of the Sicilian two-fingered "horns," guaranteed to turn milk sour, cause your cow to have a two-headed calf, raise a mustache on your wife, make your husband impotent, turn your fields to dust and in general make you aware that the invokee doesn't like you a lot.

(For those who are unfamiliar with "flipping the bird," I suggest you make a left turn from a right-turn lane on a six-lane street as soon as possible, and you will see excellent examples of the art-form proferred by the drivers of the five other cars you cut off.)

In short, it was my way of saying, "This script sucks."

It was also a way of establishing that I had been rewritten. I followed up the use of the pseudonym with as much bad publicity as I could muster.

And so, Cordwainer Bird moved smoothly from writing cruddy sf and men's magazine garbage to writing cruddy television garbage.

I've used the pseudonym only three times in the thirteen years I've been writing films and television. Once on *Voyage* (the segment titled "The Price of Doom," aired originally over the ABC network on Monday, October 12th, 1964); once on *The Flying Nun* (the segment titled "You Can't Get There From Here," aired originally over the ABC network on Thursday, April 11th, 1968) . . . and how Bird came to write *The Flying Nun* is a weirder story than even *this* book could contain, and it will have to wait for another time; and finally as the author of the pilot segment of a nasty little, short-lived (thank God) series called *The Starlost*. Bird was also featured on the credits of *The Starlost* each week of its 16-episode life, as its creator. That was in the Fall of 1973.

I'd go into the full story of Cordwainer's most famous awfulness, *The Starlost*, but I've told it in explicit and defamatory detail as the introduction to a wonderful, terrific book called PHOENIX WITHOUT ASHES (available from another paperback publisher for a paltry 95¢). This incredibly great book to which I make humble and merely passing reference is a novelization of the original version of the pilot script, the one that won the Writers Guild award last year as the Most Outstanding Dramatic-Episodic Script of the 1973-74 season. I wrote the introduction about how the morons who produced the show screwed it up, forcing me to put the Bird monicker on it, and the talented young sf writer Edward Bryant did the novel. And if you want to read the original version of that script, the one Ellison wrote, not the one that got aired with Bird's name

on it, you can read it in an anthology called FASTER THAN LIGHT, edited by Jack Dann and George Zebrowski (Harper & Row, 1975). And if you want to read a funny novelization of the shit I went through in Toronto during the period when I worked on the series before walking out on it, try Ben Bova's new comic novel, THE STARCROSSED (Chilton, 1975). In fact, Ben even dedicated the book to Bird. So that's as much cross-reference as you'll need and further than that I don't want to go into it. Besides, Byron Preiss and Pyramid Books will start charging me for advertising if I go into it any further.

Which brings us to this story you've just read.

A couple of years ago, Philip José Farmer, one of the *great* fantasists of our time, wrote me saying he was in the process of doing stories by famous fictional writers out of stories by real writers. Hemingway's Nick Adams, Kurt Vonnegut's Kilgore Trout, Jack London's Martin Eden, Conan Doyle's Dr. Watson, Thomas Mann's Gustave von Aschenbach, Barry Malzberg's Jonathan Herovit . . . that whole crowd. And he said he wanted to do a Cordwainer Bird story.

At approximately the same time, dashing and debonair young Byron Preiss, editor of this lunatic volume, got in touch and wanted me to write a story about a new American pulp hero who was a writer. I suggested Cordwainer. He thought that was super.

The next thing I knew, Phil and Byron had gotten together and were *nuhdzing* me almost weekly to write the story for this book. Phil even integrated Cordwainer into the genealogy of Doc Savage in the revised chart to be found in the paperback edition of DOC SAVAGE: HIS APOCALYPTIC LIFE. Now, let me make one point perfectly, uh, let me say this: I had never *ever* given any thought to who or what Cordwainer Bird might be. It was just a pen-name, just a throwaway, a device to let those who knew my work and the standards of craft I try to maintain that I had been jerked around, that the result was for the birds and I wasn't the one responsible.

But. Here comes that damned Farmer with letters, one after the other, wanting to know about this Bird, wanting to know that, wanting to know how tall he was, and how he wore his hair, and what color his eyes were, and what stories he'd written. Then the phone calls! Between Preiss and Farmer, I was driven bats. The one calling to find out if I'd even started writing the bloody story yet, and the other calling to tell me Bird was a nephew of The Shadow and The Spider and G-8, for God's sake! And it all started ballooning and mushrooming,

and the next thing I knew others had found out that Bird was going to take on The New York Literary Establishment, that inarticulated conspiracy of writers, editors, critics and publishers who get fat while so many fine writers starve in back rooms and quonset huts across the country. And they started suggesting why didn't Bird kill this one in the story, and why didn't Bird get all the brain damaged copyeditors who fuck up literate copy in their hellbent drive to make it conform to Smith or Bryn Mawr type-style and machine gun them in the lobby of the Plaza.

And I must confess that while Bird's activities in this story are a lot bloodier than any I've engaged in (though I did once send a dead gopher and a recipe for dead gopher stew to the comptroller of a publishing house that was messing me over), there is just the faintest tot of wish-fulfillment in the work.

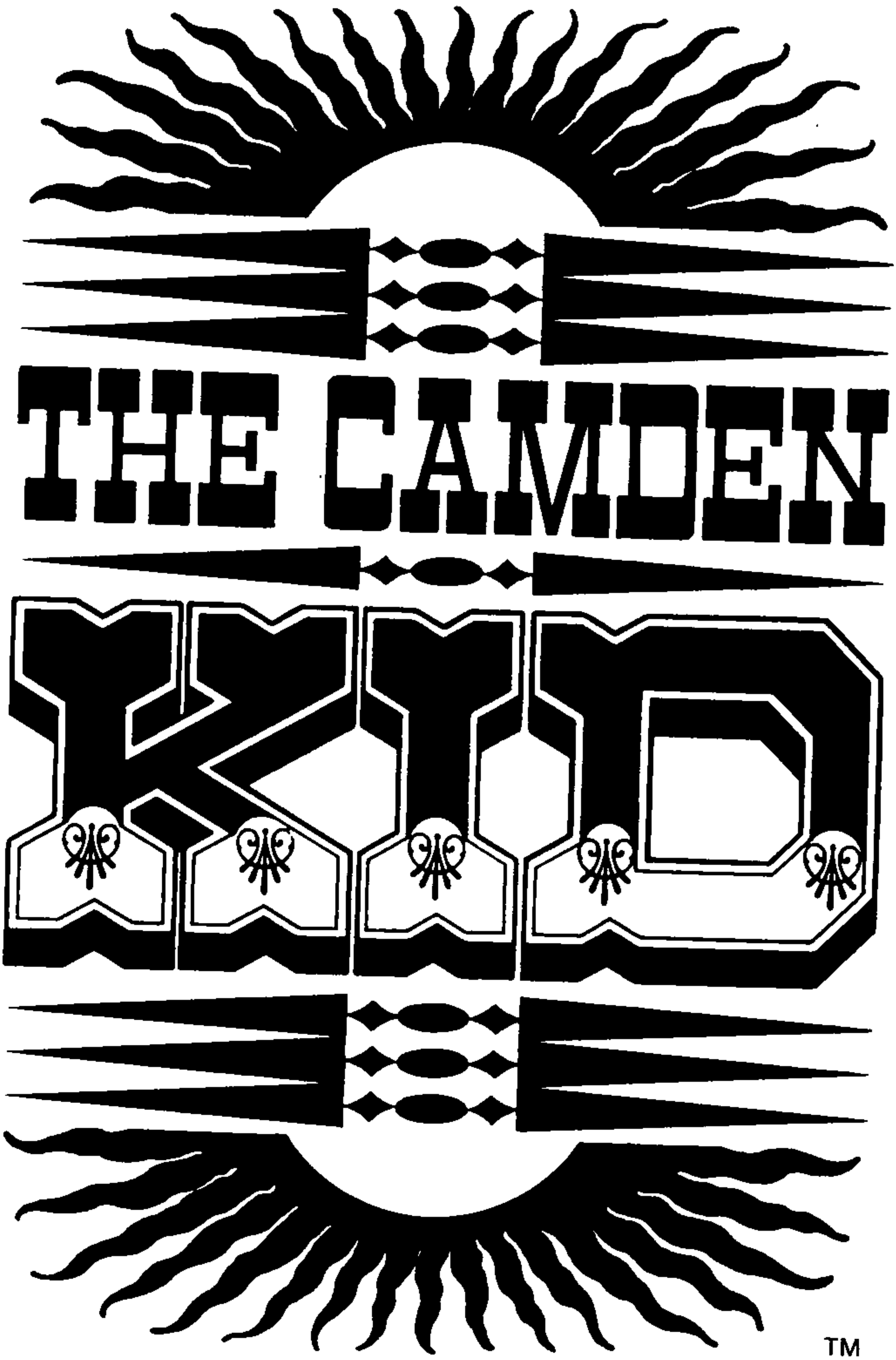
So as you can see, I *am* Cordwainer Bird and I am *not* Cordwainer Bird. I am, when I'm forced to put a pen-name on work that's been ruined by other hands; but I'm not the guy in the story, because he's a vigilante and I'd *never* do that sort of thing.

Further, my hair is brown, and Bird's is black; I'm 5'5" and Bird is exactly four feet tall; Bird has Uncle Kent, The Shadow, for a relative, and the best I've got is my Uncle Lew up in Larchmont, who dabbles in stocks . . . I think. (Come to dwell on it, what *does* Lew do for a living?)

In any case, the story you've just read is a fable. A myth. It ain't true. I'd *never* throw even a jerk like Bob Thomas out a window.And if the names of real persons have managed to creep into it, why, it's just literary tomfoolery.

So that disclaims it all, and we can settle back in the assurance that Cordwainer Bird is merely a creature of the imagination. Honest he is. Would I lie to you?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Phwombly appears in this story *after* the *Showdown at Shootout*. This indicates that there may indeed be *more* survivors of that terrible event. For more details, see Volume 1.


THE CAMDEN
KID
TM

The Camden Kid
by Charlie Swift
Illustration by Steranko

HOLD IT! DON'T TURN THAT PAGE!

This is a Western for people who don't like Westerns. It is funny, very funny. It is written in a witty, evenly-paced style that replenishes old stereotypes and brings out a very human and light-hearted cast of characters.

Charlie Swift, the author of the story, is a radio comedian and writer. His work has appeared regularly on WUHY-FM, Philadelphia. If the broadcasts are half as good as most of "The Camden Kid," then WUHY should be selling transcripts.

The Camden Kid has a strange history. He started out as the Hoboken Kid and could have wound up to be any of the following:

The Levittown Kid
The Sassafrass Kid
The College Kid
or my other favorite—
The Kid Kid

Yet good taste prevailed and you are about to read a story in which New Jersey's pulp-reading cowboy superstar comes West to seek a home and get the name "Camden."

He's a good young man, but a bit naive. He has a lot to learn about saloon girls and Native Americans, but when it comes to being a non-violent cowboy, you couldn't ask for too much more than "Camden."

Jim Steranko, who illustrates the hero, is no stranger to Westerns, An expert on the cinema epics of the Old West, Jim has painted *Wildcat O'Shea* for Berkley Books and has envisioned a classic Western for the graphic story medium.

You can savor this story. Charlie enriches each page with some of the smoothest and wildest descriptions to hit cow-lit since Max Brand picked up a pen.

STERANKO

Prologue

Located somewhere between Hopeless, Wyoming and Barksville, Arizona lies the very unique town of Destitute, Wyoming. Destitute, the same famous town where John Wesley Hardin had killed six men in a single gunfight, and where the notorious Billy the Kid narrowly escaped a shotgun wedding.

Of course, other Western towns laid claim to similar colorful happenings, but what made Destitute, Wyoming *unique* stemmed from a strange occurrence of June 1, 1874, at four-fifteen in the afternoon. It was at that time that Silas Jacobee, town blacksmith, demonstrated his new invention.

This invention was to be a labor-saving device. It was an excavator, for use in mining operations. Working from huge wheels and gears, the device rammed a half-ton iron scooper into the ground at a lightning five scoops per minute.

Despite the machine's great potential, only a few of the townsfolk had shown up for the demonstration, since Destitute's Deacon Crowly had spent the week before publicly deriding the invention. He declared that iron that did too much of man's own work must be iron forged in the fires of Hell itself.

Silas Jacobee did not subscribe to this theory, though, and at four-fifteen that afternoon he cranked his machine's huge master lever on Destitute's main street. But just as he began, the heavy nine-foot coil of spring designed to absorb tension somehow slipped out of its socket. It sprang back at the wrong angle, and sent the huge scooper flying from its cradle, catapulting it through the display window of the general store, destroying every item in the shop, collapsing the beams that supported the second floor balcony, and causing the thick oaken placard hanging over the entrance to fall upon Silas

Jacobee, killing him instantly.

Of course, Deacon Crowly was delighted with the results, and called the frightened townsfolk together to bury the machine deep down into the prairie soil. On that spot, the town government drew up a resolution which declared modern inventions illegal from that day on. The resolution protected itself by declaring that whosoever tried to tamper with or amend the resolution in any way would immediately lose legal citizenship in Destitute, rendering it impossible to change the law.

So it has been that Destitute, Wyoming and its surrounding territory has progressed little, and Destitute regrets it not. The town refuses any outside suggestions or help in any form, and although visitors are welcome for short cash-spending stays, settling is discouraged. Destitute, like the Amish country of Pennsylvania, carries on life as it was one hundred years ago, and may newcomers be damned.

It was to this unique Western town that young Cal Willis of Camden, New Jersey rode one June afternoon.

1.

The Grand Saloon of Destitute, Wyoming served as the town bar, municipal service building, doctor's office, hotel, and whore house all at the same time. It was the place you could go to find the sheriff, judge, or doctor, and watch saloon owner, sugar-coated Sam Boswell, hone his card-cheating edge. If you ever found the door locked on the barbershop or general store, you'd look for the proprietors in the saloon. They could probably be found standing at the bar, quaffing the local liquid terror and watching the town's main attraction, Grand Canyon Sweet, belt out her repertoire of bawdy house ballads.

Everyone pretty much knows everyone else around town, and except for weekly tourist groups, strangers come to Destitute in two ways: seldom and never.

That's why the entire saloon crowd looked up at once when the doors swung open and a tall handsome cowboy swaggered in, thumbs on ammunition belt, smiling.

At least, he *seemed* to be a cowboy . . .

His ten gallon hat was perched atop a trim, sandy crop of hair—its brim tilted *just right* across the man's left eye. Hanging at his hips was a pair of custom designed Colt 45s. An embroidered Western blouse hugged his chest, perpendicular creases showing in what seemed to be a recently acquired shirt. A bit of cardboard still peeked out from beneath the collar.

The observers looked closer through the smoky saloon light,

and noted that an effort had been made to have this cowboy's new chaps and boots appear worn and soiled.

Who was this man?

"Mah name's Cal Willis . . . and Ah'm lookin' fer Trouble with a capital 'T'!"

Wooden crashes came from all around the room as tables were leapt over, women were thrown aside, and over three dozen gunslinging patrons lined the stranger in the sights of their six-guns.

The cowboy spoke again, not a flicker of his eyelash, not a quiver in his voice. "Ah reckon Ah was a mite misunderstood. . . . Ah'm lookin' fer Trouble . . . Mr. Matt Trouble. Should be a rancher hereabouts. . . ."

A pained growl seethed around the saloon as furniture was propped up, cards were retrieved, beer was reordered, and the women musical chaired themselves onto the nearest lap.

Cal Willis strode forward to the bar, seemingly oblivious to the cloud of hostility settling its dust around him. There, standing with a large mug in her hand was the singer, Grand Canyon Sweet. Sweet was a rosy-cheeked woman with excited eyes. Her hair glowed with the color of an ember being fanned in a fire. She had a high 'C' that could shatter wrought iron, and she wore a low-cut dress whose upper story strongly resembled the Montgomery County Dam, just before last April's flood.

"Pardon me, Ma'am," smiled Cal Willis, "perhaps you could help me out . . ." His voice was aimed at her ears, but his eyes trailed down her neck.

"I'll help you the hell out the doors of this saloon if you can't keep your eyes off my balcony!" said Sweet.

It was love at first sight.

"Ah'm mighty sorry, Ma'am, Ah meant no harm . . ."

"Sure, cowboy," said Sweet, "What're you doin' around Destitute? You aren't a tourist . . ."

"*No Ma'am*!" snapped Cal, "Ah heard plenty about this place—and Ah been plannin' on settlin' here in Destitute!"

"Folks around here don't cotton to no squatters!" Cal glanced in the direction of the nasal, gravelly voice and discovered a toothless old coot, leaning on the bar top, grinning. Whiskers grew in abundance upon his wrinkled cheeks, and they seemed well fertilized, if under watered.

"Ah don't believe Ah have yore name," said Cal.

"Why that's tough, Sonny . . ." replied the old coot, "Ah wuz hopin' mebbe they'd send mah bills to *you* instead!"

Cal had no appreciation for true Western humor. He turned

toward Sweet. "Say, who is this toothless old bastard?"

"Just Mulligan," sighed Sweet, as if she were naming a pet turtle.

"That's right!" wheezed Mulligan, "and Ah's like t'know whut makes you so sure we'll let you settle here in Destitute?"

"And Ah'd like t'know how you figger it's yore beeswax!"

"Now don't git yer fire fanned up there, youngster . . ." Mulligan nudged a glass along the bar toward Cal. He poured a vile-looking liquid from a brown bottle marked, 'For External Use Only.'

"Ah've come here t' contribute whut Ah can fer the town . . ." Cal eyed the glass suspiciously.

"That'll grow some brush on yer hillside!" winked Mulligan. He downed his glass. Cal still hesitated.

"If you intend to live and die out West, then you'd best start takin' your chances here," said Sweet.

"Don't mind if Ah do," spoke Cal, as coolly as possible. He lifted his glass and tried not to smell it as he drank it in a single gulp. His neck muscles seemed to tighten, but otherwise the drink didn't seem to affect him at all. Standing close however, Sweet could note that his pupils pulsated to ragtime rhythm.

Cal shut his eyes for a moment, then swallowed, saying, "Not bad at all!"

Sweet giggled for a second, and a tiny spark of amusement flickered in Mulligan's eyes. "So you've talents tuh offer, eh? What are you, an insurance salesman?"

"Nope," said Cal, "Ah'm a professional rider, roper, and sharpshooter. Worked with the circus back East. I'm pretty durn good, too. All them talents are out of place most everywhere else nowadays, and that's why Ah'm here!"

"A professional cowboy!" Mulligan laughed, "And where have you practiced these Western talents?"

Cal Willis hooked his right thumb onto his holster, "Why, back in mah home town area mostly . . . Camden, New Jersey."

"Camden, New Jersey?" erupted Mulligan, "You're a professional cowboy from Camden, New Jersey?"

Grand Canyon Sweet turned away so Cal wouldn't see her smile.

"You got somethin' against Camden?" Cal was riled.

"Why no, of course not, Mr. Willis," answered the grimy old coot. "In fact, Ah believe Ah'll call you th' *Camden Kid*!"

At that instant, a galloping sound filtered through the bar room doors.

"It's the stage . . ." Sweet poured herself a drink.

Cal turned to eye the swinging door as a group of about twelve old ladies shuffled into the saloon. They were all dressed in flowered prints, clutching huge bags "weaved by authentic Navajo Indians" who evidently had their work packaged in Hong Kong.

The ladies were being prodded about by a fat, sweating little man dressed in baggy jeans, boots, and chaps. He rubbed his brow . . . megaphone (in his paw. The old women smiled and tittered occasionally as the fat man raised his megaphone) and spoke.

"Ladies . . . you see before you the only remaining authentic Wild West saloon in the world. No efforts have been made to lull your minds into believing that this saloon is fully of grimy, drunken patrons with rough reputations—no sir—all of these patrons are really grimy and drunk, and are known to be hard boiled and dangerous! Why, ladies! We're riding roughshod of safety merely by standing here in the saloon entrance!"

The old ladies ate it up, gawking and giggling an occasional, "Oh, my, my!"

The fat man continued, "Yes, indeed, why, I wouldn't be surprised if a crew of horse thievin' desperadoes sashayed through those swinging doors and robbed you all blind!" The women all giggled together.

"Reach!" cried the leader of a crew of three horse thievin' desperadoes as they sashayed through the swinging door of the saloon. They wore dirty handkerchiefs over their noses.

One thief leveled a pair of Colts at the terrified old ladies as another rounded up their purses and strung a wooden pole through their handles.

One poetic old lady with ruddy cheeks and broad shoulders clutched her bag tightly. "You whippersnapper! You wouldn't take a grandmother's handbag—knowing that her pleading, tortured eyes would haunt your nights for eternity—would you?"

The thief paused for a moment, then said, "You're right Granny, I'd rather shut them peepers of your'n." He withdrew his .45 and cocked the hammer.

The woman quickly closed her eyes and resentfully tossed her bag to the man.

Just then the crook covering the old ladies began waving his pistols erractically.

"Hey Onions!" barked the lead gunner, "Whut the hell're you doin'?"

"Ah . . . ah!" Onions' head bobbed up and down.

The thief carrying the purses became worried. "Christ, Onions! Have you gone loco? Cut it out!"

But Onions continued to wave his six-guns about, crying, "Ahh! Abba! Agga! . . . AHHH CHOOCHA!" The six-guns roared a blast together. One bullet spun the spurs of a frightened patron, the other tore a feather off of Grand Canyon's shoulder strap.

"Now see here!" shouted Cal, his nostrils flaring.

"Shut up, Tinhorn!" shouted the lead thief right back at him. "You all right, Onions?"

"Aw, shit," said Onions. A soggy dark area was spreading over the front of his bandana. He tried to touch the handkerchief with his hands, but he was still clutching the Colts.

"Keep the crowd covered, fool!" roared the leader.

"Uh, OK, Copperhead" whined Onions.

Seeing that all the handbags had been collected, Copperhead waved his gunmen towards the doors.

"Back out, boys . . . and don't anyone start gittin' *ideas*—least of all *you*, clown!" Copperhead pointed his gun barrels at Cal.

When the two thieves were out the door, Copperhead backed himself out. As he reached the last table, he nodded to a man wearing a five pointed star.

"Oh, hello there George, Ah didn't see you there. How's the wife and kids?"

"Not bad, Copperhead," smiled the sheriff, "and yours?"

"So-so," came the reply. "The hauls get smaller every week."

"I guess the crime doesn't pay, but the hours are good!" said the sheriff.

Onions' voice could be heard from the street, "Hey, c'mon, Copperhead! Let's vamoose! You kin' talk tuh him some other time!"

"Sorry, George," said the robber, "duty calls." He turns toward the frightened old ladies and touched the brim of his hat. "Much obliged."

Copperhead disappeared out the door and the sound of his horse faded with the others.

Sweet exhaled the breath she'd been holding. "Keerist!"

The old women immediately began shouting and waving their arms, like a single wounded beast with tentacles. The fat man barked through his megaphone, herding them from the saloon.

"All right, ladies, we haven't much time . . . there's still the Arrowhead Creek and Fort Destitute to see before dinner-time!" They all left.

"Does that happen often?" asked Cal.

"A couple times a month!" said Sweet.

"All thet actin' jest fer th' tourists? It seemed dangerous!"

"Actin' fer th' tourists!" shouted Mulligan, "Whut actin'? Thet wuz a wholesale holdup, you cactus brain!"

"A holdup!" said Cal. "But everybody's drinkin' and gamblin' like nothin's happened! Why, the sheriff's sittin' right there with a beer! Why don't he do somethin'!"

"And why don't you ask the sheriff yourself?" asked Sweet.

For a second it looked as if Cal wanted to voice a smart answer, but he turned away and walked over to the sheriff's table.

Sheriff Sweeny was a chubby man with a soft face. He wore a high peaked gray hat and his spurs were genuine silver. He sat at the table with three card-playing cowhands who let him cheat. A woman of the evening worked day shift on his lap.

"Sheriff Sweeny?" prompted Cal.

The lawman either grunted acknowledgment or belched.

" 'Scuse me, sheriff, Ah can see you're busy, but Ah was jest wondrin' how come you ain't out chasin' them desperadoes?"

The sheriff looked up, and an expression of tired, honest determination spread across his face. "Son, Ah say, *son*, you *know* Ah cain't be out chasin' thet gang of outlaws—they're too, Ah say they're jest too *slippery-like*! An sposin' they took the notion tuh come on back here fer a return house call, son? Ah mean tuh imply jest *who* would protect, *that is*, jest *who* would protect our fair townsfolk in this here saloon, jest like Ah did now!"

"Wuz you protectin' us jest then, Sheriff?" giggled a seedy lookin' cowpoke seated next to him.

The sheriff's leg made a swift motion beneath the table and the seedy character yelped, and began coughing and clutching at himself.

"They ain't nobody *kilt*, is there?" said the sheriff.

Cal answered, "Reckon not, but Ah'd still think it's worth trackin' down them owl-hoots! You seemed on the familiar side o' one of them—some old arch-enemy of your'n? A recurring phantom of the plains? An old friend turned evil against you?"

"Son, Ah never set eyes on that outlaw before today," said Sheriff Sweeny calmly, "and iffin Ah was *you*, brother, Ah b'lieve Ah'd f'git the whole—that is, the *en*tire thing and leave

the detective work tuh us professional-types!" With that, the lawman took to investigating the girl on his lap as thoroughly as possible.

Cal walked slowly back to the bar.

"Well, Camden," grumbled Mulligan, "will he call out the militia?"

"No . . . he didn't seem to care."

"Nobody cares," said Sweet.

Camden spoke up, "Well, Ah care! Ah care whenever they's a right tuh be righted—a *wrong* tuh be righted!"

Mulligan held up his shot glass, eyeing Camden's distorted profile through the dark liquid. "Yer grammer needs work, son—but otherwise, Ah'd say y'had the makin's of a real Western man!"

"Well I hope so!" said Grand Canyon Sweet, "We could use a few, hereabouts . . ."

"Mebbe Ah might git tuh stay a spell then, after all," said Cal. "Ah believe Ah'll mosey on over tuh Matt Trouble's ranch, if you kin point out th' way there. Mebbe Mr. Trouble feels like doin' somethin' about this situation too."

"If Ah know Trouble, he knows trouble!" winked Mulligan.

"You know Matt?"

"Shore do. Ah'll ride over with yuh, Camden Kid. Things are beginning to tuh git interestin' round here."

Mulligan took Cal's arm to usher him out of the saloon. Cal turned to Sweet for a moment.

"Ah'll be seein' yuh soon, Ah hope."

Sweet winked, "If you got the money, I got the time, sweetheart."

Mounting his horse, Whirlwind, Cal asked, "Whut did she mean by *that*, Mulligan?"

"Oh, Ah dunno, city-boy," chuckled the old-timer, "mebbe she likes tuh take taxis."

"But you don't have taxis here in Destitute, do yuh?"

Mulligan sighed from above his mule. "No Camden . . . we don't."

They started riding.

2.

Matt Trouble could have passed for a rich tycoon. Well, actually he *was* a rich tycoon, owning and operating one of the largest privately owned cattle ranges left in the U.S. The ranch was run in true Destitute 1874 tradition, and Matt Trouble was all the more wealthy for it, due to the superior quality of the

beef he raised.

He would have looked like a tycoon, wearing an expensive brown suit and vest. A shimmering gold watch chain formed a latitude across his ribs. His full mustache and beard were expertly trimmed, and his eyes, although ancient, betrayed a spark of youthful vigor that still flared into an eight alarmer on occasion.

Yep, Matt Trouble would have been the true-to-life replica of a tycoon, were he not standing in an empty corral, sleeves rolled up past the elbows, pitching rusty horseshoes at an iron spike with precision and finesse.

He looked up at the two men riding up to the corral enclosure. They dismounted, Mulligan lowered himself slowly, as if he were dipping himself into a tub of steaming water. Cal just sort of leaned over, and in a single motion touched lightly down, like a cat.

Matt Trouble tossed one last horseshoe and looked up at the two visitors. "Mulligan! Y'old hoot-owl—where've you been these weeks? Who's yer friend there?" He shook hands with both of them.

"Ah'm Cal Willis, th' feller that wrote you from Camden, Mr. Trouble."

"Well, hello there, Cal. Please call me Matt, boy!"

"Cal here is the Camden Kid t'me," said Mulligan.

"How's that?"

Before Mulligan could answer, the sharp voice of a woman sailed out of an open window in the ranch house nearby. Matt Trouble ducked slightly, as if avoiding the sound.

"Matthew Farnsworth Trouble! Are you out there in that horrid yard, pitching those rusty horseshoes and soiling your jacket, tie, and trousers and walking amongst the prairie dust and filth, kicking into piles of horse manure, chewing tobacco behind my back and otherwise occupying yourself with the diversions of the devil?"

Matthew smiled crookedly at his companions and spat his tobacco out, kicking dust over it. "Why no, Samantha dear, how ever do you fabricate such outrageous notions?"

The woman's voice became a bit louder and clearer, "Matthew! You are a no good, two-timing, jumped up, never-come-down baldfaced lying scalawag, and if you *ever*—" At this point the woman had reached the window and had spotted Cal and Mulligan.

"Why, *good evenin'* gentlemen," she spoke sweetly, "I beg your pardon."

Mulligan touched the brim of his hat, "S'all right, Ma'am. Ah realize it's hard t'keep this polecat in line . . ."

"You know it!", she said, "Well now, Mulligan, why don't you boys come on in and wash up, then I can meet your friend at supper." She waved and drew herself back into the house.

Cal noted that Samantha seemed much younger than Matt, and in fact she was, being in her early fifties. She still had attractive features as some women never lose them. Her black hair was straight and her dark complexion rumored of a plains Indian in her heritage.

At dinner, Cal seemed to be having trouble with his steak. It was without doubt the toughest, although tastiest meat he'd ever eaten.

"Mr. Willis, you're certainly having a time with that steak," observed Matt Trouble.

"Yeah," chewed Mulligan, "what's yer beef?"

"It's jest fine, Ma'am," coughed Cal towards Samantha, "it jest seems t' last fer a spell longer than most meats."

"Well, you'd better get used to this food if y' figger on workin' this ranch, Cal," said Matt. "You jest won't find none of that soft, modern, hormone-shot cowhide around here. We raise 'em with skill and care!" Matt slapped Cal across the back and turned toward Mulligan. "Anything new from town?"

Mulligan looked up, "Yep. Another robbery, jest like the others. The sheriff jest sat there applaudin'."

A concerned scowl darkened the old rancher's face. "Hmmm . . . thet perturbs me a mite. I been perturbed all week!"

"What's up, Matt?" asked Cal.

"Ah went riding out on the range last Tuesday, out toward Karpf Canyon. I had jest ridden over a small rise when mah pony kicked up something half buried near the base of a rock. It flashed in the sunlight, red, white, and blue! Ah saluted instinctively—" Matt glanced at Cal sharply—"Army habits, son! Anyhow, Ah paused t' pick it up. It was a social security card!"

"More rhubarb?" asked Samantha cheerfully.

"Quiet, Samantha! This is important!" said Matt. "Well, Ah dug around that spot there, and whut d'ye suppose Ah came up with? A whole pile of them social security cards—all different names! Gentlemen, let me tell you that at that moment a terrible realization struck me blind, dumb, and deaf!"

Cal asked, "Yes, sir?"

"What's that? Oh yes. Gentlemen, it's *this*. Some fiend is running social security cards to the Indians! Now what do you say to that?"

Cal and Mulligan said nothing at all for a while. Finally, the old prospector spoke up, "Ahem . . . Ah say there, Matt. Ah b'lieve it's time the Camden Kid and Ah had a looksee at thet area you're jawin' about. Sounds like somethin's up!"

"Sure, boys," said Matt, "You go and see if I'm not right—jest be careful, though!"

With that, Cal thanked his hosts and followed Mulligan silently to their mounts. The two rode out onto the range.

After they had gone a few miles, Cal spoke up. "Say, Mulligan, jest why would them Indians want social security cards?"

"Don't be a wombat! The only tribe of redskins left on these prairies exist in Matt Trouble's fading memories! He's always thinkin' thet *somebody* is running *something* to the Injuns! What Matt Trouble's found fer us was a clue to these here holdups!"

Cal shifted in his saddle uneasily. He didn't like any conversations that took guesswork on his part. "Come agin?"

"Those cards, Camden! They belong to those old ladies thet got robbed in Destitute!"

"You mean to say those old ladies come here and bury their social security cards? But Mull—"

Mulligan spat out his tobacco and looked as if he wanted to pray to the Good Lord from right there atop his mule. "The *thieves* dropped those cards on the way to their hideout!"

Slowly, an embarrassed grin established residence upon Cal Willis' countenance. He said nothing.

"Now listen, Camden. Them crooks must be nearby somewhere, and my guess lies in *that* direction!" The old man nodded toward the long black silhouette of Karpf Canyon. "It's dangerous business. Can you take care of yoreself O.K.?"

Cal said nothing. Turning to look at Mulligan, his hands flashed to the .45s at his hips—he tossed them high and forward into the air, switching his hands and deftly caught the returning guns, twirling them quickly into their holsters. This act took 3.4 seconds altogether, and all the while Cal's eyes had never left Mulligan's.

"Good enuff!" snorted the prospector.

3.

In 1844 the Reverend Louis Peabody Karpf brought his weary wagon train of Second Day Extremists to a huge canyon surrounded by tall sloping cliffs and containing a deep depression of a dried up lake bed in its center.

The families cheered as they made their way into the canyon—a natural fortress against bitter prairie winds and the plains Indians.

Reverend Karpf ordered an immediate encampment and supervised the sealing off of the Canyon's only entrance by rolling boulders into the narrow opening.

Once safe and secure in this wonderful rest spot, Karpf called a special prayer meeting to thank the Lord for his many blessings and provisions, and to request some much needed rainfall.

Five weeks later, Karpf's group pulled out for California, leaving behind the West's first ground-hog shaped swimming pool, one broken Conestoga wagon, and the complete plans for a bowling alley in South Wyoming.

It was into this canyon that Mulligan and the Camden Kid rode. Immediately, the old man began teaching his young partner how to search for traces of recent human habitation. But no matter how they looked, no item of waste, no footprint, and no campfire ash could be found. When they had combed the entire canyon floor, Mulligan frowned and wiped his brow with his sleeve.

"It ain't no use, Camden. I guess we're tossin' lassos at th' clouds, there ain't no trace of them yah-hoos!"

Cal glided off his horse. "But how 'bout them hoofprints yuh pointed out? They weren't made by no mustangs."

"Nope, they wus shoed horses all right, but that could've been anyone. It's startin' t'git dark now. We'd better head back." Mulligan climbed down off his mule to give it a rest, and began to lead it out of the canyon.

Cal Willis was not satisfied. "Mulligan. Ah still feel as if those varmints are around here!"

"Horseshit!" exclaimed Mulligan.

"Ah beg yer pardon?"

"Horseshit!", whispered the miner, pointing to the mess he had just stepped into.

"Well so what, Mulligan . . . they ain't good boots, anyhow!"

"No!" hissed Mulligan, "not the boots, the *crap*! Those hoofprints are days old, but this manure is fresh! Somebody's been here this evening." His eyes scanned the canyon walls. "But if they ain't in the *canyon* . . ." His vision settled on a dusty patch of rock. "Then they're in the *walls*!" He pointed, "Look *there* Camden!"

Cal looked. Winding up the rocks was a narrow, almost imperceptible trail through which a man might lead a horse.

Without speaking, the two men checked their guns, took a lasso, and picked their way along the trail. After about fifty yards of diagonal traveling, they could feel a brush of cool air coming from a large opening in the rocks. A boulder had been rolled in front of it, shielding the view of the opening from below.

Inside the entrance was a passageway that sloped downward into the rock. Cal and Mulligan shuffled along slowly, careful not to dislodge any stones that could announce their trespass. About sixty yards down, flickering shadows could be seen on the tunnel wall. As they drew near the opening, they could hear the voices of men. Cal looked at Mulligan. Cautiously, the two men peered around the opening.

They emerged onto a small ridge protected by a jumble of huge boulders. Below them stretched a wide, half natural, half man-made ramp leading to the floor of a fantastic underground cavern. The cavern itself was about a quarter of a mile wide, probably formed by some prehistoric expanding gas pocket, or perhaps a great underground river.

The walls were slimy and shiny, sparkling with bits of mica embedded in the rock. The uneven ceiling thrust down great accusing stalactite fingers toward the three robbers who sat about a wooden campfire, broiling TV dinners. Scattered around them were piles of magazines, hundreds of them, bound with string. The fire's dancing flames made the rock formations flicker, and provided demonic images of their bearded faces as their excited voices reverberated throughout the cavern.

"And I say we can milk too much of a good thing! Better quit now, while we're ahead!"

"But what's gonna happen? Destitute won't allow no outside lawmen into town . . . and we've no worries with the sheriff!"

"Maybe so, but I agree with Onions—we've got enough for the project already."

"That's true, but we might need something to fall back on!"

"Are you kiddin'? It's a gold mine of an idea! Opening this area's first adult bookstore just beyond the city limits! They can't stop us! It'll change the whole town!"

"The sooner the better!" said Onions, as he reclined on a pile of *Bondage Exotique* magazines. "If y'ask *me*, that whole durn town is *sick*!" He began leafing through the stack.

As Onions lifted his arm to flip open the foldout, a faint whistling sound echoed nearby. Suddenly a lasso tightened itself around his wrist, as if appearing out of the air. The two bandits watched Onions as he opened his mouth as if to yelp, but before

he could holler, the noose leaped back, sending him sprawling onto the TV dinners.

The crooks looked up along the rope, up to the ridge where the Camden Kid stood, his face a grim expression of determined justice, his broad shoulders stiff beneath his embroidered Western shirt, sequins flashing boldly in the firelight. Looking down on the startled crooks, he resembled a combination of Tom Mix, Gene Autry, the Lone Ranger, and Rin Tin Tin rolled into one man.

"Jesus Christ!" barked Copperhead, throwing his metabolism into fourth gear and ducking behind a stock of *Nylon Revue*. The third crook had pulled Onions to his feet, and both of them were going for their pistols.

"Careful!" shouted Mulligan. He tried to yank Cal down to safety.

"No problem," said Cal. His hands flashed quicker than a good idea, and an explosion was heard.

Both thieves looked at their empty hands incredulously as the Camden Kid blew his smoking .45 barrels.

Mulligan was awed. "D-Don't damage their merchandise now, Camden!"

Once again Cal's .45s sounded in unison. The two crooks winced, and then felt a cool draft as their trousers fell about their ankles, leather belts severed.

"Don't make a move!" said Cal. Nothing could be further from their minds.

Mulligan scanned the cavern and in the corner of his eyes he suddenly glimpsed a figure slinking back toward a bend in the wall.

"Copperhead's escaped!" said Mulligan as the form disappeared into the underground labyrinth.

"Ah see 'im," sighed the Kid, "Ah'll jest wing his shootin' arm there." And with that, Cal fired a single blast from the hip which shot high and ricocheted off five separate stalactites before lighting down after Copperhead around the corner.

The bullet disappeared, and there was no sound at all for a second. Then,

"Argh!"

Stumbling footsteps were heard, and Copperhead appeared out from around the corner, clutching his right arm.

"I've had it, damnit!"

Cal covered them all as Mulligan tied their hands and dressed Copperhead's wounds. They then led the gang outside to face Destitute's wrath.

4.

A new batch of old women shuffled and tittered as their fat guide described Destitute's rugged saloon. "I wouldn't be surprised," said he, "if a gang of horse-thievin' varmints burst right through those swingin' doo--"

Suddenly the swinging doors burst open, and in stumbled three horse-thievin' varmints, hands tied securely behind them.

Mulligan and Cal were right behind them, holding .45s at their backs.

"Mulligan!" hollered Grand Canyon Sweet, "how in tarnation did you *ever*—"

"Don't gawk at *me*," replied the seedy prospector, "ask the Camden Kid!"

The saloon patrons all drew about the thieves and their captors, buzzing in admiration. Grand Canyon planted a kiss on Cal's cheek, just like in the dime novels he had read.

"He won't have no trouble hangin' around here *now*, eh, Sheriff Sweeny?" Mulligan said proudly.

The sheriff just grumbled, prodding the thieves away.

"How'd you do it?" blurted Sweet.

"He's jest as good as he said he was," replied Mulligan. "Mebbe even better!"

Cal grinned, cheeks glowing, "Ah shore am!"

Sweet tilted her head slightly. "I guess you have a right t'act a mite high and mighty now . . . but try not t' overdo it!"

"Ah promise!" said Cal. "Now how 'bout a drink?"

"Great idea! thundered Mulligan. "Ah'll git th' firewater!"

"No need," yawned the Camden Kid. And with that, he whipped out his left-hand pistol and shot the cork off a bottle of Arizona Dust Devil *just so*, sending the entire stopper flying across the room. Cal smiled at his friends, "And Ah'm *right-handed* y'know . . ."

Mulligan and Grand Canyon Sweet turned abruptly from Cal, as if he had never existed.

"Ah say thar, Sweet," said the old coot, "D'ye think the rain'll hurt th' rhubarb crop?"

"Not if it comes up in cans, Mulligan . . . not if it comes up in cans."

The Camden Kid poured himself a shot glass and drank it alone.

Afterword

My first reaction to writing the Camden Kid was nausea. You see, I've always disliked Western stories of every kind. I cannot abide horses, cacti, or sweating people, and find the notion of associating with dusty leather frankly disgusting.

However, once I began penning the preceding tale, a strange primitive urge coursed through my veins like some pounding, throbbing hunger, forcing me to complete the story at the fantastic rate of nine, sometimes ten words a day. Actually, this urge *was* hunger, giving me no choice but to overcome my revulsion with Western tales and to inscribe the epic as soon as possible.

Looking back on it all, I must admit that the writing was an invigorating, exciting, delightful, transcendental experience. I hope to be paid for it someday.

VIVA
TM

Viva
by Stephen Englehart
Illustrated by Esteban Maroto

Stephen Englehart, known as "Stainless Steve" Englehart to his hundreds of thousands of Marvel Comics readers, is an adventurous fellow. His work on "Captain America," "Son of Fu Manchu," "The New Beast" and "The Avengers" has been filled with cliché-breaking characterizations, outrageous plots and uncommonly cerebral dialogue. Amidst these happenings, Steve has made his own adventure—the classic switch from multi-seasonal New York to sunny Bay Area California, in 1973.

"Viva" is another extension of Steve's adventurousness. He confronted the concept of an ex-prostitute turned jungle woman with his usual literary gusto. Feeling out the potentialities that the character possessed, Steve opted for a tapestry of emotions draped on a classical adventure tale. The story would concentrate on the evolution of Viva's self-consciousness, as it developed rapidly within a four-day period.

Viva's story is not a pleasant tale. We come head-on with the life of a woman distorted by drugs, worn by self-destructive and violent action and scarred by mingled memories of an oft-bitter youth.

"Oh, yes!"

"Oh Jesus!"

A yawn took hold of Viva's jaws and forced them wide despite her will, as Carl D'Amato rocked on and on, oblivious. In truth, her will wasn't working overtime right then, since she knew the ecstatic executive panting toward his climax with ritualistic abandon had his eyes tightly shut. His vision was filled with fantasy, not her, so she let a yawn spread all across her beautiful face and pulled him closer till she could once more form some sounds.

When she could, she screamed, loud and long, like a true wanton in the throes of orgasm; then she settled into her patented pulsing coo of contentment. As always, she sounded just like she had after Eugenio balled her behind the 74th Street playground on her fifteenth Fourth of July. She should scream, she thought, since she could still call up quite clearly what sexual pleasure had been—*and* since she was one of the Bay Area's foremost whores. The price she'd pocket for this performance was a very fast thousand bucks, along with all the coke she could snort.

She played that back, as Carl loosed his load within her. "A very fast thousand bucks, along with all the coke I can snort." There was no getting around it: that was a lot of both commodities. Yet she knew it meant nothing to the man-brute within her, and she knew with wicked insight it meant nothing to her. She had seen too much, done too much, and lost too much in her twenty-seven years for excitement ever to touch her soul again. Drugs, money, and sex used to be ends in themselves; then they becames means to an end; and now, they weren't even that. Like this roll in the hay in room 1404 of the Hyatt Regency hotel, it was all a damn play. Another yawn

took her, and again she let it have its way. Who the hell cared? She was empty.

Carl D'Amato, on the other hand, was drained. He pulled out of her quickly and fell on the green sateen sheets like a sack of potatoes. His taste for Puerto Rican hookers went back a long way, back to the days when he'd stalked the streets of New York like a leopard and taken his pleasures whenever the spirit moved, which was often. The white girls had been flaccid, the black girls usually scarred, but the brown ones . . . !

He had indeed come a long way since then, but he still liked to satiate that spirit. "It's our Latin heritage," he grinned to himself, dropping one paw on Viva's slack thigh and kneading it reflexively. This was one of the best he'd had in a long time, and he hadn't even hoped to find a PR in Frisco. Mexicans, or even Chinese, had looked much more likely.

The boys had picked a good spot for the conference and had gone to a lot of trouble to make sure he enjoyed himself—and this was only the first leg of his round-the-world jaunt. When he got back to New Jersey, he'd have to pat some fannies. Of course, Rovin had arranged it all in order to snag the boss's eye, but he *had* arranged it, and the boss liked the results more than reasons.

The boss raised his hand to inspect his neatly manicured nails, then let his eyes follow the hand as it came to rest on the girl's nearest breast. Hitching himself onto his right hip, he took his first long look at her.

Even spent, he was struck by her physical presence. Viva's body was rounded, yet trim, the way a good whore's should be. True, the hips were a trifle wide, lending an illusion of heaviness to the thighs, but closer inspection proved it was only an illusion. In fact, the hips seemed to mesh with the mouth, which was also wider than the norm, giving her a solidity that was only enhanced by her high sculptured cheekbones and breasts. And it was all framed with luscious, ass-length black hair. Maybe he should have this one set up in Jersey, for when he got back.

Viva hid gut-bred disgust at his scrutiny behind her sultry brown eyes. There was a small smile at the corner of her mouth—she could always do that—but there was also a cold despair in the pit of her stomach and a desperate desire to close off her mind from the situation. She reached across him for the coke, deftly chopped and carved out two long lines, and sucked its blackness into her brain.

She opened her eyes. The ugliness remained.

Her nipples tickled Carl's chest hair, and he slid his paw

down her rounded belly—but then he drew back sheepishly. "Bathroom first," he grinned, and swung his huge feet to the scarlet carpet. He stood up—at which point the locked room door burst inward to reveal two darkly dressed blacks with black guns in their hands, stepping forward in perfect unison, speaking his name, and blasting four hunks of hurtling metal through Carl D'Amato's heart.

He died.

And Viva, frozen on the bed, knew beyond the slightest possibility of doubt that she was next to go. She stared eternally into the men's methodical faces. She saw her imminent death. And the next thing she was aware of was the hall outside, having no conscious memory of swirling the heavy bedspread over the hitmen's heads and leaping past them as they swore and floundered. It was such an automatic, instinctive response, done more with her arms than her head, that Viva actually felt some surprise when she realized where she was.

She turned, at a loss, and a bullet snapped past her right temple. It cut through her swirling hair, chopping a chunk of it off short and spraying it into a sparkling tapestry. Squealing, she rebounded to the left, colliding hard with the low wall and catching a vertiginous glimpse of the vast open lobby some fourteen floors below.

The Hyatt Regency was a barnlike affair, no matter what its architect intended. The thought "living in a rib cage" sprang out of her drug-darkened brain. Each floor clung to the outer wall of the place, overlooking emptiness—very Seventies posh, but offering no cover at all. She'd have the exact same chance as a clay pigeon running along the low hall. She couldn't run. And she couldn't turn back. Viva clutched the wall's edge and waited to die.

But again, some obscure inner impulse surged up out of her brain. She stared at the lamp cables which hung down from the building's roof. Under ordinary circumstances, her impulse would have been obviously impossible; right then, Viva leapt to the top of the barrier, pasted one brown foot in the dirt and ivy of the planters and pushed herself off into space.

She had no clear impression of actually seeing the cables again. All she registered were the psychedelic explosions of the brick design in the floor far below, rushing up to claim her and add her splattered body to their patterns—as she fell. Then her left hand scraped a metal strand. She twisted, awkward in the air. She clutched it! Her other hand missed, but her legs scissored tight around the wire and she held onto it like a

mother! With a choking cry of pure exultation, she slid away!

Viva thought she heard another shot, and possibly two, from above and behind her, but if she did, they were so totally off-target as to be beyond notice. She was picking up speed, and the rush of the air in her ears rendered certainty inaudible.

It was that speed which became her next concern. It was getting close to free fall, which was no good at all. Tentatively, she tightened her grip on the singing line. Her reward was the most intense agony she'd ever known. For the first time, she remembered she was wearing no clothes! Nudity had been the farthest thing from her thoughts until that moment, but as her palms, thighs, and ankles erupted in bloody blisters, it moved center stage with a vengeance. She was being flayed to shreds! Gritting her teeth till they tingled, sliding in her own burning blood, she took it as long as she could.

By inches, it was enough. When she struck the hanging lamp at the end of the line, only her fall was broken. When the lamp whipped sideways and dropped her a final forty feet, it was like toppling from a standing start. She arced limply toward a massively overstuffed chair, hit it and shattered it. The hotel was dead silent as she rolled out on the floor. But she was alive!

"Oh shit!" breathed a red-haired tourist sobering up in an unshattered chair across the way. "They told me Frisco was sin city, but this is the first time I've seen anything to match the hype!" He shoved himself upright and ran toward his bennie from heaven, oblivious to the oddness of it all, just as he was oblivious to Viva's weak effort to wave him away. In his inebriation, he saw only a naked young girl lying spread-eagled across the gloomy, gray brick, and he claimed no inclination to worry about whys and wherefores. At least he died happy, then, as an assassin's bullet meant for his prize tore through the roof of his mind and exploded his chin into froth.

The night manager and desk clerks were charging forward in horror, even as the few remaining lobby-loungers were scampering for cover. Viva forced herself to her knees, wracked with pain but refusing to consider it. She was running on pure adrenalin, and her thoughts had somewhat crystallized because of it.

She knew she couldn't remain in the hotel; her pursuers were too ruthless for her to chance coming to rest. Yet how far could she get in the city outside without clothing? Even in the emptiness of the Embarcadero, even in these small hours of the night, that possibility held no promise. Once again, she stood between the rock and the hard place . . .

And once again, something within her found an alternative! It dazzled her for a moment, and she couldn't be sure what had unsettled her mind, but it sounded just crazy enough to work. By God, tonight that was all the spur she needed!

Viva darted a calculated glance into the gloom above, in time to glimpse the two gunmen bulling their way into one of the glass-and-gold elevators that ride outside the walls at the Hyatt. She knew those cages were swift, but not as swift as she hoped to be. Staggering, trembling, Viva lurched toward the bank of lifts at her level, and at that time of night had no trouble finding one. Before the hotel staff could catch up to her, before the assassins could catch on, she was rocketing back toward the fourteenth floor.

Pressed under gravity, she sagged against the elevator's handrail and jerked in time to the triphammer in her chest. Gone was the elegant, cynical hooker, replaced by an animal, gasping for breath and awaiting only its next chance to run. Viva gazed downward and her eyes were answered with shock. Sprawling before her, now completely comprehensible, was the incredible cavern of the hotel. With the cage on the outside of the wall, there was no more impediment to her view than at the moment she jumped, only now Viva had time to digest it. The height of fourteen stories was insane! So must she have been! Overcome, her drug-wracked brain on the verge of becoming unstrung, she slumped to the floor.

When the lift hissed to a stop, however, she made herself stand. Limned in the baleful glow of the indicator panel, Viva tottered into the corridor and around to the wall. A quick peek showed her two pursuers, guns discretely pocketed, standing far below in identical puzzled crouches. They'd lost her, but it wouldn't take long for them to hear of the naked nymphet in the see-through lift. Viva turned and fled, back toward Carl D'Amato's room.

Carl now lay face down in a surprisingly small pool of blood. He looked—well, he looked obscene. Viva felt a touch of unease that such a concept would occur to her hardened mind. Maybe she *was* cracking up. She also felt that she would truly lose her gorge this time, as the sight conjured memories of that body in hers. But she choked back both her thoughts and went resolutely to work.

It was certain the whole hotel would soon know that a naked female was running around loose. Those who would gather on her trail, particularly those innocent of lethal intent, might be driven by more average enthusiasm in their search.

But what if their quarry looked like a man?

A man, Viva hoped, would be overlooked out of hand by any such posse. The image of unclothed femininity would be so clearly imprinted on their minds they wouldn't think twice about anyone in a business suit. She knew right now it was the only hope she had.

Viva folded her sleek crepe gown into a strap and tied it tight around her chest; it was so stylishly short it almost didn't reach. Then she slithered into Carl's suit, with more than a little disquiet. The fit was unimpressive, but the elegantly-tailored bell bottoms tucked under without a trace, conforming to her shorter legs. The sleeves were matched equally well with her arms and the coat, unstylishly buttoned, hid her hips. The hat fit fine.

Thus it was a medium-sized gentleman that slipped from room 1404 some two minutes after Viva had entered—and some ninety seconds before the two gunsels got back. By then, she was in the far stairwell, stumbling her way to freedom.

Or so it seemed.

She flagged a late-cruising cab on Sacramento and headed straight west to the ocean, as far away as the town by the bay would let her go. After a preliminary stab at conversation which engendered absolute silence, the cabbie paid little attention to his hunched-over fare. She paid him none at all.

The irregular rise and fall of San Francisco formed a perfect backdrop to the most furious analysis Viva had attempted in years. "What the fuck went on back there?" That was the question of the day. "Okay—Mr. Carl D'Amato, of somewhere back East, made himself some blood enemies. That could sure as hell mean Mafia!" Viva was a bigot.

"It's no secret the spades and Latinos are finally getting their piece of the pie. If this *is* some mob thing, I'm done. They won't let this lay."

A second, even more unnerving thought struck her, sparking a string of virulent curses. The driver jumped in his seat and began to pull over, but she snarled for him to mind his own business. He shrugged and stepped on the gas.

She swore again, more softly. "Ay, puta! I left my fuckin' handbag in that room! Oh Christ, they'll find out my name!" That meant she could kiss goodbye the idea of returning to her Taylor Street apartment. She was cut off, flat—cut off for good, since she'd have to leave San Francisco altogether now. It

was too dangerous to stick around; the concept of seeking shelter with any of her friends brought an ugly smile to her lips. They knew which side of the bread held their butter, too.

Not that she was necessarily sorry. Probing her mind as if for a roach, she could rustle up no sense of loss at abandoning her every worldly possession. Her clothes, color television, and component system were still the same meaningless garbage they'd been when she'd considered them before, lying under Carl D'Amato. God, could that only have been a half an hour ago?

Her only real problem lay in finding another place to set up shop. It would have to be someplace brand new, where she didn't know anyone. "Trouble is," she mused, "hookers who try to peddle it on their own soon get a visit from the local mob . . ."

At length, the cab slowed to a stop, just below a fog-shrouded cliff house on the Great Highway. "Where to now, sir?" asked the driver, his voice clearly indicating a desire to dump his fare here and head back toward the lights. He obviously had little patience with the spaced-out drunks and dopers of late night San Francisco.

"This is fine," Viva muttered, keeping her chin tucked deep in D'Amato's suit. She'd felt a wallet in his back pocket as she'd entered the cab, so she fumbled for it, hoping its previous owner hadn't lived life by credit card.

He hadn't. There were enough bills in that cowhide to choke a horse. The singles, all crumpled, were strictly from change; everything else was big and brand new. Viva rushed through D'Amato's other papers. A phone number—hers. A picture of an old woman—D'Amato's mother. Then she happened upon a much more useful treasure: a neatly folded, peacock blue airline ticket folder. Hurriedly, she counted out what she owed the cabbie, rounded the dollar and added another, and stepped clumsily into the fog. She had stiffened up considerably during the drive; everything everywhere ached.

Under the closest street lamp, she examined the folder. It held an around-the-world ticket. Unmoving, breathing shallowly in the mist, she made herself think about its meaning. Logic told her that she didn't want to follow any path arranged for Carl D'Amato . . . but she could cash the ticket and buy another, for anyplace else on the globe.

She began to rub her hands softly together.

At precisely 7:10 A.M., Pacific Daylight Time, Pan Am's flight number 515 rose majestically from SF International and roared out over the bay, bound for Rio de Janeiro. Near the tail, on the aisle, a passenger listed as Marguerita Perez let loose a long, low sigh of relief.

"No trouble at all," she reflected.

The counter girls had smilingly refunded Miss Carol D'Amato's money, and when Viva used her second alias at a second counter to purchase a seat on her present flight, she came to the conclusion these girls received capped teeth with their wings.

"Now, that's cruel," she admonished herself—though she had to admit her nerves were shot. She'd only been up since sundown, "but that was some night last night." She needed to let it all flow out of her now that she was safely airborne. Settling back in her cushioned seat, she did just that.

The cabin was quiet, except for the rustling of newsprint and the clink of breakfast being readied for the passengers. Viva lifted her head in response to an obscure urge and peered down through her hair at her battered form. Beneath the soiled and wrinkled gown, it didn't seem like an adult's body, full of the curves God had provided and hooking had forced her to maintain. Instead, she saw the skinny gawkiness of a little girl, and even as she marveled at the strangeness of it all, the taste of *malta* flooded her mouth, and she was skipping rope on 22nd Street.

"I was happy, then. I really was." She'd never felt the same again. Oh, she'd had moments, even months, when she was getting what she wanted and thought she was on top of the world, but there had always come a time when she found the glittering prize unworthy of the effort. After a run of those times, she felt she had lost the capacity for joy . . . and this thought brought her back to cold-edged realizations of the night before. Now, nothing mattered in her life, except for that life. When the chips were down, she hadn't surrendered it; though now, soaring away to an unknown future, she couldn't say why. The excitement had ebbed, and she was empty again.

She had been a different person. It had been so wonderful with Pico, and her six brothers and sisters, and her mama and papa. Puerto Rico meant nothing to her; she'd never seen it. As far as she was concerned, Manhattan was the world, not to mention her oyster. The other kids with other-colored skin called her Puerto Rican, or spic, or other words she'd put out of her mind immediately, but she saw herself only as a New

Yorker, citizen of the greatest city in the world.

It wasn't till she was seven, when the big boys from Tenth Avenue hurled Pico's broken-backed body through her family's front window, that the insanity of the city violated her life. Viva cried and cried that awful night, until her work-worn papa, entering her despair with the promise of comfort, belted her across the room instead. "Callate, hija!" he'd snarled, looming tall and orange in the filtered neon from the street. "Lo' otro' nino' quieren a dormirse!" At the age of seven, she learned to sob without sound.

At the age of nine, she learned not to cry at all.

Jaime Ramirez had begun walking her to school. He was in the sixth grade and very handsome, with a half-formed swagger that delighted the little girl. For a year and a half she sneak-read her sisters' *fotonovelas* and daydreamed Jaime playing all the leads to her.

But one day Jaime raped her.

She told no one. The image of poor, broken Pico was too clear in her mind; she knew something similar would happen to her if she made herself too noticeable.

To be happy in New York, you had to be a child. To grow sad, all you had to do was grow up, and there was no way to stop that now. In the early nights, she considered crying, but the tears would not come.

Her smile went the way of her virginity. Viva straightened her limber form, walking to and from her education with a full understanding of the shadowed battleground she trod. New York City had become very tall and uncompromising; she dared be no less. Her friends fell behind her, still drawn to their dolls. Her family took to watching her, shaking their heads. She told no one of her loss.

By the time she was fourteen, she was so solemn and watchful that it was absurdly easy to fall in love. Swept off her feet by a completely nice boy, Viva briefly fell back in a world she had forgotten existed. She and Eugenio rode the Staten Island ferry, giggled at the Central Park zoo, and ended up, one summer's day, making love behind the uptown handball courts. If the truth be told, it was she who'd pressed the issue, rightly feeling it would not be the same as with Jaime. It wasn't.

But even nice boys, at the age of fourteen, have a tendency to let their concentration wander. Eugenio came to laugh with her as often as ever, but one day when Manhattan was possessed of a particularly clear blue sky, he tremblingly announced his intention to squire Teresa Calderon to a Friday night dance. Viva

punched him in the gut and stalked out of his life, vowing never to get hurt again.

Her alertness returned, luxuriant in its smugness, and full adolescence bred it into cynicism. Love was all hype: loony tunes of moon, June and spoon. What boys her age tried to palm off as love was an insult.

She began to look for a way out. Half a block away, it was walking the streets: prostitution, in flashy colors and diamond rings, in the company of tailored dudes. An insult's easier to take if you're getting paid for it, and money, *so they say*, can put you places where there are no insults.

She joined in at the age of seventeen, and her rise was rapid. She kept her now-regal body in perfect shape, stayed clear of drugs and booze, and hooked up with Ferdinando (el Toro), who had the unusual idea of keeping his stable well fed. He said he figured that whores who avoided that desperate look of necessity pleased their tricks more, and pleased tricks came back. The pimp obviously had his eyes on a level of business a few rungs up from street-walking; before long, Viva could halve her number of customers and triple her price. Ferdinando quadrupled his cut, *but that was only right*.

She was well on her way toward being the bellhop's best friend at five or six midtown hotels when a junkie leapt out at her one winter's morn. His hand was full of broken bottle. His eyes were full of ice. She put her stiletto heel in his crotch. He fell down. Yet where he was, a pain came and went like a rush. He was up after her before she could run twenty feet, brandishing his bottle like an Indian club, and gibbering something loud. His first lunge traced a scarlet trail down her arm; the second ended abruptly as a bullet brought him down.

She whirled, to find a grim-faced black in a Squaw Valley parka crouching warily in an alley she'd just passed. It took the man another ten seconds to satisfy himself there was no second mugger before walking stiffly over to where Viva was shivering with more than cold. As he holstered his revolver, he flipped his wallet open toward her. Her sight of the badge within and his words "Off-duty policeman, ma'am" were simultaneous . . . and a split-second ahead of a second shot, which caught her Samaritan and threw him into the slush.

Viva took one horrified look at the uniformed cop slogging his way to her aid, his service revolver still smoking and his service face a mass of smiles from the speed in which he'd downed her "assailant," and she knew she had to get free of New York.

She chose San Francisco for its reputations as a sin city and a

sane city. To be sure, there seemed to be more individual nuts roaming the hills out there with their bizarre religious and sacrificial knives, but the frenzy was in their minds, not the air. San Francisco was painted and cared for, the streets were clean, and the prostitution at her level was langorously posh. Ferdinando had put her in touch with his contacts, and she had it made. Her beauty, poise, and delivery quickly turned her into one of the town's favorites. Her star rose ever faster, and within a year—last year—she was taking on tricks like Carl D'Amato with mind-numbing regularity.

That was her whole problem, Viva thought, slipping down from her daydream a moment to look around. Something had been nagging at her attention for some seconds, but now she wasn't clear as to what. The mammoth cabin was full of early-risers dozing on the way to Rio. The ocean was a crystal blue and far below. The stewardesses were still preparing breakfast trays. Everything was efficiently dull. Mind-numbing. She fell back into her funk.

Yes, her whole problem was that San Francisco *was* mind-numbing. As the upper-crust capital of a state devoted to sunshine and the pursuit of pleasure, everything took place in —or as if in—a drug haze. Do-your-own-thing was the standing order there, which tended to breed a particularly relentless form of plasticity amongst the populace. San Franciscans were continually running their acts on each other. It was no problem at all to have a thousand acquaintances with whom to party, but if Viva ever found herself in need of one real friend . . . well, last night had just brought home what happened then. Like everyone else, she could lose her sorrows in unlimited quantities of every variety of the best drugs around, and she had finally turned to them—but even that had to pale after a while, leaving her right back where she started, numb of mind and increasingly numb of spirit.

So it was that she'd come to lie in Carl D'Amato's rented bed, wondering why she bothered. It had been the end of her string.

And now . . . now what? A frantic flight under an assumed name to South America. A beginning again when all she had left was an ending. Oh God, if only—

Something derailed her train of thought once more. For one pulsebeat, she still couldn't quite pin it down—then, with a lurch, she registered a pain in her back. It was so dull a pain as to be almost unrecognizable as such—but not quite. Viva leapt from her seat, barking her shins on a passing breakfast cart.

Cokes and coffee splattered her stomach as she spun to behold a heart-stopping tableau. Though it vanished in the blink of an eye, a long, sharpened wire had been protruding from her seat back. She clapped a hand behind her and it came back covered in blood.

"Those bastards!" They'd followed her, even here! The shock of it kept her from wasting time on fear. Fear no longer looked very large in her life. Fear slowed her, held her back, and there was *no* holding her back as she stiff-armed the stewardess and lunged for the seat behind hers. A modishly-dressed Black man was fumbling his lethal wire into his attaché case, while his neighbors still firmly drowsed. There had been no real disturbance yet.

Then, Viva flew at his face.

He was quicker. He snatched a small gun from the case. Viva kicked it away, shredding her gown from hem to hip. The pistol arced, landed, and skidded several feet before coming to rest near a Chinese child.

Other passengers cried out, craned, and cowered as they scrambled in the narrow aisle. Despite a backhanded blow that left her ears ringing, Viva got a hold on the gun just as her opponent did. Each refused to let go. Viva was determined not to die after all she'd been through. The memory of her leap from the fourteenth floor came surging within her; already it had assumed the status of a dream, something men did in movies and nowhere else. Yet she had done it, and survived it, and she owed it to that dream to beat this killer. Her two brown hands strutted against his stronger black ones; the gun wavered in the width between them; and suddenly, with a near deafening roar, it went off.

There was a sound of shattering plastic, followed immediately by a tremendous boom and a force that sucked them from the floor. The aircraft tilted madly, and before the depressurized plane pointed its nose at the sea and dived, Viva had time to see they'd shot a window. She heard the high-pitched scream of the motors, the searing breath in her own rasping lungs, and then no more. No more.

Thus, she was afraid to open her eyes.

The last feeling she could recall was having no fear at all, but she hadn't been burdened then with suspicions that she was already dead.

There was light beyond her closed eyelids, a soft, pale light

that appeared to have no particular source. It could not be the airplane's; there was no sensation of movement now, either falling or floating on waves. That left being under the waves, and that left being dead.

There was sound: a steady hum pitched just above inside audibility. It, too, was unlike anything she'd known before.

She tried to check her fears against her body, hoping she'd feel some ache or pain. God knew she'd had plenty of them before the crash, what with her blistered hands, thighs, and ankles, her punctured back, and her all-over bruises. But she felt nothing . . . at all.

"Do not distress yourself, Viva."

Had she been able, she'd have jumped a foot at that most unexpected voice, breaking without warning into her frantic introspection. Under other circumstances, she might have called it horrifying, for it was nothing so much as a guttural whisper. Right now, though, it could have been an angel.

The knowledge that she was not alone dissolved the doubts about her death. Relieved of those fears, she tried to open her eyes and see who was there with her . . . but her eyelids wouldn't move. She tried to twist her head and got a similar response. The word "paralysis" skittered through her thoughts like a slavering spider, and she couldn't even shudder. Despite raging commands from the dark of her mind, she continued to lay as silent as midnight snow.

The speaker must have noticed her efforts, however, for in the next instant her eyes were opened for her. First one lid was pulled back, blinding her momentarily as her irises responded only sluggishly. Then the other lid. Vaguely, Viva made out strong, blunt, golden-hued fingers doing the work. Her gaze focused beyond the fingers, on the hand, then the arm. She followed that arm upward, past truly massive golden biceps, to heavily-corded shoulders, to—

To a shrunken, shriveled face of foul, gray flesh, inset deep with eyes that burned like the sulphur pits of hell!

She knew she was dead.

But being unable to turn her head, she was forced to watch this demon as it ran its golden hands along her, apparently in examination and despite the passage of considerable time, the sight did not change or go away. From the neck down, the thing was the finest example of masculinity she'd ever seen, which was saying a lot. But from the neck up, it could have been the Phantom of the Opera. There was a clear line of division between neck and torso, and all along it, spaced about an inch

apart, gleaming metallic clamps held the two parts together.

Other items impinged themselves on her fixed gaze as well. Above the creature was a ceiling that appeared to be fashioned from ivory. The light she had seen through her lids had its source there, as a constant diffused glow. Part of one wall also lay within her field of vision; it shed the same creamy phosphorescence and was covered with a carefully constructed layout of wires and tubes, open-ended and waiting for connections.

Judging from the angle at which she was viewing all this, she decided she had to be lying flat on her back. The way her host moved in and out of her sight as he made his examination reinforced that idea.

At length, he came to loom directly over her face, looking down with his hideous eyes. Viva's eyes had begun to smart from lack of lubrication, so he closed them again for a moment. When she was comfortable, he opened them once more, and spoke.

"My name is Hugo St. Ives, M.D., Ph.D.," he hissed. "My visage notwithstanding, I am not dead, and neither are you."

The lips which issued his voice were as shrunken and stiff as the rest of his face. They did not appear to be in frequent use.

"Sixteen years ago," he whispered, while his sulphurous eyes blazed above, "I was the greatest physician on two continents. For that reason, I could not disbelieve my diagnosis of a malignant, inoperable tumor in my left lung. My medical science told me my body had five years of life left to it. Through my singular skill and determination I stretched that to seven.

"As a medical man, I had long been familiar with the functions of the human body and their eventual cessation. Not unlike most medical men, I had chosen my profession out of an abiding fear of that cessation. I had hoped to discover some method of achieving immortality, but I failed.

"It was the definite time limit placed upon me that drove me to my *new* research . . . in areas outside of medicine!"

The eyes were brighter now, still locked upon her and yet looking inward, too. He began to pace back and forth, in and out of Viva's field of vision.

"The first of these areas was the study of androids. To the general world of science, bodies constructed synthetically to operate much like human are nearly within the range of probability. That is because the fools who inhabit that world know nothing of the breakthroughs I achieved. It took me six years of continual labor and research into extra-medical fields

to complete the form you see before you."

St. Ives was gesturing now, making wide, sweeping motions with his hands. Each time he moved, the diffused light limned his muscles with silver highlights. Viva felt a rhythmic pulsing begin in her neck. The drug was wearing off.

"You would probably understand nothing of shunned, forgotten science," the gray mouth muttered, "so I shall gloss over the intricacies of my work and present the merest details. Basically, you see, an abiding theme among those who have written and worked in the field is that our everyday world of three dimensions is but the most easily perceived fraction of a multi-dimensional reality. The body is a simplistic illusion which appears solid and complete to our tri-dimensional senses. But the true being—the soul, if you will—actually has the form of a luminous egg, extending from the brain at the top to the solar plexus at the bottom. These eggs, to those who can see them—and there are those among us, myself included, who have trained themselves to do so—are composed of continuously shifting filaments of light."

The "perfect" hand made an impatient gesture.

"In other words, the real Hugo St. Ives exists as 'invisible' energy occupying the same space as my torso. What you see as arms and legs are merely tri-dimensional representations of the powers of locomotion and grasping inherent in all of us. However, the truly important parts of my tri-dimensional *corpus* are the nerve centers corresponding to the parameters of the egg: the brain, the spine, and the solar plexus. In other words," he hissed, turning away from her for the first time, "this!"

Viva's neck spasmed, banging her head against whatever it was she lay upon; it was the only reaction she could make in her horror. There, extending from the withered, sere flesh at the back of the head, was a similarly mummified backbone, jutting obscenely over the nape of the neck and running down the outside of the golden body to a point of re-entry just above the pelvis. It, too, was held in place by tiny clamps.

"The flesh in which my brain and solar plexus are encased has suffered in appearance in the nine years since a trusted colleague—now deceased—cut it away from my dying body," St. Ives murmured with a distinct trace of mirth. He held his pose a moment longer, then turned and strutted back to her side. Viva relaxed what little mastery she'd regained over her muscles, slumping back on her platform.

"Still, despite that small failure," he continued, "my thoughts, my voluntary and involuntary actions—my complete

personality—all continue to exist! Only my body is gone, returned to the dust from whence it sprang! *I live!*"

The utter incredibility of the words she was hearing threatened to drive Viva to the brink of madness—and beyond! If her world had been turned upside down by the events of the previous night, now it was turned inside out. She found herself thinking that Black mob assassins were *preferable* to this ghastly ghoul, and she had to hold herself firmly in check to keep hysteria at bay. Christ, she was nothing but a simple whore! Fleeing the underworld had seemed the height of peril, but at least it was something she could understand, something she might well expect in her line of work. Meeting St. Ives was like finding an eel in her bath water.

If only she could talk to him, ask him how she had come to be there! Her life on the fringes of society had made her an onlooker, a woman of the night rather than a woman of words, but she'd talk now, by God. She'd find some way to salvage herself from this incredible nightmare!

Straining desperately, she tried to force her body to equal her will—and succeeded only in twitching her hands and feet. No sound escaped her frozen larynx. And St. Ives was droning on.

"When your airliner struck the seas just off the southern shore of this island, I admit I was prepared to allow it to sink without a trace. The normal denizens of humanity have little appeal for me now, and I must maintain my incognito at all costs. But a portion of appeal does remain, for I am, in the end, the occupant of a *male* body."

"Oh Jesus!" she thought.

"For nearly sixteen years, I have lived here on my private island, alone but for my work. In those years, particularly the past nine, I have been free of the thousand daily annoyances involved in maintaining a flesh-and-blood body. I have created a monument to my technology. Where once stood nothing but a Central American rain forest, I have built a palace! Here is the ultimate in scientific comfort, equipped with devices the human world will not discover for decades, if ever! And outside lies a verdant paradise! I have made myself a king!"

"And all you need now is a queen," groaned Viva inwardly.

"And all I need now is you," hissed St. Ives. "I had hoped for a harem when I swam out to explore your sinking craft, risking the sunlight which so easily scorches my synthetic flesh—but you were the only female left alive. I found seven men, as luck would have it. I snapped each of their spines, though not before ascertaining your name from the Negro. He thought telling me

would save his life."

Viva continued to strain, and was rewarded by sudden rushes of feeling in her legs and back. She was getting there! If only her captor would keep talking—!

"Now, before your anesthetic wears off, my dear, I shall have to carry you to your quarters. You will find them laid out in a style somewhat more advanced than what you are used to, but they are certainly not lacking in comfort and convenience.

"I believe that I shall require intercourse with you every second day at first, since I am somewhat out of practice and," glancing downward, "condition. But I am certain our times together will increase.

"In fact, I see no reason not to begin now since you are still unable to resist."

With that, he strode to the far end of her table, set one knee upon it, and crawled up. Awkwardly, because of the limited space left unoccupied by her form, he lumbered forward and knelt above her hips, gazing down with warm anticipation smeared all across his wrinkled face. He reached out abruptly, and planted one blunt, golden finger on her left breast. It was then, for the second time in many days, that she recognized she was nude.

She knew, because she felt his clammy touch!

She! Could! Feel!

The knowledge of sensations—the sensations themselves—exploded like an atom bomb behind her eyes! She could feel, and that meant, by God, *she could move*! As if in slow motion, she watched her right leg come up off the table and impact with Hugo St. Ives' golden torso. All she felt was pins and needles, but his lips flashed purple and spewed his breath like invisible vomit. He clutched at himself, lost his balance, and fell face-first on the floor.

"Unable to resist?" she mumbled, pushing herself unsteadily after him. "I've been unable to resist for a long time now! I've been balled and shot at and hunted and hounded and—and—." She stopped, at a loss for words. "But I'm through with that now! Through! I don't know why fate's dealin' me this rotten hand, but I'm playin' it on my own from here on out!"

Her outburst used up all her remaining strength, so she had to grab the table for support. The effect was that of a purgative. She glared, gasping, at her tormentor's writhing form. Then she felt a new, clean warmth come flooding through her, replacing the cold that had clung there so long. Crouching naked and alone in that unknown hall, she knew herself reborn! With a

breathless cry of pure animal joy, she turned and tottered from Hugo St. Ives.

There was a door across the chamber, opening onto a long tan corridor that stretched off into darkness. As she stumbled toward it, an alarm began to clang, but her clumsy feet never faltered, and she hurtled through the portal. She was rapidly regaining coordination as the drug continued to wane. Half-imagined iron spikes and flashing lasers failed to materialize; only the bell dogged her trail as she ran.

Far down the murky hall loomed another door. It seemed to float toward her, as if seen through a telephoto lens. All around her hovered the hallmarks of St. Ives' handiwork. The walls were masses of wires and tubes. The floor and ceiling were soundproof cork. There was more technology here than she'd seen in all the rest of her days—but not a single thing that breathed. Her captor had built his castle as he'd built himself: cool, precise, and inhuman.

Then she was there, at the door, throwing it wide open. Sunlight burst upon her, its brilliance beyond belief and it hugged her like a long lost friend. She stood on the threshold, dazed and gazing at a torrid tropical paradise, torn *in toto* from a travel brochure and steeped in a shimmering haze. Exhilerated, she entered it.

"I can go no farther, Viva," rasped a voice from behind. She started, spun, and spied St. Ives standing just beyond the long oblong of light streaming in through the door. "I have told you of the injurious effect the sun has upon myself, so I shall not pursue you now." He spoke calmly, as though nothing had happened. Viva realized with a sudden chill that he must have run quite quickly to catch up to her—and that he had done it with almost silent speed.

"Upon the setting of the sun, in less than ten hours," St Ives continued, "I shall venture forth to seek you out. You will not escape me, for the island is hardly fifteen kilometers at its widest point, and I shall come equipped with several detection devices at my disposal.

"I can see that it would do no good to ask you to remain. You must make your attempt at thwarting me. But," the fire in his eyes abruptly faltered, "when I take you once more in tow, I shall devote all my energies to making you wish you had never been born!"

He turned, and padded back into his realm. His final words seemed to echo and grow in the half-lit hall. "Enjoy your day," he shouted. "Enjoy your day!"

At first she just ran, intent upon putting as much distance between herself and St. Ives as time would permit. She had no other plan. There was an urgency within her now, a certainty that she had used up all her other chances in getting this far. This was it, the day she lived or died—she would never re-enter that castle breathing. No scheme for survival would come. All she could do was run.

Yet when she topped a rise and stepped calf-deep into a field of infinite flowers, she immediately stopped. The tiny blossoms continued her motion in a billowing wave, till they reached a slope a thousand feet ahead and disappeared beyond it. Transfixed, she looked both right and left, and saw more flowers bobbing a greeting. It was the most beautiful sight she had ever seen.

But it was crazy. How could all this beauty exist on the same island as St. Ives' evil? For that matter, how could it exist on the same planet? The flowers fluttered in the salt-tinged breeze and said nothing . . . but Viva was beginning to find her own ideas. For the moment, she had forgotten all about further flight. Something was stirring in her eager mind.

The thing was . . . the thing was, these flowers had no trace of evil in them. That was mankind's distinction. The flowers simply grew, taking what they needed from nature, giving it all back when they were finished. They opened themselves to the world, trusting the world to work. Whenever the world didn't work, it was always mankind's fault. Viva had heard about pollution and changes in the weather, and even the vanishing ozone layer in the air. Flowers were innocent. Flowers were children.

A picture arose in her thoughts: herself in the flowered field. But she saw it as if from a distance, and the distance was growing greater all the time. She was only a speck, minute against the field . . . and then against the entire valley . . . and then the island . . . and then the ocean. She became invisible to her mind's eye, and the sun and the winds and the water and earth were all there was.

It was another world, a world she'd known nothing about . . . and it was all around her. All Viva had understood of life was cities: when she found New York too oppressive, she fled to San Francisco. When that got too hot, she took off for Rio. There'd been no thought of heading for the country: there was no work for her there. She'd ignored everything beyond her business—but there had been, and *still was*, a world left to discover!

With a toss of her long, black mane she brought herself back to the here and now. She could not accept that her life was done. Before, she had refused to die because she had invested too much. Now, she realized she had hardly invested enough.

She began to jog again, the flowers foaming around her legs, and there was purpose in her pace, and grace. She had always heard that women were more sensibly designed for locomotion; for the first time ever, it meant something to her. Running barefoot through a field of flowers made running fun, not something done in shoes on streets to satisfy a gym teacher. As a living, breathing creature, she was built of bone and sinew, meat and muscle, and it all worked in concert as her legs churned side by side. "Tri-dimensional representations of the powers in my soul, my ass!" She knew better. She—

—tripped headlong over a hidden root, dumping her heavily amongst the blooms. Lightning ratcheted through her toes. Dirt and leaves glued themselves to her face as she fell. Her instinctive cry of pain nearly choked her. She lay in a heap, coughing through clenched teeth, for the full count. Then, viciously, Viva rolled to her hip, hunched over her throbbing foot, and inspected the damage.

It was considerable. The nail on her big toe was hanging free, with blood oozing thickly from a jagged gash. She stared transfixed, trembling with the pain . . . but then, from way down deep inside herself, possibly even from her swollen toes, a raucous laugh came burbling up like water from a fountain. For a second, she feared it was hysterics; then she was rolling too helplessly on the ground to care. This damn crazy body—! God, so she was human, after all!

Weak and gasping from her outburst, Viva lay quietly for a long, long time, listening to the wind blow loosely through the palms. Birds were twittering off to her left, but she found herself drifting back over and over to that gentle, endless sigh. Yes, and beyond that, dimly, to the quiet crash of the ocean not so very far away. She no longer felt the need to run from anything. Despite all that had happened, she was at peace.

Thinking back—back all the way to Carl D'Amato—she had to marvel at the way everything had flowed to this point. Until room 1404, she'd been another person. That person's life had been empty, her mind dull and despondent, her body ruled only by reflex. That person knew no pleasure. She had let herself be used. Used by others, used by herself, used by drugs that rotted her mind from the inside out. But then she'd begun to *fight* for her life—at first instinctively, then thoughtfully, then right-

eously, and now even spiritually—but always correctly! She had made the right choice every time. No matter how bizarre the traps, she had refused to relinquish her will to live.

It had made her a new person.

For a new world.

The golden body glinted bone-white against the rustling shadows as Hugo St. Ives stepped into the clearing. The tropical moon rode high above, but he made no effort to mask his presence, and the ground crunched noisily under his feet. In one clenched fist he held a small, oblong box, dully studded with solder from point to point on its underside. Its top consisted of a luminescent green screen. As he turned the box this way and that, the screen flickered with greater or lesser intensity; usually, it was the former. St. Ives followed the path of the greatest green.

"You appear to have wasted your time, my dear." His voice was just knife-edged enough to penetrate the quickening breeze. "The heat-seeker brings me in almost a straight line from the door of my castle. I would have thought you'd twist and dart like a rabbit, but now, Viva, you won't even have a decent tour of the island before I drag you back inside!"

Suddenly St. Ives stopped. His body resembled marble in moonlight. Then he spoke and the marble turned to ash. A hissing boast shattered the illusion. "This trap is just another waste of time, Viva." He gurgled with what might have passed for whispered laughter. "My device is exceptionally sensitive to the slightest abnormality in heat patterns. Both the upturned earth and the kinetic traces of your movement within this circle of trees has caused the seeker to light up unmistakably. You'll have to do better than that!"

There was no answer from the surrounding dark, but he didn't expect one. Viva could be credited with that much cunning. Besides, he didn't really want her to give herself away; it was much better to run her down scientifically. He skirted the deadfall with leonine precision and picked his path through the upthrust palms.

In time, he came to the edge of the jungle, where he stepped out on a tall and rocky cliff overlooking the matte black sea. The breeze was stronger here, sweeping any heat back towards the trees. His device went useless, and goose-flesh sprang up upon him. "A perfect body," he breathed, admiring his nubbled arms. "It possesses every human property—and one thing

more." With a conscious mental command, he aborted the feeling of chill and made his nude form comfortable again. Then, with sly relish, he unstrapped a second machine from a plastic pad on his hip and tied the heat-seeker in its place.

"This one measures scents," he lectured his unseen quarry. "Your particular perspiration, enzymes, and bacteria were impressed upon it back in the laboratory. The wind won't leach all of your spoor from the ground you trod." As he spoke, a sudden scuffling in the undergrowth to his right sent him spinning in that direction, ready for whatever came his way—it was only a rat, but it gave Viva the opening she'd been waiting for! In one surging rush, she came over the edge of the cliff where she'd been hiding on a ledge and stiff-armed him, hard. As he stumbled to his knees, she followed through with a double-handed smash to the back of his skull. He fell to his side, but it was only in order to kick a leg free and hook her feet from under her. She crashed to the dirt, dangerously close to the cliff's rim. St. Ives seemed unaffected by her attack; he was upon her in an instant. He stabbed a massive arm out, pinned her left wrist, and threw his legs across her knees to hold her squirming in one place. His free hand gripped her jaw, the golden fingers digging deep into the flesh, and he twisted her face toward his. St. Ives opened his mouth to sneer his victory—

—but then her free hand groped its way round his rock-hard waist, seized upon his withered backbone, and *ripped it bodily from its clamps!*

St. Ives arced orgasmically, screaming! She couldn't remember exactly what he said about the nerve centers in his spine—didn't want to remember what he'd said about the luminous egg they marked—but the effect was all she could have wanted. His hands lost their tight grip on her body, and his legs began to spasm. With a rising wail, he pushed himself upright, but he reeled from side to side, threatening to fall again at any time. He pawed at his back, trying to undo the damage she had wrought. He could not. His arms wouldn't obey him; they fumbled and fluttered several inches from their target. Then, he collapsed—over the cliff.

For a heady moment, she thought it was all over. The wind in the palms rattled their leaves in random applause. The moon was a silver spotlight. But then she heard a rasping, whispery curse, and spied ten golden fingers firmly gripping the cliff's rocky edge.

Shit!

Viva's hair streamed out from behind her like a mane as she cautiously crawled toward the drop-off. She peered over, and there he was, hanging high above the pawing surf in all his golden glory. As her eyes adjusted to the spattered moonlight on the sea, she realized he wasn't quite as glorious as before. His massive legs dangled uselessly below a twisted waist, swinging slowly in the wind.

But the top third of his spine was still clamped to his back, still guiding his steely arms and fingers. That was all that held Hugo St. Ives from a long death-drop—that, and the iron will still raging in his aged skull.

"I am . . . uncoupled, Viva!" The rising wind tried to take his words away with it, but she could have heard him on the moon. "The lower half of my body is beyond my control! But with whatever strength yet remains to me—with whatever spirit I can still call my own—I shall have my revenge!"

The force of his will was hypnotic. Viva could only stare in mute wonder as, with a straining lunge, St. Ives chinned himself on the cliff's edge. He hesitated momentarily, then lurched upward once more, hauling his rippling shoulders and chest above the brink. His ghastly face grimaced with the effort, but he was going to do it! He was pulling himself out of the abyss like a demon taking leave of hell—only Viva's hell would be on Earth if he succeeded.

With an angry shudder, Viva yanked herself from mesmerism and leapt to her feet. Her features were as contorted as her tormentor's, and her breath came in ragged gasps as she swayed over him. She brought her right foot up, poised it over his left hand. "Survival of the fittest!" she hissed.

But suddenly, she saw herself again as a speck—yes, and him, too—outlined against the night on a tiny island on a wide and wine-dark sea. She heard again the pulse of the palms. She smelled the salt and felt her foot aching with the eagerness to break that man's fingers and she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt she couldn't do it.

As if in response, the rest of his spine started to rip free.

The weight of the golden body had finally been too much for the remaining clamps. With the cruel cadence of dominoes toppling, life fled St. Ives' limbs. His suddenly leaden arms dropped him face-first in the dirt, and he began sliding back to whence he'd come.

"NO!" It was Viva, dropping frantically to her knees. She clutched, she grabbed, and nearly lost her balance but she kept

herself from falling, God knew how. Far below her, she saw that "perfect" *corpus* plunging toward the waves . . .

. . . but in her right hand, she still held its head and spine!

Alive!

She stared incredulously into those burning eyes. Started to say something. Couldn't complete her thought. She didn't know why she'd acted as she had—didn't know what in the world she'd do now.

All she knew was it had something to do with life.

Any life.

All life.

Viva!

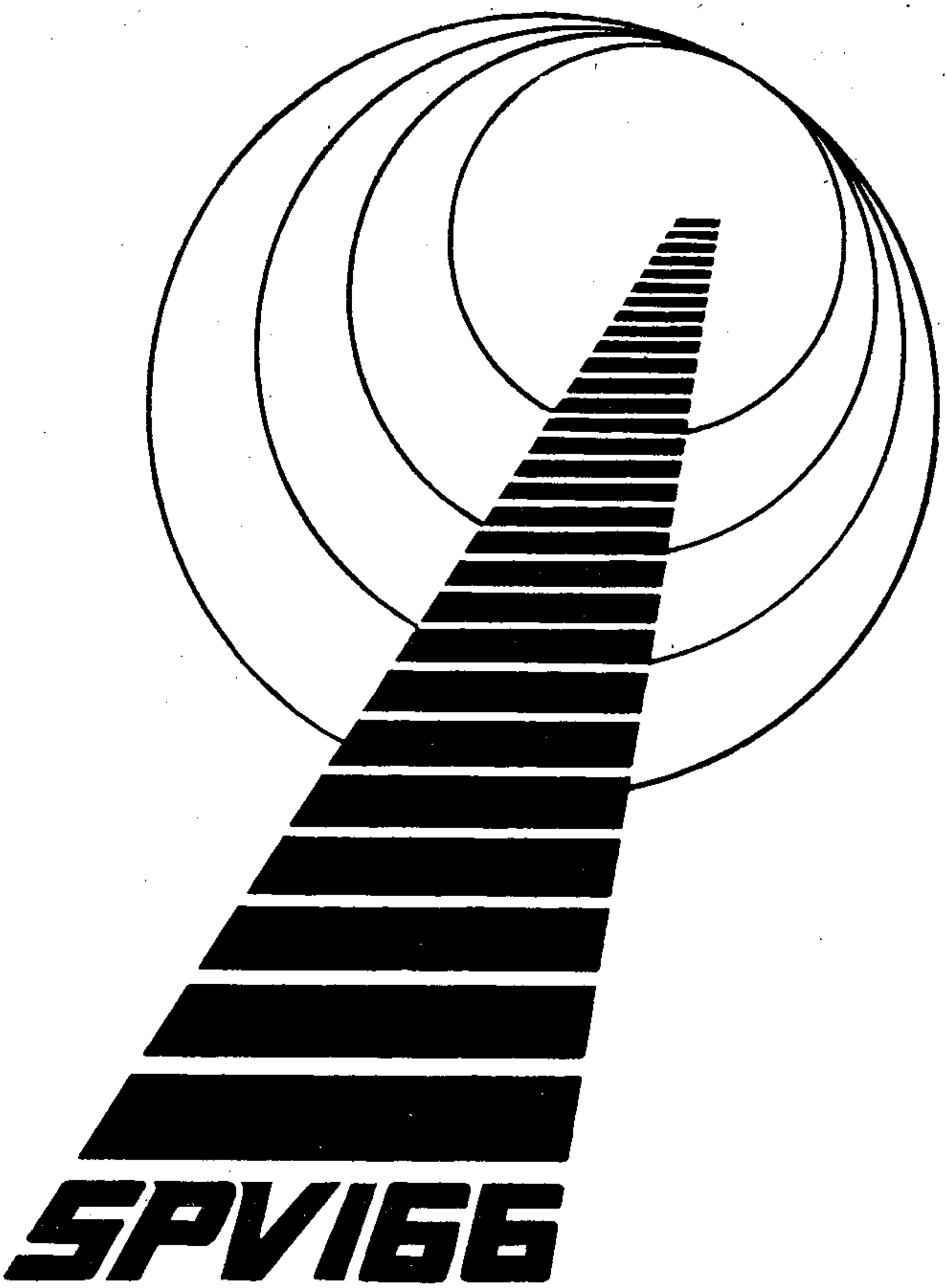
Afterword

The thing is, to comic book readers I'm a star. See, three years ago, I began scripting for the Marvel Comics Group, but I just couldn't bring myself to do traditional material. I mean, entertaining eight-year-olds is too darn easy; I'd get awfully bored awfully fast if my favorite phrase were "Zap! Bap! Pow!" So, against all advice, I wrote comics for adults.

Fortunately, there were people around who wanted to mix a little literary liberation with their heroic fantasy, and my versions of Captain America, Dr. Strange, Captain Marvel, and half a dozen other characters garnered an enthusiastic response. In no time at all, other writers were working the same territory, and I was an acknowledged *artiste*. It was fantastic . . . til I figured out that all the comic readers in the world make up maybe one-half of one percent of the total population . . . and the other ninety-nine and one-half percent rate all the four-color funnies somewhere below Dick, Jane, and Spot. After that, my head warped back down to size, and I went on about my business like any other non-entity.

But that brings me to Viva. In case you haven't guessed, Byron Preiss appreciates comics, and that's why he wanted me to have a hand in his "heroes of the Seventies" scheme. I remember him looking me right in the eye and saying, "There's one that's right up your alley, Steve. It's a hooker turned jungle queen." (*False*—Editor) The rest of that conversation is kind of hazy. But you see, comics—at least, the best ones—are just like that: straight-facedly serious and off-the-walledly outrageous at the same time. No matter how somber a saga sounds, there's always an amiable awareness of its actual absurdity, and it's that ambivalence which attracts me as an author. Comics allow—nay, encourage—you to have fun with everything from the plots to the palaver. Alliteration, apparently, is a part of *my* particular product, as are patter, poetry, and puns.

Which brings me, once again, to her of the exclamatory name. She's not part of a comic book, but, to my mind, she's a comic heroine right up there with the best of 'em, and I pulled out all the stops for her. I had a lot of fun, and I hope you can say the same.



TM

SPV 166:
The Underground Express!
by Elliot S. Maggin
Illustrated by Ralph Reese and Paul Kirchner

THE PREMISE: Three female ex-convicts, working out of a reconditioned subway car in the labyrinth known as the New York City Rapid Transit System.
THE RESULT: Craziness!
THE REASON: Elliot S. Maggin

I didn't know what would happen when I mixed one part of Maggin with one premise for a detective series, but I didn't quite expect the plethora of incredible events and unusual characters that stream from this decidely *gonzo* affair. No matter, it's all in fun, with some social consciousness/relevance coming along for the show. For once in this book, New York City gets a much-needed upbeat treatment. Maggin's site section adds to the fun and N.Y.C.-ites should readily identify the backdrops for much of the action.

For those unacquainted with the literary Maggin, he is a regular scripter for Julius Schwartz' *Superman*, and an infrequent witness to the adventures of Green Arrow, the Justice League of America, Batman, and Wonder Woman. He is a graduate of the Columbia School of Journalism and is currently completing a novel for which one New York agent already has bestselling designs.

The visual material that accompanies SPV 166 is more elaborate and considerably varied from that of the other stories in this book. When SPV 166 was conceived, I asked for a different illustrated format. Not a prose story with simple full-page illustrations, nor a comic book-style story with pictures and balloons, nor a Gil Kane-type story with pictures and typeset captions. I wanted something different, and Elliot, Ralph Reese, and Paul Kirchner delivered.

Ralph Reese delivered in his characteristically polished manner. He is among the most applauded and technically proficient artists whose work evolved from an early apprenticeship with famed EC illustrator Wally Wood.

Ralph's forte is detail, humorous and dramatic, and I can safely say that there are few, if any, people in the graphic story field whose work surpasses Ralph's in realistically depicting aspects of city life. This is readily evidenced by his work for *National Lampoon*, and for the graphic trilogy that includes

"Rats" and "Roaches".

Ralph often works by inking the pencil drawings of other talented illustrators. With SPV 166, Ralph has teamed up with Paul Kirchner, a talented artist whose work has appeared with Ralph's in *The Electric Company Magazine,* Atlas Comics, Marvel Comics, and *National Lampoon* Apple Pie.

In addition to Ralph's and Paul's work, Elliot Maggin added to the graphic dimension of the story with his unusual storytelling style. Rather than do a capsule summary, I'll share with you the Maggin explanation of *gonzo storytelling.*

"It's a short story told to the reader not in narrative prose, or poetry, or other conventional means—but told as the writer himself sees it. The idea is for the reader to live the story, as certainly as I did. It's journalism—only fictional.

"The term *gonzo* is not a new one. The outstanding *Rolling Stone* political reporter, Hunter Thompson, uses it to describe his own brand of new journalism. Pure gonzo journalists don't pay much attention to their writing style—and just as well, considering the conception most of the working press have of the English language—but they spend time almost up to the deadline reporting, interviewing, researching—and then they foist on the public what is essentially their transcribed notes.

"For example, 'Think Rocky was lying. Bit his lip when he thought I wasn't looking,' or, 'Defense attorney found each juror's weakness and played it like a violin.' Or something like that.

"The readers wouldn't be interested in my notes. What notes I have are numbered events. The rest of what I lived when I met Joann, Thea, and Liz and followed them around, tugging at their minds, prodding them to talk just a bit more cleverly than they probably would have had I not been with them. They poured the few days of this story into my experience. And I only perfunctorily smoothed the edges to empty it into the minds of those who read my words.

"I did what I could to make this thing real life. I left pinholes in my explanations that I certainly would have filled in more formal prose. I put events in order of occurrence without flashbacks—interrupting trains of thought to point out what was going on during the time a line was spoken, and then allowing the line to finish—paying lip service to imagery only in my descriptions of scenes and attitudes, so that the reader would experience an event as it happened, at the speed it happened, without interference. Most people think faster than they read.

"Know what I mean? It's not quite a screenplay, because it's meant to be read rather than seen. Storytelling, I think, is richer when it is done through the vehicle of the printed word—or the handwrought illustration—than when it is put into the spoon-feeding form of film anyway. But that's a longer essay. This could be a screenplay, but no more easily than it could be a novel or epic poem. It would have to be changed to any of those things from what it is now—a chunk of gonzo storytelling from the lives of three extraordinary young women and one wide-eyed, enchanted storyteller. I kinda like it that way. Hope you do too—"

Thomas Jefferson Would Throw Up All Over You

It's pitch black. In the distance, at the optical center of the scene, is a tiny white light. A young, immature female voice is saying at a steady volume, with mock drama . . .

voice-over

"Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves."

The tiny light approaches, and a rumble gradually gathers as it grows. It is the headlight of an old-style subway car which begins to drown out the steady voice-over . . .

"Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

The voice builds to a climax with that phrase, and with the last few words the subway car is virtually upon the viewer. The roar drowns the last few words as we cut to the interior of the car to pick up the speech uninterrupted. It is being delivered by **Thea Van Wyck**, whom we see in closeup. A smiling, bouncy, painfully cute little girl who looks at the world past the face of a twelve-year-old, with eyes that betray a foxiness that only comes with a bit more age.

Thea

"Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that 'Caesar'?
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?"

We begin to *zoom out* slowly, and we see that we are not inside the basic swing era subway car. Thea is gesticulating as she says her words, desperately trying to distract **Liz Engel**, who sits in the back of the car poring over *Have Space Suit, Will Travel* by Robert Heinlein, doing her best to ignore Thea. Liz is a big, broad-shouldered amazon type. Her accent and manner of speech are Early Modern Brooklyn, but she's the kind of girl who, if dressed for it, would not look out of place at a debutante ball. There are communications consoles, maps, sonic guns, and controls for all manner of weird systems, papering the walls around the subway car.

Thea

"Write them together, yours is as fair a name;
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;
Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with 'em,
'Brutus' will start a—"

Liz

You wanna stow that, Cassius?

Thea

" 'Liz Engel will start a spirit as soon as . . . 'Abe Beame.'
Now, in the names of all the gods at once . . ."

Thea grabs the air, relishing the phrase like a Nathan's hot dog.

Thea

". . . in the names of *all the gods at once*,
Upon what meat doth this our—"

Liz

Dammit all over your crotch, Thea!

REESE + KIRCHNER

Joann Lee sitting at a little table in the opposite end of the car, as the interchange between Thea and Liz continues uninterrupted. She looks up ruefully from scrawled notes in the direction of her two friends. Joann is small—though not as small as Thea—and Chinese. She has long straight black hair that swims from her head to just below her waist. Her movements are liquid, paying only lip service to gravity in deference to friends trapped by its force. Over Joann's table is a big elaborate electronic map of the New York subway system with illuminating routes. Lit up at the moment is a route from the Lower East Side of Manhattan to Flushing Meadow in Queens. A light on that route is flashing on the East River, indicating the group's current position.

Liz

This book's got me strung from Brooklyn to the next galaxy and you throw Caesar at me.

Thea

"By my heel I care not."

Liz

You can shove your heel before—

Cut to a red light in a panel of the wall near Joann flashing on and off along with a sharp beeping sound, then cut to: Liz looking down at Thea with a scowl

Thea

The Grand Poobah's voice! What will you have today, Poobs? Delicately hand-carved belt buckles for your uniformed hired assassins? More hemoglobin for your pet vampire bat?

Joann

That's no way to talk to the police commissioner.

Cut to Joann getting up to push a button near the flashing light to stop both light and beeper. She pulls down a sliding panel to reveal a television screen.

Joann

We're still not sure he isn't monitoring every word we say in here.

Thea

Listen, Joann—my electronic scramblers are like Raid for any bugs the old fart put in here.

Joann is turning on the monitor to show the face of an aging buffalo of a man. The police commissioner of New York City.

Thea

I didn't spend three years at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute just going to panty raids.

Liz

Not to mention the BVD-raids on the boys' dorms.

Cut to monitor with commissioner's face.

Commissioner

And what about those other schoolgirl pranks—like breaking into that professor's office to lift the plans for the solar energy supply system on Skylab?

We catch Thea, startled for the briefest instant, then breaking out into the cutest, most sincere little girlish smile ever observed this side of Andromeda.

Thea

That was part of my education, Commissioner. Just wanted to see if I could design a better one.

Long shot of the entire car. It's the old style of car with straw seats and revolving tavern-style ceiling fans, jammed with living facilities, electronic paraphernalia, and a little corner workshop. There are two hammocks strung between poles. The monitor showing the commissioner is toward the front, where the three girls are settling to listen to him. One wall is full of

tall, narrow books—art print books. There are other books there, too—including Liz' massive collection of yet-unread science fiction paperbacks and Thea's scientific reference matter.

Joann
Did you call so you could quote our dossiers to us or have you got something else in mind?

Commissioner
Actually I've got a job for you.

As he talks, the commissioner picks up a photo from his desk and holds it up to the monitor. It is a photo of the United States Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair.

Commissioner
I've had our Transit Authority operatives clear a route for you to Flushing Meadow Park—the site of the 1964 New York World's Fair.

Liz
Some park. Mostly junkies and rotting buildings.

Commissioner
It's one of the buildings we're interested in. This one—the old United States Pavilion—the site, over ten years ago, of one of the best covered-up crimes we've ever run against . . .

Cut to the faces of the three girls so that we can catch the surprise that registers on them as he says . . .

Commissioner
—the theft of the Declaration of Independence.

Cut to the single subway car barrelling loudly through the pitch black subway tunnel, away from viewer. As it goes we cut back inside.

Commissioner

The original document was brought to the Pavilion in 1964 on loan from the National Archives. On April 21 of that year, the eve of the fair's opening, the Secret Service advised us that the document was missing. They determined that the document must have been stolen between six and eight P.M. that day.

Strangely, none of the twenty-six guards recorded any comings or goings that day. No stray kids on bicycles. No odd sounds. No fair officials on spot checks. The only one in or out that day was the parks commissioner, Jerome Ezekiel.

Liz

Ezekiel. Wasn't he somehow messed up with the Serpico inquest?

Commissioner

Yes, and he walked away clean. At the time of the investigation, Ezekiel was in Europe on a top-level urban conference.

Thea

I know, he was talking about filling in the Versailles Palace lawn with cement, right?

Commissioner

Actually the conference was about tactics for reducing muggings in city parks based on strategies originally proposed by Frank Serpico.

Thea

No wonder he got off. Nobody else could describe what he was doing three times fast without tripping over his tongue.

Joann

Is there a theory as to the location of the document?

Commissioner

We're hoping you can help with that, Joann. The Declaration on display in Washington is made of air and glass with a laser beam shining through it.

Thea

A hologram.

Commissioner

Very similar to type you designed to camouflage Special Police Vehicle 166. When the beam is on, even somebody up close can't tell that the "parchment" underneath the glass is just an illusion.

Thea

But somebody's getting worried about that illusion.

Commissioner

"Somebody" has been worried about it for the past ten years. They haven't had much success.

Joann

Now with the Bicentennial on its way, the heat must be coming down to find it fast.

Commissioner

Exactly. I've gotten word to use the department's so-called "cross-socio-economic contacts" to entice whoever was involved with the Declaration robbery into telling what they know.

Thea

What's the bait?

Commissioner

A million federal government dollars.

Joann

But you don't want to spend it, do you?

Commissioner

Ahh, Joann, you know me like a book, don't you?

Thea

(an aside to Liz)

A historical novel, no doubt.

Commissioner

(smiling)

I heard that, Thea. It's no joke. I'd like to have that money around for one of our precincts in the Bronx.

Liz

What're they into?

Commissioner

Juvenile drug rehabilitation programs.

Joann

Sounds good. When could we get the money to play with?

Commissioner

Immediately. They're getting very nervous in Washington. It would be one grand fiasco for the President to announce that the Declaration was missing in the year of the Bicentennial.

Liz

You mean the White House doesn't know yet?

Commissioner

That's the whole package. The Secret Service has kept the lid on this thing for eleven years—even managed to handle the mess during Watergate. Now they want the real Declaration back before the TV cameras crowd in for the big event. The million comes in with no questions asked. All they want is the document back and no publicity.

Thea

Why us?

Joann

Because you don't have to worry about us talking to the *Daily News* behind your back?

Commissioner

Joann, you're such a bright little girl, how'd you ever wind up in jail?

Joann

You know better than I do.

Commissioner

Very funny. You're correct though, it's been insane around here since the Serpico thing. We could start a New York Police Book-of-the-Month Club. Seems like every other sergeant is writing his memoirs.

Liz

You're worried about an "I Found the Declaration of Independence."

Commissioner

I don't want to read about it in *The Times*.

Liz

All right, I'm in.

Thea

All right, me too—though I don't see why I should be upset about seeing the bonzos in the CIA and FBI getting chewed out by the President.

Commissioner

Consider it a *personal* favor.

Thea

You're a cutie.

Commissioner

That settles it. Thanks women. A dossier will be waiting for you at the Forest Hill Station.

Liz

We're on our way.

Dissolve to the face of a station attendant atop the cement at an old Queens el station. He greets Joann, Liz, and Thea as they carefully cross the third rail between the regular subway track and the spur where they've docked SPV 166.

Attendant

Greetings ladies.

Thea

How goes it, Sir Al?

The attendant chuckles; he holds out a folder.

Attendant

Patrolman Cooper said you ladies would be stopping by for this today.

Joann

Thanks, Mr. Jour. We'll be downstairs for about half an hour.

Attendant

The usual?

They pass him and head for the stairs.

Thea

What else?

(and then from below)

We'll bring you back a slice.

The scene is Mildred's Kosher Pizza Store—a perfumery of street food with a distinctly *Italian* aroma.

Thea

Three slices and three Cokes.

Mildred
Separate checks?

Thea
Everybody's a comedienne.

Joann
Come on over here, Thea! This material is fascinating!

Mildred, leaning over the counter towards Thea with three slices of pizza in her dough-whitened hands, sees Joann and Liz sharing interest in some papers scattered over the table top of one of the store's booths. Another customer notes the confusion and indulges her curiosity.

Customer
Are you girls schoolteachers?

Thea
No, ex-convicts.

Mildred drops one of her slices of pizza.

Thea
But we're harmless, really! Joann over there was a Red Chinese assassin. Liz was a bank robber. Me, I knocked off pizza shops.

Mildred continues to wipe the pizza off the counter, surprisingly calm in light of Thea's remarks.

Mildred
Who you kidding, young lady? All three of you work for the police department out of some cockamamie subway car parked upstairs.
(Smiling, she hands Thea a new slice of pizza)
So be a good girl and go over and help your friends with their problem.

Thea
(playing Jack Benny to an imaginary camera)

Who talked?

Camera directs its attention towards the seated girls. They are examining a summation by the commissioner.

Joann

So they think Jerome Ezekiel has something to do with it after all.

Liz

Sounds like a slimy character.

Joann

Listen to this—"Interpol says there's been activity in three countries to arrange for quick access to a quarter of a billion dollars in gold and silver. They say the involved parties are private citizens, some with links to organized crime, all with huge holdings in collectables such as paintings and first editions. Interpol's guess is that an auction is going to take place with the Declaration as the prize."

Thea

What's shaking, gang?

Liz

Look's like someone's planning an auction for the Declaration.

Thea

Here's your piz—

The cheese on the top slice nosedives onto the dossier as Joann unsuccessfully tries to pull the folder away with a scream.

Joann

Thea!

Thea

Whoops!

As they salvage the papers, Thea digs for a recap.

Liz

The best leads they have are to Ezekiel. Evidently he was making shady use of his connections while he was in office and afterwards. Nobody could pin anything on him, but there's a ton of circumstantial evidence.

Joann

If two of the inside guards were on his payroll, it's possible that they could have managed to lift the Declaration.

Liz

I thought you said everybody was searched on the way in and out?

Thea

They searched Jack Ruby, didn't they?

Joann

Let's say for the minute that Ezekiel did take the Declaration. What would he do with it? It would be hotter than the Hope diamond. He'd have to store it in a properly cooled atmosphere and wait until there was an opportunity to get rid of it.

Thea

That doesn't fit in with what we know about him. Ezekiel is a businessman. That's one reason why the secret auction makes sense. So is the fact that Ezekiel has filed for permission to sell the ice skating rink he owns in the old World's Fair New York State Pavilion.

Liz

I don't get it.

Joann

Ezekiel gets the Declaration, then needs a place to store it. He's worried about how far he can go with it in his possession, so he plans to unload it in a nearby place. The parchment

needs to be stored in a cool place and the ice skating rink in the New York City Pavilion is just the answer. As parks commissioner, it's under his jurisdiction. So he plants it there.

Thea

But you said he's about to sell the New York *State* Pavilion rink.

Joann

After the fair was over, Ezekiel got worried. He was going to leave office. What if they closed down the rink? What if it was found before he could maneuver? Don't forget, the man knows the FBI has been watching him since the day of the theft.

Thea

So what does he do?

Joann

Take a look at this document. Ezekiel arranges to legally buy the ground space of the New York State Pavilion shell. At his own expense, he builds a new skating rink. Then, perhaps using the gimmick he employed to get the Declaration out of the U.S. Pavilion, Ezekiel has it transferred to the new rink.

Thea

Amazing, Joann!

Liz

If that's the story, then what do you have in mind to get it back?

Joann

If the auction hasn't been held yet, then the Declaration may still be there.

Thea

So the question is how to get at the skating rink.

Joann

Ezekiel wants to sell it, so we buy it.

Liz

But Ezekiel won't let go of it before he gets the Declaration out!

Joann

I know, but he won't have any choice if the commissioner can get the city to push up the legal date-of-sale for the rink. Ezekiel's planning on selling it the middle of next month. If the department forces a sale this week, he'll have to scramble like crazy to arrange for an auction and the moving of the Declaration.

Thea

Sounds possible; when do we go see Ezekiel?

Joann

As soon as we finish telling the commissioner about the future of his money.

Dissolve to the girls heading back into SPV 166. Munching gratefully on a slice of pizza, Al heads over to a special casing which covers the spur control. He presses a button and the track holding the SPV moves into line. Al simultaneously eats and watches as the car begins its acceleration. Then his eyes quickly roll downward as he feels something scrape against his teeth. It feels like cardboard. It is cardboard. The scraping causes a chalk-on-the-blackboard type shiver to swim up Al's back. He takes out the paper and reads it.

"Loose lips sink ships! Kiss-kiss! Thea."

Al smiles and we hold on him as SPV fades in the background.

Dissolve to the special spur of the IRT line near Shea Stadium that is no longer in use. We *hear* the familiar slow clatter of a subway car chassis as SPV rolls into the platform area. Yet what we *see* is something far different from the specially equipped police vehicle. What we see is a noble, dark brown whale of a train, one of the atmospheric beauties that

have slowly been vanishing in administrative favor of sleek new semi-muted aluminum and plastic speedsters.

The door opens to reveal the girls—Joann first—stepping out onto the platform. Behind them is the elaborate equipment "absent" when viewed through the "windows" of the car. Thea's holograms at work.

Liz

Lotta up-front guys in the city government, man.

Joann

Depends on which city government you're talking about.

Thea

I think she's talking about the one that sent us to jail so it could bribe us with our freedom in return for putting our talents at its disposal.

Joann

It's better than taking the bus from 91st Street every morning to be some clown's exec-secretary.

Roll over the park as the girls talk. The early autumn air is a romantic influence. Leaves blow, trees bend in the wind. A couple strolls arm-in-arm. We move past the United States Pavilion, across partially tended lawn. Then under the Unisphere towards the twin towers of the New York State Pavilion. Blue and red checkerboards behind a gray pathway toward a geodesic greenhouse. Then the Space Park. Old Saturn rockets. Flushing Meadow Park, the ghost of two World's Fairs.

Joann

The government that sent me up was the one that gets its kickbacks from the public utilities. The guys that consciously let this recession happen.

Liz

You talk like there's more than one of

them. It's the same government that just forked up a million bucks to get a slice of rotting sheepskin back.

Thea

You two always have to blow my kicks by trying to figure what we're doing here. Enjoy it.

Liz

She says enjoy it. I don't see why we don't just take a vacation sometime.

Joann

For one thing, we're probably being watched by someone or other most of the time. For another, you know as well as I do that whether you live in a democracy, or a monarchy, or a fascist state, you're always into the government for something. You're always hurting somebody innocent. It simply seems obvious that we are hurting fewer people by taking special assignments for the police force than we would be if we were somewhere else.

Cut to the three girls perusing the area on the train platform.

Liz

I know. You told me before, girl, and it still don't quite wash in my head. If we wasn't here, they'd send out somebody on the take—or somebody who liked to shoot people and watch their blood run—or a few slobs who've just had police academy training to go on and who'd be in over their heads. But if what you really want is to be innocent, listen. We were never more innocent than when we were in jail.

Joann

I was in jail because I stepped on evil people's feet. I would have managed to do a lot more good if I'd said a little less in that

series I was doing in the *Village Voice* on the fuel shortage—and pulled on a few matters a little slower.

Liz

Oh, sure. For a cool bitch, you make yourself suffer a whole lot. The power company offered you some cushy public relations job when you got too close, and they threatened to make you name your sources in court if you didn't play their game. Then that very week the Supreme Court of the United States comes up with a ruling that says they can do exactly that. They're all together. All of them. And we ain't part of it. They can get you any time they want. Don't give me that jive, you closet idealist.

Joann, pensive and then inscrutable. A beat. Thea sits down on the open doorway of the train, Liz leans boyishly against the door jamb, and Joann turns to float down the platform toward the park.

Joann

Assuming the commissioner can pull the strings he thinks he can, I might be able to pull off this deal. Either way, Ezekiel is going to be very suspicious about the whole thing. You two should whip some evasion systems into shape. I don't know who might be coming back behind me.

Liz

Hey, I got this idea for how to figure out where to dig to get the Declaration. We might even be able to knock it together—

Joann

Save it.

She starts walking toward the fair ground.

Joann

First we'll see how receptive Ezekiel is to

the proposal. We may be able to get the Declaration back through his own mistakes.

Dissolve to a series of shots of Flushing Meadow Park with evening falling across it, accompanied by a suitable wild sound track not necessarily all in sync with the picture.

A couple rolling in the grass in front of the decaying United States Pavilion. Both in their teens and giggling.

A patrol car cruising on a park road, as seen through the Unisphere, where a few kids sit around with guitars. Others climb its base.

Joann walks through these scenes, past the U.S. Pavilion and the Unisphere toward the twin towers of the New York State Pavilion. Through it all, the sound of calliope music builds from a whisper to full earshot. Joann rounds a corner approaching the New York Pavilion. Two men disappear. Apparently a drug dealer and his edgy client. The music is coming from the New York Pavilion, and as Joann enters, we see that it has been converted into a combined roller- and ice-skating rink. Hundreds of people roller-skate and ice-skate and Joann looks very intense as she rounds the rink on foot. A group of very macho-looking guys point at her and one asks her to come over. She doesn't even dignify them with a sneer.

Cut to the left hand of a man depressing the speaker button of an old model office intercom. The calliope music has died down considerably, but it persists in the background. The man's voice is resonant and lush—as Caruso might have sounded. The replying voice is that of a female secretary.

Man's Voice

. . . because I'm busy buying the World Trade Center—or I'm on the phone with Martha Mitchell—or something. Anything. Get rid of her.

Secretary
(over intercom)

She apparently heard that, Mr. Ezekiel.

Cut to the large oak door of the room we are in. It opens and Joann begins to step through deliberately. She moves like a dancer—much like David Carradine did in *Kung Fu.*

Secretary

(over intercom)
She's on her way in.

There is a click as the man—Mr. Jerome Ezekiel—presumably removes his finger from the intercom. Joann looks up, starting to face him.

Joann
Mr. Jerome Eze—
(She is startled. She doesn't startle easily.)
Mr. Jerome Ezekiel?

He stands and smiles to greet her, extending his right hand, tall and almost emaciated, his deep voice belying his appearance. The entire right side of his body is an artificial robot-like device—an exoskeleton that works mechanically. His mouth and throat are intact, but the hand extended to Joann is gloved and his clothes—a jacket and tie—are neatly cut down his entire right side to make room for the exoskeleton. His right eye is particularly startling. It looks like a jeweler's glass attached to the machine face. Hair from the left side of his head is draped across the mechanical side.

Ezekiel
Can I help you, Miss . . .

Joann
Ms. Lee, Joann Lee.

As she enters the picture, she shakes his hand without a qualm. Both sit down.

Joann
Mr. Ezekiel, I am prepared to purchase this roller- and ice-skating establishment from you in return for two hundred fifty thousand dollars in cash. Delivery today.

Cut to a closeup of Thea's hands, holding opposite ends of the kind of cable you use to jump a car battery. She touches the electrodes together to make a spark.
Cut to a wider shot of the same scene, in which we see Thea's grinning face as she clacks the electrodes together a few more times.

Thea
She's ready to go, Liz . . .

Cut to a long shot of subway car interior where at one end Liz is pointing a 16mm film projector outside through an open door and Thea is connecting the electrodes to opposite poles of a double-wire outlet from the projector. The electrodes come from a panel in the car wall.

Thea
. . . let's see what happens.

Liz
(turning on the projector)
Hey, man, it looks great.

Cut to outside the subway car. There is a big, subway-sized tunnel at one end of SPV 166—a tunnel that looks like it's an underground one, though they are above ground now. It's apparently dug through a wall at what should be the end of the tracks.

Thea

All right, turn it off before someone sees it.

Liz

Gotta admit that was one pisser of an idea I had, Thea.

The tunnel fades away, leaving only a barrier at the end of the spur on which the subway car is parked. It wasn't a tunnel at all, but it sure looked a hell of a lot like one.

Cut to inside the car where the two girls are putting away the equipment.

Thea

Ideas are what you're here for, baby. And if you knew what a hassle it is to rig up a projector to work with black light, you'd give me at least half the credit.

Liz

Ahh, you might have the smarts, lady. But me, I have . . .

(with a flourish)

VISION.

Thea

Oh my God.

Cut to Ezekiel's office. Joann sits calmly in her seat as Ezekiel, standing, comes out from behind his desk. His right foot is not a foot but a retractable complex of three wheels—like a roller-skate. As his left foot takes normal steps his right foot rolls along constantly. As he walks out from behind the desk he picks up a cane leaning against the wall. He apparently does not need it at all.

Ezekiel

—not for two hundred fifty thousand dollars, Miss Lee—not for two hundred fifty million. The rink is not for sale.

Joann

(standing up)

But you haven't told me why yet. I . . .

Ezekiel

You know that this rink is on city property don't you?

Joann

Yes, but . . .

Ezekiel

Do you know that an owner of an establishment on city property may not sell the rights to that establishment without permission from the city? Yes, it's true that I have applied for such permission, but I don't expect that it will be granted to me for at least another three weeks.

Joann

Would you mind if I checked on that, Mr. Ezekiel?

Ezekiel

Miss Lee, do you think I'm trying to lie to you?

Joann

If you don't mind, I'd . . .

Ezekiel

All right, be my guest.

Joann

Thank you.

As she reaches for the phone we cut to Thea flipping a switch on a wall console in SPV as a small device in Liz's hand lights up. It looks like a walkie-talkie with one short antenna, a little red light instead of a mouthpiece, and one push-button below the light.

Thea

Think she can do it?

Liz

Why ask me?

Thea

Who else is here?

Cut to outside, it's evening now. The doors of the car open. The point of view is about fifty feet from the side of the car. Thea and Liz walk out toward the viewer. They are heading toward the edge of the concrete subway platform.

Liz

Well, let's see . . . when Joann was freelancing in Washington and the Watergate stuff was flapping, she filled in the blanks in those tape transcripts a week before Leon Jaworski's office got around to it . . .

The two girls are now standing on the edge of the platform, Liz shaking the device to her ear as she says

Liz

. . . and when we were up in Ossining and those cunting dyke prison guards were using my head to clean the toilets and your ass to wipe the kitchen floor . . .

Liz points the antenna of the device at the edge of the concrete platform

. . . they were calling her Ms. Lee. Offhand I'd say . . .

Liz's hand depresses the button on the device. It hums.

. . . she can probably pull this one off too.

The concrete begins to crack and then crumbles to powder, falling away.
Cut to Ezekiel, hand on phone and uneasy smile as he talks into the receiver.

Ezekiel

It came through already? When? This afternoon? Oh, OK, thank you.

He looks up toward Joann.

Ezekiel

It seems like the ball is moving much faster these days down at city hall.

Joann

Yes.

Ezekiel

Tell me, Miss Lee, why do you want to buy this rink?

Joann

Let's just say it's in the public interest.

Ezekiel

I'm sorry if this is going to upset your plans, but I am considering a retraction of my petition.

Joann

Perhaps we could discuss this further in more suitable surroundings?

Cut to Thea and Liz, with their backs to the viewer, walking toward the subway car.

Liz

Congratulations. It works.

Thea

(grandly)

Did you doubt it for an instant?

Cut to the calliope music, clearly audible, as Ezekiel's gloved right hand fits a key into a keyhole.

Ezekiel

You realize, of course, that this only means I will *consider* the matter further.

Joann and Ezekiel outside the New York State Pavilion, as Ezekiel opens the door of the little bean-shaped elevator that travels up the side of the sky tower outside the pavilion.

Joann

It's a step.

Ezekiel

I admire your attitude, Miss Lee.

The two step into the elevator and clang the door shut. Zoom out as we watch the bean ascent the tower. Cut to the top of the tower, looking down the hole in the platform below the pavilion's top deck. The bean comes through it and we pull back to track its ascent into Ezekiel's rooftop apartment. Cut to the interior of the apartment. The bean door opens and Ezekiel falls out to the floor, unconscious. Joann steps over him and with a determined look scans the room.

Cut to Joann's point of view. The apartment is plush, Hefneresque. Pan it slowly. The room is round and a long window follows its circumference around the whole sky tower. The furniture, including a round bed, is contoured to the curvature of the wall. Hold on a large dresser.

Zoom in slowly. We see Joann's hands rifling the drawers. They are full of clothes and nothing more. In the bottom drawer she finds a box. Opening it, she finds a woman's nightgown with the label still on it. She sniffs at it and puts it down.

Track Joann as she checks out the room. In a desk drawer, under crumpled papers, she finds a framed 8 x 10 picture of a girl about twenty. Very pretty. Maybe it's a graduation picture. Joann looks at the picture and nods slightly.

Dissolve to Joann approaching the subway car on the platform as the door opens for her. She steps through. She's carrying the picture.

SPV's interior. Thea is sitting at the table putting together a plastic model airplane and Liz is lying on one of the hammocks reading ***I, Robot*** by Isaac Asimov. Both look up as Joann breezes by them toward the communications console where the videotape receiver is located.

Thea

Well . . . are you going to tell us what happened or do we have to ask a ouija board?

Joann

I'll fill you in on the way.

Angle on Thea, mouthing the words "on the way" with some confusion.

Liz, shrugging, Joann on an intercom which she holds out from the same panel that holds the videotape monitor. There is a wide mail slot opening in that wall. She speaks into the intercom.

Joann

Transit Authority Control—this is Special Police Vehicle 166 . . . SPV 166 . . . get on the blower, TA Control.

Voice from Intercom

Reading, SPV 166 . . . do you wish us to clear your route?

Joann

That's the basic idea. We need clear tracks between this point and the nearest precinct house. Also, please send a photocopy of this picture ahead for possible identification.

Cut in on Joann's hand slipping the photo of the girl into the slot.

Joann

We will also require the complete federal dossier on one Jerome Ezekiel. Is that clear?

Voice from Intercom

Affirmative. Jerome Ezekiel. Your route is cleared.

Cut to the elaborate subway system map as this is said. Route lights go on between the Shea Stadium/World's Fair stop and the 67th Avenue stop on the BMT Queens local line. That's the Yellowstone Boulevard precinct house.

Cut to the subway car speeding along the elevated tracks through the night. No live sound, but the following voice-over . . .

Joann

Thank you, TA Control. SPV 166 out.

Thea
Now do we find out what happened?

The roar of the subway car begins to build and the voice-over begins to fade in under it.

Joann
Ever have a date with a cyborg?

Liz
A cyborg? Is that what he looks like? I wanna see him.

Joann
He's no Romeo.

Thea
"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east and Juliet is the sun!
Arise, fair sun . . ."

We watch the subway car as it speeds through the night and then dissolve to a research room in a precinct house. A cop stands at the door. Thea pores over a pile of papers. Liz sits back in a chair leafing through a folder full of other papers. Joann slowly strokes her lower lip, staring at the photo of the girl in her hand.

Liz
A sister? A cousin? An old lover?

Joann
Arabella Lyons. Grew up in Lenox, Massachusetts. Now a junior at Boston University. Scholarship student.

Liz
Maybe here's the connection. Ezekiel got a high school cheerleader pregnant in 1967. Could it be her?

Joann
I doubt it. She would have been about ten

years old then. Doesn't that file say anything about how Ezekiel got the way he is?

Thea

Nothing here.

Angle on Thea, leaning on her elbows as she reads from the papers

Private hospital records say that the bones on the right side of his body got homogenized and he got grafted into that exoskeleton. It happened in the spring of 1969.

Joann

No whys? Where was he? What was he doing? Hell of a way to keep records. Just throw in everything you've got and don't bother making sure all the ends meet.

Thea

Here's something.

Thea looks excited; she stands up and we pull back to follow her as she walks behind an attractive Liz and Joann

According to this he's deducted an anonymous five thousand dollar contribution to Boston University for the past three years. Since Arabella's been a student there.

Joann

Anonymous. Then she does't know about him, most probably.

Liz

A daughter? An absentee ward?

Joann

Something like that. What do you make of it?

Liz

Hey . . . listen.

As she says this, zoom in on Liz's face. She's excited.

I have an idea for tomorrow.

Dissolve to Ezekiel in his office, scowling as he talks at his intercom. He has a small bandage on the human half of his right forehead now—apparently a side effect from his fall the previous night.

Ezekiel
Send them in—but leave the door open, damnit!

Angle on the big office door. Liz carries an attaché case. Presumably there is a secretary behind the door, leaving it open.

Joann
Hurt your head, Mr. Ezekiel?

Ezekiel
A freak accident—

Ezekiel

—I banged it on someone's elbow in a crowded elevator. Couldn't happen again in a million years. Your friend . . .

Joann

This is my associate, Ms. Engel.

Liz

Uhh—call me Liz

Ezekiel

A pleasure.

Ezekiel extends his right hand. Liz looks uncertain about wanting to touch it long enough for Ezekiel to snicker and extend his hand to Liz's chair, seeming as if he wanted to do that in the first place. Minus two for Liz. A momentary scowl on Joann.

Joann

Let's get down to business, Mr. Ezekiel.

Ezekiel

Apparently a habit of yours, Miss Lee.

Joann

We made a very handsome offer for your establishment yesterday. And we are prepared to make an even more handsome one today. Unfortunately we have found it appropriate to lower the cash portion of that offer to two hundred thousand dollars.

Ezekiel

The cash portion? There's more?

Joann

Yes; the photo please, Ms. Engel. The other part of the payment is our agreement not to do anything that would impair the health of this young lady.

Joann drops the wallet-size photo of Arabella on Ezekiel's desk. Ezekiel stands behind his desk, the smirk on his face slowly

fading as he looks down at the photo.

Ezekiel

Arabella?

He bounds up from the chair, quickly roll-walks to the door to the office, slams it shut, and wheel-stomping around the room, he bellows . . .

Where is she? What did you do to my daughter? Did you tell her who I am—who she is?

Liz

Oh, don't make with the melodrama, tin man. She's safe.

Ezekiel

(near hysterics)

Where? How did you find out about her? I've been so careful!

Cut to Joann, impassive, and Liz, blithely letting her eyes wander around the room.

Joann

May I have the sales contract, Ms. Engel?

Liz reaches into the attaché case and hands Joann a document folded like a deed or a lease. She reaches in a jar and lifts out a small vial containing an insect.

Ezekiel

What's that?

Joann

We took the liberty of drawing up a contract with the conditions for the sale of the roller-ice rink. Ms. Engel will witness. All very legal.

Ezekiel

Where's Arabella? She'll be safe? Right?

Cut back and forth among the three characters.

Liz
I hate to see a grown robot cry.

Ezekiel
What—what's that in your hand?

Liz
This vial?

Closeup on the vial for a moment. There is a rather large and vicious-looking red ant trying to eat away at his plastic cage.

Liz
Have you ever heard of Mara Bunta ants, Mr. Ezekiel?

Ezekiel
Mara Bunta?

On Ezekiel's face for a beat.

Ezekiel
No . . . NO!

Liz
Man, the guys that catch those mothers have to wear tighter suits than Neil Armstrong. If just one of them gets into your brain, you've had it.

Ezekiel
Arabella.

Liz
A swarm has been known to wipe clean the bones of a buffalo in half an hour. Damned if I know who stood around to time them.

Ezekiel
You wouldn't!

Joann

There's a car on the way over here carrying two hundred thousand dollars.

Ezekiel

Would you?

Liz

I heard once about this dude who had to put a patch on his ant-catching suit with one of those tire patch kits. The patch was tight enough to keep air inside a car tire, but not enough to keep those ants outside the suit, I guess.

Ezekiel

You really would.

Joann

Your secretary has a notary seal?

Liz

When they found the poor slob he looked like a free-floater left in space without oxygen, all decomposed with his suit still intact around him.

Joann

The contract, Mr. Ezekiel?

Ezekiel

The contract. Arabella. Where's my pen?

Cut to the pavilion exterior, five minutes later. A plainclothes police officer is handing a large attaché case to a strained Ezekiel.

Joann

You'll find the entire two hundred thousand in there, Mr. Ezekiel.

Ezekiel

Thank you. But you promised—

Cut to Joann and Liz entering the back seat of the officer's car.

Joann
Your daughter is fine, Mr. Ezekiel.

Joann and Liz close the back doors of the car. Joann sits in a window talking calmly to Ezekiel, who looks relieved. The latter grasps at the car window with both hands.

Ezekiel
She doesn't know her father's a—a—

Joann
Half robot and all criminal? Not that I know of. Several policemen will be here within the hour to make sure you and your people are out of the pavilion by tonight.

Ezekiel
But Arabella. How is she? Does she look well?

Joann
I haven't the faintest idea.

Ezekiel
Didn't you see her, set up her abduction?

Liz
We haven't had time to abduct anyone . . .

As the car begins to pull away, Ezekiel starts to trot-wheel alongside.

Joann
. . . I've been too busy digging around the park looking for a red ant.

As the car rolls away, Ezekiel stands stunned, alone, his face beginning to drop. As he opens his mouth wide, about to scream, we dissolve to:

Commissioner
(on the SPV monitor)
I've arranged for six FBI agents at the pavilion, in case Ezekiel decides to get at the

Declaration. When Joann and Liz get back, tell them you have a green light for the dig. We're trying to keep track of Ezekiel.

Thea

Will do, cutie.

Commissioner

And do you think you can stop calling me cutie?

Thea

Whatever you want, hot stuff. And if you feel like changing your mind about getting us a room at the Hilton, you know where to find me.
(With a smile Thea clicks off the monitor before the commissioner can come up with a rejoinder. The center door of the car slides open to let in Joann and Liz.)
How'd it go?
(Liz waves her copy of the contract.)
Commissioner says we can dig the thing up.

Joann

We don't know how many people in town are aware of the stolen Declaration, but it's not going to take more than an hour or two for all of the contacts to let their bosses know something strange is happening. Between them and Ezekiel, we'll be as safe here as the last sausage at an Italian street festival.

Liz

We better hustle, huh?

Joann

I'll stay here while you two take Thea's cement pulverizing device to the pavilion. Speed is crucial now.

Cut to Liz and Thea entering the roller- and ice-skating rink area.

Joann
(voice-over)
. . . because the less time the document is in our hands, the more likely we'll be to get it back to Washington without getting our skulls shattered in the process. Don't forget to take that tape measure . . .

As Joann's voice fades out we see Liz measuring the distance of seventeen feet from one end of the roller rink with a long tape measure. Thea follows Liz with the concrete-shattering gizmo poised in her hands. Back to live sound.

Liz
Seventeen feet. Should be right here.

Thea
Really? You mean underneath our feet—just inches removed from our humble toenails—is the immortal document penned by Thomas Jefferson's own trembling hand?

Thea's hand presses the button of the device, aiming it at the point to which Liz made her measurement. The concrete begins to buckle.

Liz
Why was his hand trembling?

Thea
Gonorrhea.

Concentric circles of cracks and crevices begin to radiate outward from the point in the concrete rink.

Liz
Jefferson? Really?

Thea
I don't know. I'm an engineer, not a historian.

The concrete begins to crack and break apart as we pull back to include the figures of the two girls as well as the buckling

ground. They slowly begin to back off as Thea turns her gadget off, but the concrete is apparently going to crack in more than just the local area to which the gadget was pointed. The center of the rink is starting to cave in as the two try to run off the rink.

Thea
(yelling)
Everybody had gonorrhea then! It was the thing to do!

The rink collapses downward as if into a deep, ten-foot-round hole whose midpoint is the point at which Thea's device was aimed. This causes convulsions of varying degrees across the entire rink.

Cut to a long shot of the rink from the end opposite the girls. Thea and Liz begin to step gingerly toward the hole itself.

Liz
What went wrong?

Thea
Shoddy construction? Do you think the only thing stashed in a hole that size is a rolled up piece of sheepskin?

They start to clear chunks of concrete away.

Liz
It shouldn't all have caved in like that. The commissioner said the Declaration could be rolled up in a little titanium tube, like a poster ready to go through the mail.

Thea
If somebody dug out all this space—

Liz
Look at this.

She holds up a chunk of cement from the area of the hole.

There are two layers of concrete here. As if a top layer was cemented over lately.

Various shots of the pair starting to dig away at the rubble. Thea is near ground zero—the apparent center of the hole.

Thea
Top layer looks thicker toward the center of the hole, as if it was just covered over altogether. Just now. Not back in 1964.

Liz
(doing a Boris Karloff impression)
Do you know why? Because there's a monster in there.

Thea
(reciprocating with Peter Lorre)
Don't look. It's ugly.

The bit of pulverized ground Thea is standing on shifts a bit, causing her to slip ungracefully on to her ass. From under the shifting chunk of ground comes a kind of red glow.

Liz
Hey. What's that?

Thea
A pile of concrete dressed up in a halter. What's it look like?

Liz
No. That light. Under those rocks.

Angle on the light coming from the rocks as Liz bounds into the hole and starts to throw away mounds of concrete. Thea steps in to join her. They uncover the top curve of a two-foot-diameter plastoid globe that emits an eerie red glow.

Thea
That's no titanium mailing tube.

Liz
What the hell could it—

Liz touches the glowing surface of the sphere for the first time. Her hand, which touches the thing only momentarily, turns as

red and glowing as the globe. This lasts no more than a second as we zoom in for a closeup of Liz' face, startled, then pained. She grasps at her head like the star of an Anacin commercial.

My head! I couldn't talk there for a moment. My brain felt like it was floating in space.

Thea

What was it?

Liz

A brainache.

Thea

I don't think you ought to mess with—

Liz

Hey, college girl. What happened to scientific interest—the endless quest for knowledge—remember?

Thea

Sure—quest for knowledge. That doesn't include getting your nervous system short-circuited in the name of science.

Liz

There's something . . . alive in there.

Liz is feverishly clearing rubble from the sphere.

Thea

Come on, babe. Don't throw your bug-eyed-monster mentality at me. I bet it's some kind of gadget.

Liz is digging clear the glowing red sphere. It houses some obscurely defined object.

Liz

No. I could feel it when I touched it.

Thea
Don't tell me. Brain waves, right?

Liz
Something like that.

Liz manages to make the globe clearly visible. Floating inside, suspended in some sort of liquid solution, is an apparently newborn black child—with extremely large and gripping eyes. Angle on Thea, gulping and speechless, wide-eyed, looking at the globe.

Liz
It's . . . a human fetus, I think.

Back to the globe. The fetus floats into a position so that it is looking directly at the girls. Not only is it alive, it looks smart.

Thea
Uhh. Kootchie-kootchie-koo.

Cut to closeup of Joann in the subway car. Pull back to show her hand floating over some unmarked levers at the wall of a control panel. She flips a row of switches marked "CAMOUFLAGE HOLOGRAPHY SYSTEM."

Cut to an outside shot of SPV 166. All three doors facing the platform are wide open.

Cut to Joann inside the car, walking from the camouflage panel toward the center door of the car. All three doors are closed until Joann presses a button near the center door. She steps out.

Cut to the outside of the car as she stands on the platform. She stands in front of a window, not a door.

Cut to a closeup of Joann's face, looking from right to left suspiciously.

Cut to a long shot of the platform from about fifty feet away. Joann glides across the ground looking suspiciously in all directions at all times.

Cut to Joann turning to look around as there is a shuffle somewhere between her and SPV 166. She shrugs and continues walking further from the car. She stops to look across what she can see of the park. There is a loud shuffling behind her and she wheels around.

From Joann's viewpoint, we see two figures about midway

between Joann and her subway car with the doors apparently ajar. The pair have appeared from nowhere to make a wild run toward the unattended subway car.

Cut to Joann, closeup, looking uncharacteristically frantic and screaming—

Joann

No! Stop!

Cut to Joann running after the two, who are well ahead of her in the race toward the subway car. There's no way she can get there first.

Cut to the two, making their last running steps before reaching the gaping doors of the car. Both bound for a separate door. Instead of adhering to the laws of physics which rule that gaseous air will get out of the way of two solid bodies in motion, the two figures simultaneously reach their respective doorways and smash "SPLATT!" into what should be no more than a sheet of air. A big thud and both bounce dazed onto the platform in front of the car.

Pull back so that Joann is seen striding serenely toward the two mounds. She reaches them, pulls a hypodermic needle from her belt, and turns one over to look at her face. Joann shoves the sliver of needle into her arm and lowers her. There is a definite masculine groan from the other crumpled pile. She quickly refills the needle from a vial and shoves the hypo into the other's veins. A sedative. Joann stands up from the second would-be subway car thief and steps forward to the window in front of which she had stood earlier. She apparently walks through the wall and the closed window, and disappears inside the subway car.

Dissolve to Thea and Liz, having cleared away the rock and pebbles that surrounded the sphere containing the red-glowing fetus.

Thea

If you think I'm gonna touch that Martian firefly you're off your bird, chickie.

Liz

It doesn't burn or anything. It just feels kinda weird.

Cut to Liz as she moves to touch the sphere.

Thea

What are you doing? You nuts?

Liz

Listen, I think I can touch it. Feel it, y'know?

Thea

Don't put your hands on—

Thea squeezes her eyes shut as Liz swats her fingertips on the sphere for a moment. Then she brushes her hand across it. Then touches it with her palm. Slowly, gingerly, like a fakir distributing his weight across a bed of nails, Liz places her hands flat on opposite sides of the globe and the fetus inside stares up at her intensely. Thea gets increasingly wide-eyed. Cut back and forth between the face of Liz, gradually scrunching up as if listening to a phone conversation on a bad line, and the face of the fetus, impassive, serene, aware.

Pull back from an extreme closeup of the fetus to show a shot of the three.

Liz

(darkly, mysteriously)

We've got to get him down to Washington.

Thea

What do they want with him down there?

Liz

I don't know.

Cut to up-shot of Liz and Thea as Liz slowly removes her hands from both sides of the sphere. Then she picks it up, ready to carry it.

Liz

He hasn't explained that yet.

Thea

Explained what? It's a stillborn kid. You think he's talking to you? We're supposed to find the Declaration of Independence, remember? This stillborn kid who talks to

you—you think we should lug him across two hundred acres of badly lit park full of people who want to get our asses?

Liz
(impassive)
He says if we start walking now and do what he says, no one will even see us until we're back in the car.

The two stand, Liz carrying the globe, as Thea angrily opens her mouth to speak. Finding nothing to say, she follows her friend out.

Begin a series of moving shots as Liz and Thea tramp across the park. Liz is moving strangely, uncharacteristically, with some measure of grace. They walk down some macadam outside the New York State Pavilion as we momentarily cut to a man with a gun leaning against the other side of the elevator tower near the pavilion, loading the gun. He finishes and looks back around to the pavilion entrance. He sees no one there.

Cut to Thea and Liz and the globe walking in shadows by the Unisphere toward the United States Pavilion. Nearing a big tree, Liz nudges Thea with an elbow, indicating that they should stop.

Cut to the hurricane fence surrounding the U.S. Pavilion, as a man waving a gun jumps out of the shadows behind the fence and opens it, allowing two burly types to race in and tumble back into the shadows with him.

Cut to the girls and the globe under the tree, Thea looking suspiciously at the globe, pointing at it in wonder. Liz nods calmly, serenely.

Cut to Liz, the globe, and Thea trotting off silently behind the United States Pavilion.

Cut to Thea's hand shoving an oddly shaped key—ovular rather than flat—into a small hole next to the subway car door.

Cut to a quick and very sudden noisy shot of an electric coffee grinder buzzing away with Joann's thumb on the button. Pull back to show Joann as she takes her hand off the button of the grinder and wheels around to see the door. Continue pulling back as we see Thea and Liz, with the globe, walking through the opening door.

Joann
Did you bring the Declaration?

Thea

It wasn't there, but Elizabeth found a new friend. Joann, meet Cannonball. Cannonball, this is Joann Lee.

Joann

Who—

Thea

Balls is a little shy, but he grows on you.

Joann

Not on me.

Joann goes over to touch the globe as Thea cautions her.

Joann

What is he?

Liz
(darkly)
We must get him on the helicopter to Washington.

Joann stops as she is about to touch the globe.

Joann
What's gotten into you?

Thea
Would you believe, umm . . . that this preserved fetus thing told Liz how to avoid all the loose baddies in the park?

Joann
What are you talking about?

Thea
I mean Cannonball there seemed to know what tree everyone was behind, and what to do to avoid any trouble getting here. Liz even said that there'd be a pair of zonked clowns on the platform here, even knew they'd still be out cold. Telepathy. Really.

Joann
What kind of garbage—let's go, Liz. What's the story? What is it?

Liz shrugs impassively as she holds Cannonball.

Liz
He is a redirected mind. A seminal consciousness taken from—

Joann
Can that. Put him down and wake up, will you?

Liz puts Cannonball down on a hammock and squints, rubs her eyes, shakes her head, generally plods back to normal.

Liz

Whoa. That sure takes a pissload out of you.

Cut to Joann and Thea, inquisitive.

Joann

What is it? What did it do to you?

Liz

From what I can pick up, he seems to be a disembodied mind. Liz crouches down and looks admiringly at the serene Cannonball.

Zoom slowly, on Cannonball's face as Liz speaks.

Liz

He is a black fetus, found in the belly of an unclaimed murdered white woman twelve years ago. Some government scientist picked up the body and dumped the kid into a preserving solution. Turned him into a decision-making machine by feeding all kinds of information directly into his mind.

Thea

What information? How did they do it?

Liz

I'm not sure what information. Something really complicated. But they just did it by not cluttering his mind up with language the way everybody else does. He doesn't have to translate his ideas into words to communicate. He just has to think.

Joann

I'll buy this much: the Declaration wasn't there. But if you want to ship nature boy here down to Washington just because—

Suddenly Cannonball begins to glow—flash between a lit-up red and his normal color—like an alarm. Cut to a shot of Cannonball with all three girls. Liz is alarmed and puts her hand on Cannonball's surface. A beeper alarm from a control panel of

the train goes off. Joann wheels to look at it. Cut to a closeup of the SPV alarm flashing the words "AERIAL APPROACH."

Liz
Two helicopters approaching from the east. We have to move.

Cut to a long shot of the whole interior of the car. Liz sits communicating with Cannonball. Thea is setting up the equipment she is pulling out of storage areas below the subway car seats. She's setting up the black light projector. Joann is on the intercom system as she throws switches and turns control dials.

Joann
Transit Authority control—this is Special Police Vehicle 166 . . . Emergency . . . SPV 166 . . . come in, TA Control.

Cut to outside the train as it lurches to a start and we hear the batting of helicopter blades from afar.

Intercom
(voice-over)
This is Transit Authority control, SPV 166 . . . what's up?

Inside the car Joann barks into the intercom and the sound of the train chugs progressively faster. Simultaneously, the helicopter noise grows lower.

Joann
We need a route cleared immediately from Flushing Meadow Park to the Pan American Building in Manhattan. We will be under helicopter attack at any moment.

Cut to the train's exterior as it barrels away from the platform and a pair of unmarked copters come into view.

Intercom
(voice-over)
Helicopters? Who is that up there?

Joann
(voice-over)
How the hell should I know?

Cut to Liz, her hands on Cannonball's surface.

Liz
Cannonball says they're British. They think we've got the Declaration and they want it.

Cut to Joann on the intercom.

Joann
They're tentatively identified as British.

Intercom
Decrease speed by ten miles. Your route will be cleared in 95 seconds.two minutes.
Did you say British?

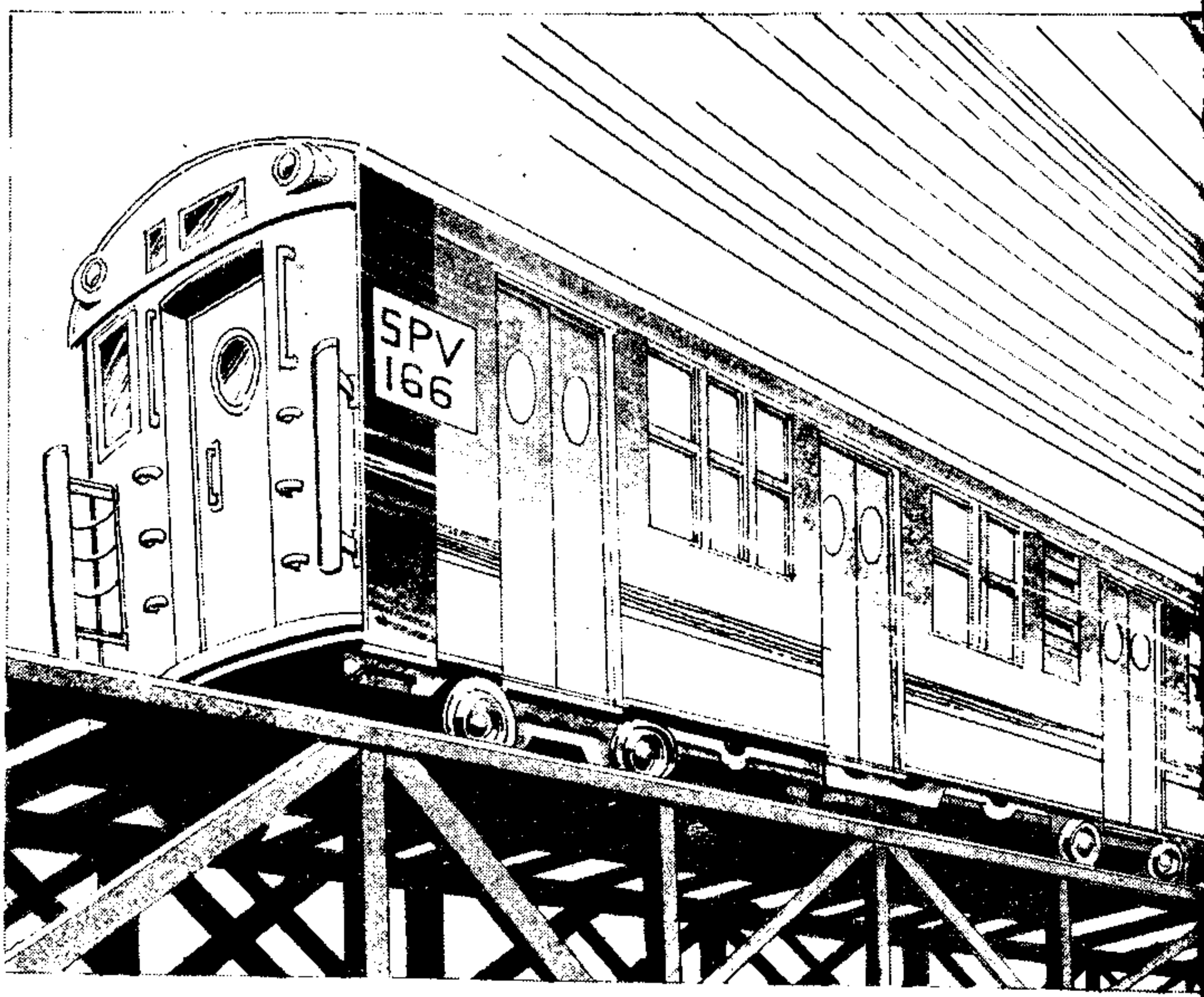
Joann
I said emergency . . .

Cut to the exterior of the speeding subway car, rolling along the elevated tracks of Queens, New York, followed hotly by a pair of helicopters, quickly descending towards SPV's roof.

Joann
(voice-over)
. . . so you tell whoever's sitting on the tracks to move because we're coming through.

Cut to the cab of one of the copters. There are two men in it, one who is the pilot and talks into a two-way radio, another who mans the gun.

Pilot
(British accent)
Harry, the speed is approaching 160 kilometers and that damn train is accelerating as fast as we are.



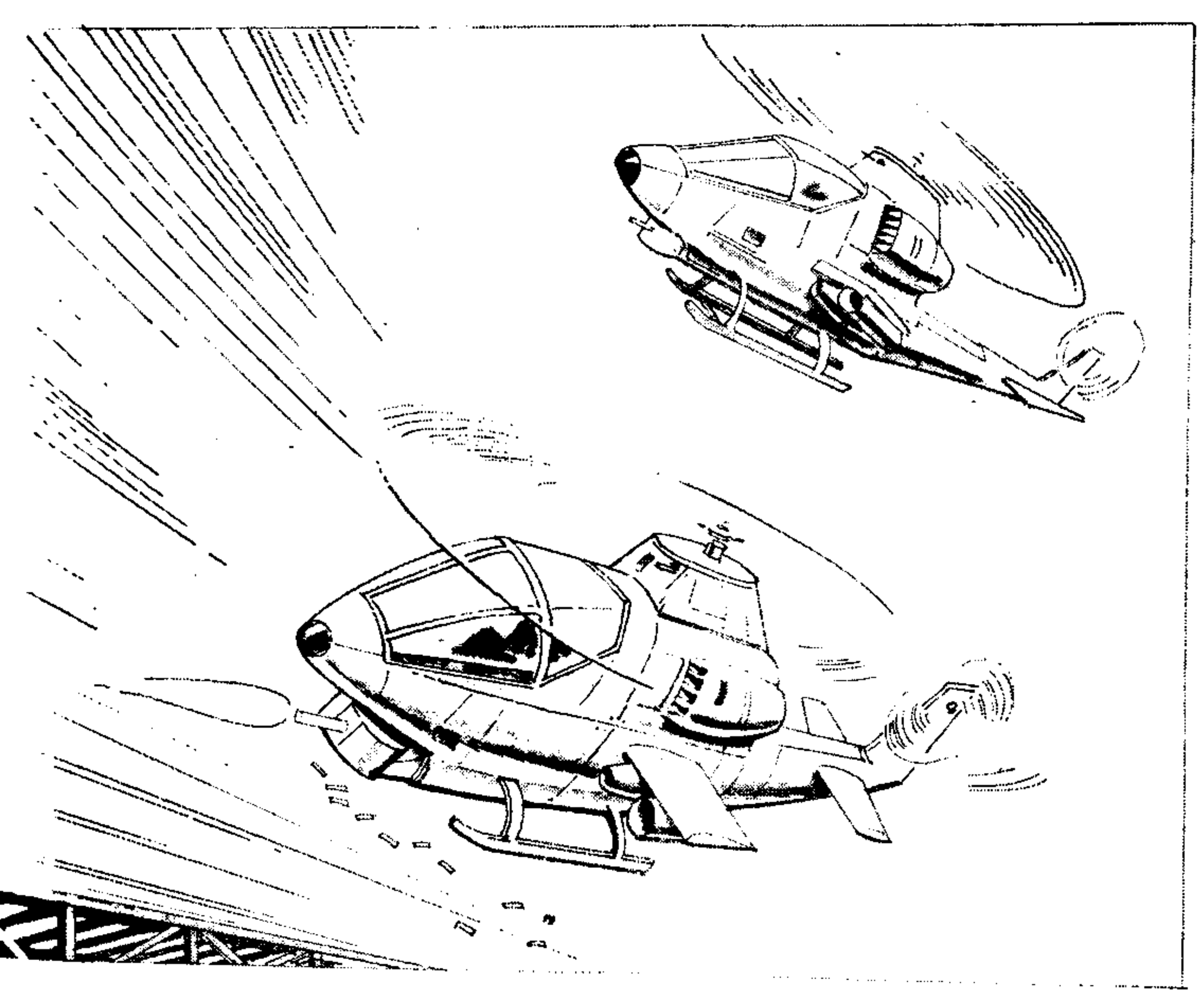
Voice from radio
(British accent)
They're putting up shields on their windows, Peter . . .

Cut to side view of SPV as armor slides over the glass windows.

Voice from radio
(voice-over)
. . . but there's a local train I can see ahead. It should slow them down so one of the whirlybirds can land on the track in front of them.

Cut to a wide shot of the inside of the speeding subway car, the shielded windows shadowed by the silhouette of a Piaseki helicopter. Joann is watching out the unshielded front end of the car as Thea rigs her projector to point out a now-shielded window. Liz and Cannonball are still genuflecting.

Joann
You *can* get them out of the way. You've done it before. We're doing over 90 and those



helicopters are catching up.

Liz

I'm getting something. Ezekiel stole Cannonball from the Securities Exchange Commission in Washington.

Thea

Yeah, that's it. He's a twelve-year-old systems analyst who reads minds. He doubles as a paperweight. Get over here and help me set this up, will you?

Cut to a long shot of the elevated tracks from the viewpoint of the chasing copters. In front of the speeding SPV, a slower moving thirteen-car train is approaching a station.

Cut to the cab of the helicopter. The navigator is talking to the radio.

Navigator

(British accent)

I say. What's that shimmering black thing down there?

Radio

The tunnel. If we're going to get that Declaration for our fanatical client, we'd better see if we can make the dive.

Cut to the interior of the SPV, Thea monitoring the conversation with a radio tap she's pulled out of the wall.

Thea

Looks like they're going to fall for it. I'll give them another ten seconds before I break the image.

Cut back to copter.

Navigator

(on radio, incredulously)

Impossible! The map says there's a wall, no tunnel!

Radio

All right then, you ditch the Piasecki and dive! If we don't keep them now, those women will be out of our reach!

Navigator

Are you bloomin' crazy?

Radio

There's a train up ahead! The women will be stuck behind it.

Navigator

It's your contract, Harry. Just stay clear of our dive!

Pilot

This will shake us up. I'm going for some altitude.

Cut to Joann at the monitor inside SPV.

Joann

Transit Control's got the local moving. I

think we'll be able to make it.

Thea

That does it! I'm breaking the image. The British guys will be able to touch down safely.

Liz

Some drop zone!

Cut to the "tunnel" to the immediate northeast of SPV 166. As the holographic image slowly fades away, a Piasecki helicopter hurtles into the materializing concrete wall. Two men, in small, air blown, parachute-type overhead canvases descend to the ground next to the burning wreck.
Cut to SPV's interior. Liz, laying her hands on Cannonball; Thea, sliding up a panel to reveal a plastic screen which flashes schematic images of the car; and Joann, keeping a hand on the control panel near the subway map.

Liz

He's not a systems analyst. He's a systems controller.

Thea

Well, that's good, Liz. I mean I want to wish the young fellow all the luck in the world with his career. I mean that sincerely.

Angle on Thea, pressing a button that causes one of the schematics of the subway car to freeze on the screen. As she speaks, she picks a transparent sheet out of a shallow drawer and begins to mat it down over the screen.

Thea

We are probably being tracked by Ezekiel's old crime family, any number of unsympathetic police precincts, and every foreign agent in New York City. Think you could maybe lend a hand?

Liz
(darkly)

You don't understand. I am.

Angle on Liz intensely staring at Cannonball.

Liz
Cannonball is the most advanced form of mind control that exists in the world today.

Thea
And that's how he makes his living?

Liz
He works for the Securities and Exchange Commission—controlling the national economy. He runs the stock market.

Cut to Joann at the big map.

Joann
Funny. I always heard a bunch of elves in Zurich do that.

Cut to Liz and Cannonball again.

Liz
No no no. That's dumb.

Angle on Thea, laying a succession of colorful clear sheets over the screen, decorating the schematic subway sketch on the screen with graffiti so it looks like a normal subway car.

Thea
Dumb. And the idea of a little kid running the stock market is smart.

Liz
That's why Ezekiel wanted him—buried him under the roller rink. He had him taken from Washington so—

Cannonball is lighting up—flashing—again

Joann! Lower our speed to sixty. Quick!

Joann
(wheeling around smoothly)

Lower it? Why?

Liz

Somebody's on our tail down here. And they can move on the tracks as fast as we can.

Joann

Cannonball told you?

Liz

Yeah. It's . . . it's . . .

As Joann pulls back a throttle and the train's contents lurch forward. The speed lowers dramatically.

Joann

It doesn't much matter who it is if they're hostile.

Cut to Thea at her screen, grabbing onto a pole to keep upright.

Thea

You believe that hokey, Joann?

Joann

He knew about the copters before we did. Are those camouflage holograms set up?

Thea

Only on one side of the train.

Cut to Joann, coolly pulling out the intercom.

Joann

That'll have to be enough. Put a mirror image of the same disguise on the opposite side of the car.

(into the intercom)

Transit Authority Control, this is Special Police Vehicle 166 . . . SPV 166 to TA Control . . . we need the position, please, of the nearest inbound regular passenger train to our present position . . . come in TA Control . . .

Cut to another vehicle tearing through the subway tunnels. This is a three-man bubble-top subway cruiser whose bubble top is barely higher than the level of a station platform. Very modern and fast-moving. It is analogous to a motorcycle.

Cut to inside the small vehicle. There are two men and a woman, all speaking some indefinite foreign language. It could be Kryptonese for all we know. In front of one of the men is a small radar screen with two blips, one gaining on the other. We switch back and forth among the three occupants of the vehicle as they check out maps and equipment, arguing and bantering among each other. Two of them—the woman and the man who does not monitor the radar screen—are heavily armed with nightmare weapons stashed all over their wild-looking uniforms. They successively pull out and look over all these weapons as the faster blip steadily gains on the slower one and their speedometer tops 150 miles per hour. They roar through an occasional subway station, startling people waiting for trains and blowing others over in their wake. Now there is more banter in the vehicle as the slower blip on the screen intercepts a long series of blips. The smaller blip merges with the longer one as it passes, and the smaller one is gone, the longer one following the smaller one's previous course. The three argue with each other in their own language as the vehicle picks up more speed and screams off.

Cut to a station platform. People are waiting for a train and on one side of the platform the small bubble vehicle screams into the station and screeches to a halt. The three leap out as the bubble opens, the two with weapons shocking the patooties out of the eight or ten people on the platform, motioning them into a corner behind a stairway at gunpoint.

Cut to the view down the subway tunnel on the other side of the platform as a long subway train barrels up.

Cut to the view from the platform as the train stops and the woman runs up to one of the train men between cars as it stops, waving a big futuristic-looking tommy gun at the scared, bewildered man. She quickly points at the subway doors indicating that they are not to be opened.

Trainman
You . . . want the doors shut.

She repeats her motion and the order barked in her foreign tongue. As the man repeats his line he makes a motion exactly like hers.

VNTOWN
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You want the doors . . . shut.

She nods in response, repeating the motion and mouthing amiably.

Trainman
(into a speaker near him)
Keep the doors shut, guys. There's some unstable lady here with a gun who might get the passengers hurt if we open up.

She nods amiably, lowering her weapon, patting the trainman on the arm. He smiles widely and nods back at her.

Medium cross-cuts to show the woman scooting over to the platform passengers with her weapon to watch them while both men scurry from car to car of the train. They peer into the windows, looking for SPV 166. It isn't there. One of the men motions the trainman to move along. He makes a sweeping forward motion toward the tunnel. The trainman repeats the motion.

Trainman
You mean it's all right for us to . . . go.

The armed man repeats the motion, nodding. The conductor repeats the motion again, smiling, then speaks to his intercom.

The loonies say it's okay to leave now. Make some announcement to the passengers.

Cut to a long shot of the platform with the train slowly building speed, then quickly tearing down the tracks.

Cut to the three agents bunched around the platform passengers, motioning that they are free to go, smiling amiably at the generally terrified people. The people trickle away, some of them making a point of not turning their backs on their erstwhile captors. Then the more heavily armed man motions for them to stop and come back. They all do it gingerly. He talks to the other man, who reaches into his pocket and pulls out a handful of nickels. He gives one to each captive. Reparations.

Cut to the long train speeding through the tunnel. The train is moving fast. We start looking at the lead car and soon see the last one. As we get to the last car we pick up enough speed to

follow it steadily for a second. It's a normal car with passengers and so forth.

Cut to the link between the two cars uncoupling.

Cut to the side view of the last car, falling behind the rest of the train. Slowly the graffiti begins to fade from the outside walls of the car. Then the passengers we see through the window begin to cloud away, to be replaced by our three heroines and the interior of SPV 166. Holograms!

Cut to the inside of the train, a long shot of the interior. Liz is sitting on a chair, talking to Cannonball, who is resting in a hammock. Thea's tearing the last of the plastic sheets off the schematic of SPV. Joann is standing hunched over her table, looking at the subway map. There is a blinking light on the map's route near the Pan Am Building.

Joann

We'll arrive at the Grand Central Station stop in approximately two-and-a-half minutes. We'll have to carry a twelve-year-old fetus two blocks to the Pan Am Building, and then to the rooftop heliport in daylight.

Cut to Liz and Cannonball.

Liz

Doesn't anyone want to hear why Ezekiel had Cannonball abducted in the first place? Listen, before he was grafted onto that machine, Ezekiel was driving in New Hampshire, and he saw what looked like a UFO—

Cut to Thea plopping down on a chair near the screen, holding the schematics.

Thea

Screw that, Liz. We're not out of the woods yet.

Liz

Well, Cannonball thinks your plan has an 82 percent chance of working, Thea.

Thea

Uhh—thanks, Balls . . . but if it's all the same to you, I haven't finished figuring it out yet.

Cut to the train screeching to a halt at the crowded Grand Central Station platform. The doors open. The three girls leap out, Liz carrying Cannonball. The doors immediately shut behind them. Startled onlookers. The three lope up the stairs with Liz bringing up the rear.

Thea

That mounted police escort isn't gonna do us a helluva lot of good if we can't be sure about the cops.

Liz

Don't worry. They're coming straight from the commissioner.

Cut to the three charging out onto the street, Liz not even bothering to cover up Cannonball. There are six cops on horseback at the subway exit, and a small crowd begins to gather around the scene.

Thea

Anyone on the street could be a threat. Hey—Freddy.

Cut to one of the mounted police, smiling as he sees Thea. His name is Freddy.

Freddy

Thea! I didn't know you were on this squad.

Thea tugs at Freddy's arm, flashing a disarming smile. Liz and Joann look a bit uneasy as the crowd begins to edge closer.

Thea

Listen, man. You've got to give me your horse for a minute.

Freddy

My . . . I don't know. You girls get your

orders from the commissioner. I guess . . .

Freddy dismounts. He boosts Thea up to the horse, and although she doesn't take the time to adjust the stirrups to her size, she begins to canter up the street with reasonable competence. Cut to Liz and Joann.

Joann

Everyone's watching Thea now. Let's split. Anyone following us on the street will give himself away.

Cut to Thea on horseback. She's pulling her shirt from her trousers and throwing it off into the following crowd. No bra.

Cut to teenage boy in the crowd who catches it and grins. He's standing next to a dignified older woman who cranes her neck to see Thea.

Teenage Boy

I think I'm in love.

Older woman

Shameful. Excuse me, sir. I've never seen such a display in all my life.

Cut to Thea, prancing off as seen from the rear, flinging one arm about as she sings "Annie Laurie" at the top of her lungs in a flawless Gaelic accent.

Thea

"Maxwell ton braes are bonnie where early fas the dew,

'Twas there that Annie Laurie gave me her promise true.

Gave me her promise true, and ne'er forgot shall . . ."

Cut to Liz and Joann running with Cannonball into the entrance of the Pan Am Building, scooting across the lobby into an empty elevator. The door closes.

Cut to Thea, prancing down the street followed by the mounted cops and the crowd.

Thea

". . . and for bonnie Annie Laurie I'd lay me doun and dee."

Cut to the rooftop helicopter as seen from the air. A copter is revving up.

Cut to the rooftop door opening. Joann and Liz, with Cannonball, come bounding out. They are met by the police commissioner.

Commissioner

I had the copter revved up when I saw the commotion on the street. What's going on down there?

Joann

Thea always wanted to be an actress.

Commissioner

Did you get the document? What's this?

Joann

No Declaration, Commissioner—but you'll be more interested in Cannonball here. He's to be delivered to the SEC in Washington.

Cut to an exhaust fan on the roof. Out from behind it bounds Jerome Ezekiel, a wild look in his one good eye, a weapon in his one good hand.

Ezekiel

Freeze! Everyone.

Ezekiel is warily approaching Cannonball. As he nears Liz Engel, there is a sudden crackle on the heliport's rooftop sound system. In an eerie youthful voice, a steady flow of words stream from the speakers. Birds fly off, as if startled by the sudden rejuvenation of an infrequently used device. A chill wind sweeps the hair off Liz Engel's face and she realizes quickly, shockingly, that Cannonball is "speaking" his first words.

Cannonball

You hhhhhhhurt me, Ezekiel.

Ezekiel
What? The fetus?

The voice is hopeful. It does not accuse. It questions.

Cannonball
Wwwwwwwwhy did you hhurt me, Ezekiel?

As the voice flows from the speakers, Cannonball becomes brighter. Liz feels the growing warmth and realizes the need to sit down with Cannonball before he gets too hot to hold.

Ezekiel
Stay where you are, Miss Engel!

Cannonball
Please put me down, Liz.

Ezekiel
Stay where you are, Miss Engel!

A red light flashes out from the globe. Ezekiel's weapon is melted limp.

Cannonball
You were too rich, Mr. Ezekiel. You were too greedy. Yy-yyour operations threatened the balance of the eeeeeeconommmy.

Ezekiel advances toward Liz, who has now seated herself on the rooftop.

Cannonball
I just wwwanted to stop you from hurting people.

Ezekiel
How, fetus? By doing this? By blasting my car, turning me into a freak? By homogenizing the right half of my body? By turning me into a cyborg?

Cannonball

I am sssssorry, Ezekiel. I was so young. I was pushed.

Ezekiel

Sorry? Do you know how it feels to be an outcast? To be *strange*?

Cannonball

Yesssssss, Mr. Ezekiel. I know.

Then, from the side, as Ezekiel rushes Liz and the globe—

Commissioner

Joann? Grab Ezekiel He's going to smash the fetus!

Liz

Cannonball! Stop him!

Cannonball

Talkinggg makes me weak, Liz. Tiredd, must finish.

The sound from the speaker grows weak. Ezekiel is almost above Liz by now. She attempts to rise, half falls, almost drops Cannonball. She starts to get up again, but Ezekiel grabs Cannonball from her hands and begins to run toward the helicopter parked on the roof.

Ezekiel

Ha! A cyborg! A recluse! I had to go to the finest hospitals in Japan to get this body!

Cannonball

Whyyy did you *bury* me, Ezekiel?

Ezekiel

Revenge, fetus! I put you out of touch! There was no data coming into your mind! I couldn't destroy you, so I wanted to drive you crazy! Like you drove me! All those months searching for the source of that insane little military device! I wanted revenge! Can't you understand that, fetus? Are you a child?

Can't you understand what it's all about?

Ezekiel reaches the helicopter door. Joann is blocking the entrance.

Ezekiel
Out of my way or I tell this globe to incinerate your—

Cannonball
You have no control over me, Ezekiel.

Angle on Joann, indecisive as she looks apprehensively at Cannonball in Ezekiel's left arm. Then she smiles. The rooftop speakers go dead. Cannonball begins to grow brighter. Hot! Ezekiel is forced to drop him.

Ezekiel
Yii!

As he falls, Joann dives for the globe. Ezekiel comes right after her. Pan with them as they rather comically chase the globe rolling along the rooftop edge. At the first corner, Liz is there to meet it.

Ezekiel
No!

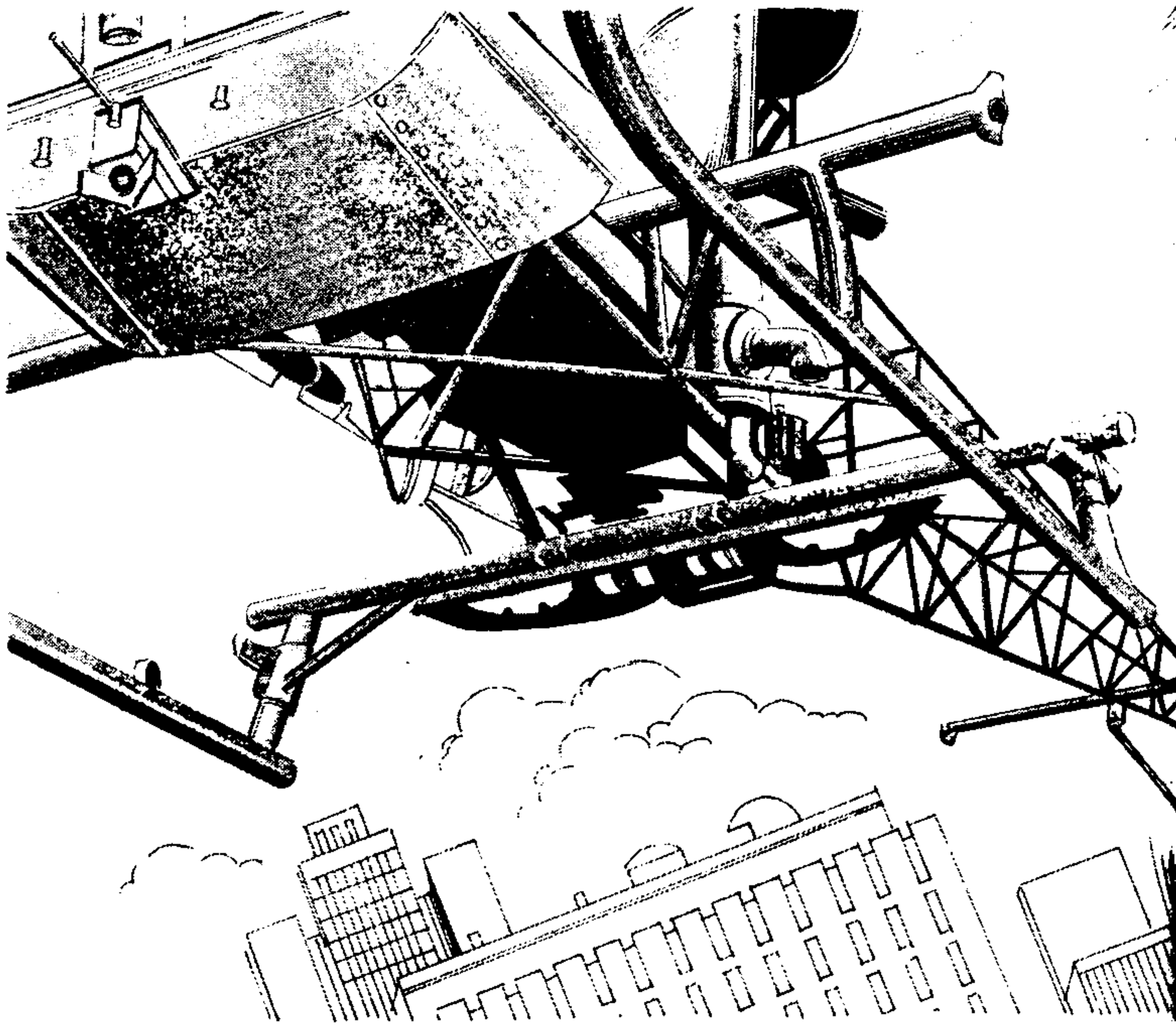
Liz hands Cannonball to the commissioner as Ezekiel lunges after the globe. Liz falls, grabbing breathlessly to the interior edge of the roof. Ezekiel is back on his feet, after the commissioner.

Angle on the commissioner as he hands the globe back to Joann. Ezekiel almost pushes him over as he runs toward the helicopter.

Angle on Joann. She's reached the helicopter. Ezekiel's shadow covers her as she puts Cannonball into the open seat. The revving motor drowns Ezekiel's voice. The craft begins to rise.

Angle on Ezekiel unsteadily and ungracefully creeping up and motioning wildly at the helicopter as it leaves. Joann tries to restrain him.

Ezekiel



No! Come back. I can't let you get away.

Joann

You lost, Ezekiel. Can't you see? Give it up.

Ezekiel throws Joann down to the rooftop with his metal half.

Ezekiel

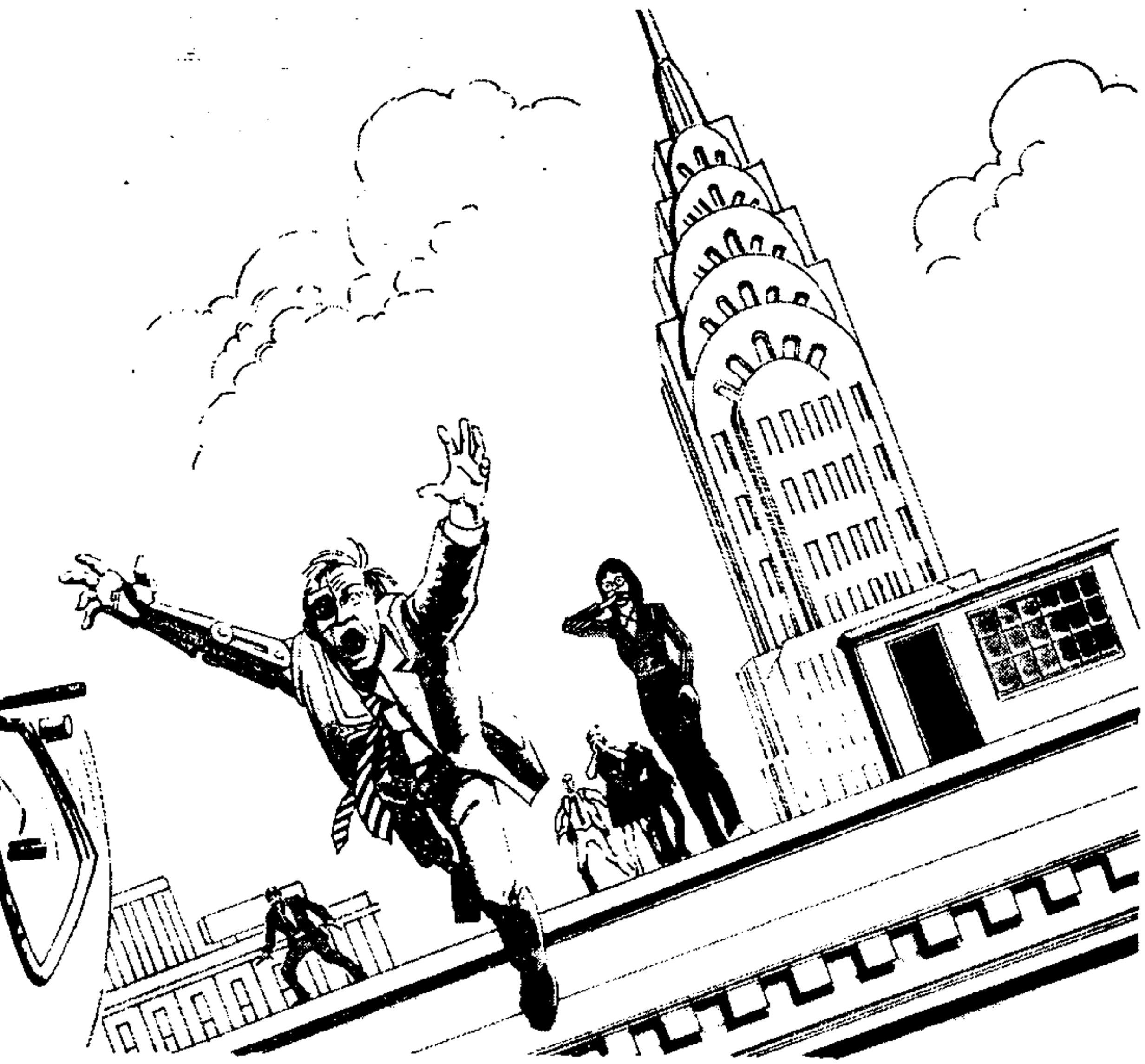
Bitch.

Ezekiel follows the copter, running to the roof's edge.

Ezekiel

Come back. I'll get you. I swear I'll—

And he leaps for the copter, falling off the roof as we quickly cut to Thea, atop a horse, look-ing worried as she hears the distant falling wail.



We dissolve slowly to a shot of a nonplussed grape-popping Thea and Liz, who is leering up from her book suspiciously in Joann's direction.

Thea
Looking for the Declaration, again?

Cut to Joann, holding a coffee cup in one hand while she slides up a thin metallic door panel with the other.

Joann
Funny you should ask—the commissioner said the same thing to me this morning. Gave me an idea.

Cut to Thea looking up curiously and Liz beginning to break into a huge grin.

Cut to Joann pulling a long metal tube—like one used to send posters through the mail—from the refrigerator.

Joann

What if we had made a mistake about Ezekiel? What if he had moved the Declaration to someplace *besides* the rinks? Then I remembered the kitchen of his apartment. Before, I was too busy with Arabella's picture, but today it occurred to me: There were *two* refrigeration units in there. I went back for another look. The first had chicken, yogurt and week-old milk. The second had this—

And she pulls the silicane shielded parchment of the Declaration of Independence out of the tube and brings it over to the others.

Cut to Thea and Liz, ecstatic and devilish as they snatch up the document together and Joann impassively sits down to drink her coffee.

Liz

Hey! Old T.J.'s trembling hands themselves. Let's see that. Better tell the commissioner to cancel his trip.

Cut to inside the tunnel as the train barrels through the darkness.

Cut back inside the train as Joann, looking almost bored, sips her coffee.

Thea

"When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to . . ."

Cut to the train plowing through the darkness.

Cut inside, Thea dramatically reads from the document like a town crier as Liz marches in place next to her, whistling "Yankee Doodle" through an imagined flute at her mouth.

Thea

". . . and accordingly, all experience hath shown,
that mankind are more disposed to suffer,

while evils
are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing . . ."

Cut outside, the noisy train barrels along.

Cut to Thea, reading, seen from another angle, as Liz sits on the hammock.

Thea

". . .The history of the present king of Great Britain is a

history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States . . ."

Liz

Doncha like what we got now better?

Cut to the train barrelling along.

Cut to Joann draining her coffee and watching blank-faced.

Thea
(getting worked up)

". . . For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing taxes on us without our Consent: For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury: For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offenses. . ."

Liz

Go get 'em!

As Joann snarls, cut to outside shot of the train again and back to Thea from another angle, working up a sweat as Liz looks on.

Thea

". . .He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people."

Liz

Oh, Thomas Jefferson would throw up all over you.

Cut to a slightly longer shot of the moving train.

Cut to Thea taking a breath and holding the document high as she sums up.

Thea

". . . with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."

Cut to Liz' hand slapping down hard on Joann's table top, followed by Thea's hand, Liz' other hand, and Thea's other.

Pull back to show Joann looking at the four hands with impassive disinterest.

Thea

I said, "Our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

Liz

What're you, Jo—a pain in the ass or a Tory?

Joann takes a quick breath, slaps a hand on top of the pile, and slides the other in below. She grins ever so slightly as we zoom in on the six clasped hands and
freeze.

Afterword

When I was a smug, precocious young man of ten or twelve I had a habit of going out of my way to impress adults with the assertion that when I grew up I would be a theoretical physicist. I didn't quite know what that was, but I knew Einstein was one and whole bunches of people were impressed with him. Eventually, though, I did learn that a theoretical physicist was the first link on a chain of problem-solvers which also included something called an *experimental physicist* and another called an *applied physicist*. Essentially, the first comes up with a principle—the theory—the second proves it right or wrong through experimentation and the third applies it to practical use.

What a logical, admirable way to conduct something-or-other, I thought to myself. And I stored away that knowledge in the labyrinthine recesses of my lower cerebrum.

Until I wrote this story.

Because what we have here are three women who perform roughly similar functions. That is: Liz reads lots of science fiction, thinks a lot, eyes brimming with wonder and so forth. Thea, the engineering genius with no imagination to speak of, has the curious talent of patching together into real life whatever monsters Liz can conjure up. And Joann—the freelance investigative reporter—is the adventurer. The hard-nosed plugger with the sublimated sense of mission. The drive and guts of the group.

Assuming all this, personality traits drifted gradually to each one as functions of their respective roles on the team. Elements fell into place (a talk with a friend about holograms, a walk through the old World's Fair grounds) and so the story happened.

GREAT HEART
SILVER
TM

The Return of Greatheart Silver
or the Secret Life of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm
by Philip José Farmer
Illustrated by Tom Sutton

He's back! That ace of the skies, that champion of justice, that unemployed, hospitalized, cheated hero of the Zeppelin AZ-8—Greatheart Silver!

Such is the nature of Philip José Farmer's remarkable epic pulp hero, who, on short notice, has returned for his second crack at fame.

In Volume 1 of Weird Heroes, we discussed the possibility of the second Greatheart story being a more serious venture than the first. *Forget it*! The talent behind Kilgore Trout's *Venus on The Half Shell* has perpetrated another *coup d'humor* to excuse a phrase on his readers. "The Return of Greatheart Silver" is another head-on collision between Phil Farmer's humor and the life of our hero. Blending the flavor of the old heroic atmosphere with a contemporary plotline, Phil has turned up a new treat for his many fans.

Coming to the rescue with two new illustrations for the story is our work-weary Tom Sutton, who, having labored through a multiplicity of old pulp characters, found himself up to his neck in depicting espionage agents which Phil Farmer had designed for the story.

Editors note— My public appreciation to both Phil and Tom, who, acting as heroes themselves, stepped in to produce new material on *very* short notice when *Weird Heroes* was expanded into two books.

Author's Foreword

Greatheart Silver, our hero, was introduced in *"Showdown at Shootout."* In his first supersaga, Silver was first mate on the passenger freighter Zeppelin, the AZ-8, bound for Phoenix, Arizona. His airship was boarded and robbed by the Blimp Gang and set adrift. In the resultant crash, Silver lost his left leg. Mr. Micawber, owner of the Acme Zeppelin Company, blamed Silver for the loss of the ship. He blackballed him so that he couldn't get a job with any other airship line.

Meanwhile, Silver's financee ran off with his only valuable property, a painting of his ancestor, Long John Silver, by Copley. Fitted with a plastic electromechanical leg, owning only two pet ravens, Silver set out to vindicate himself. The first step in his longrange plan was to go to work for a private investigation agency. With his partner, an old man who was once one of the greatest fighters against crime, he went to a little Arizona town, Shootout, to trap the Blimp Gang.

Here he discovered that all the great crime fighters of the Twenties through the Forties and their great enemies, archvillains all, had gathered for a final conflict, a grand finale. Though in their late eighties and nineties, the forces of Hell and the guardians of Good wrecked the town. It was another Götterdämmerung (albeit with its comical elements). And all went out in a blaze of gory glory to whatever Valhallas awaited them.

Silver was the sole person left standing on his feet (or foot, in his case). Like Ishmael (another ancestor of Silver's, by the way), he could quote Job, "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee."

However, Micawber still hated Silver's guts.

1.

The boom of the .45 automatic pistol in the hallway deafened Greatheart Silver.

He jumped back, slamming the door. A hole appeared in the wooden panel, just where his head had been. Stooping in case more shots were fired, he reached out and locked the door.

But if they wanted him, they could easily shoot the lock out.

They might try to kill him. He was a witness, and he could easily describe them to the police. After all, he had been with them all morning.

Where could he hide, where run to? The apartment had only one exit, unless he wanted to leave via the balcony outside the French windows. The balconies of the other apartments alongside were too far away to be jumped to. The one directly below was too far down, since the balconies were staggered.

He sat down and rolled up his left pants leg. Should he take off his mechanical leg? It was fitted for just such an emergency. But the anticipated emergency was on a smaller scale. Its power would give out when he was only halfway down, which meant that he'd have a fall of five stories. No. Use it as a weapon. If they stormed in . . .

He gripped the leg where irradiated plastic and flesh met. One slight twist, and the connections between nerves and wires would break. Then, a turn of a half-circle, and the leg would be unscrewed.

If he did that, though, he'd have to go to the hospital for reconnection of the nerve-endings. That would cost considerably more than the twenty dollars in his wallet, all the cash he had. But the leg was usable even if disnerved.

Hearing no more sounds in the hallway, he decided not to uncouple his leg. He rose and went to the door and placed an ear against the wood. Silence.

They were either waiting for him to show his head again or they had fled. Judging from their situation, they would have taken off like antelopes who knew lions were in the neighborhood. It was evident they were kidnapping the young woman whose face he'd glimpsed. Her mouth was covered with a strip of white tape, and her arms were behind her, obviously tied or handcuffed. One of the men was holding a pistol to her head. Her eyes were enormous and half-glazed with terror and shock.

There had been three men and two women with her, the entire crew. Like him, they were clad in bright orange coveralls, and on their backs and fronts in big black letters were: "*Acme W-W Cleaners*."

The woman wasn't the only one shocked. The kidnappers stared paralyzed at his unexpected appearance. And he was stoned with astonishment and bewilderment.

He knew the captive. How well he knew her! He hadn't seen her for eleven years, but he recognized her instantly.

"Regina!" he cried.

And then everybody had broken loose from their stasis, as if somebody had pulled a switch cutting off a powerful binding magnetic field. One of the women jerked Regina backward. The others stepped forward, raising their weapons. (These, he decided later, must have been concealed in the cleaning equipment.)

At the same time, he saw out of the corner of his right eye a ghostly figure. It—he—was a tall one-legged man, dressed like a pirate of the Spanish Main, leaning on a crutch, a huge green parrot on his shoulder. He was semi-transparent, not quite blocking out the light green wall and the lithograph on it behind him.

The phantom swiftly drew a finger across its throat. The parrot opened its mouth, seeming to screech a warning though no sound issued from it.

"You're a little late!" Silver shouted at the wraiths. "Thanks a lot for nothing!"

The figures began fading, but he was paying them no more attention. He hadn't needed them to be told that he was in danger. He threw himself backward, slamming the door shut. And then the slugs from the pistols and the semi-automatic rifle had torn through the door. It would be the man who had a burn mark around his left ankle who had fired the rifle.

At the moment, that had seemed an irrelevant thought. What difference did it make whether the rifleman had a scar or not?

Now, he knew, though he could not say why, that it was important. His subconscious would not have intruded that thought at such a perilous moment if it had not deemed it significant.

Silver had first seen the scar on the man named Pete while the crew was traveling in the rear of the Acme panel truck. Pete, sitting across from Silver, had leaned over and pulled up his left pants leg. He had vigorously scratched the broad red area on his ankle. Then, seeing Silver's curious look, he had grinned and said, "The mark of my servitude. But I'm a free man now. Forever!"

2.

He unlocked the door as quietly as he could, listened again, and then rammed the door open with the butt of his palm. It swung out and banged against the wall. There was no response. His heart beating hard, he looked around the doorway. The hall was empty. At the end, the elevator indicator showed a car going down. It might or might not contain the gang.

He breathed in air and blew out frustration. What a hell of a mess he was in! If he told the police how he happened to witness a kidnapping, he'd have to explain then what he was doing in this apartment. And he'd be charged with breaking and entering. Justly so—from the law's point of view. His excuse that he was looking for the painting that Regina Graves had stolen from him would not be acceptable. And it would be in character for that vindictive bitch to press charges against him.

She had a perfect alibi. Her lover, her other lover, had testified that she was with him when the painting had disappeared. Since he was a detective lieutenant, assigned to the burglary division, his word had been accepted.

Why had he come here after all this time? He had known that Regina must have sold the Copley long before. It undoubtedly now hung in the locked room of some unscrupulous private collector. He'd been stupid to expect to find it here, but it was desperation that had made him stupid. Also, Regina, though she had a body that attracted men like moths to a bright light, had a one-half-watt brain. She might just be dim-witted enough to keep the Copley—if it were still unsold—in her apartment.

No time for recriminations. First, he had to notify the police. Anonymously, of course. Then he'd get the hell out. If the police intercepted him before he got out of the building, they would not, at least, have him for breaking and entering. He

couldn't deny that he'd come to work with the gang this morning. That would be enough for them to lock him up as a material witness. Especially since old Bendt Micawber would put pressure on to ensure that.

He walked across the big luxurious room toward the phone. The huge mirror on the wall showed a six-foot-four thirty-two-year-old man in orange coveralls. Across his chest in big black letters: *Acme W-W Cleaners*. W-W stood for *wall and window*. Micawber owned the company. Silver had gotten some amusement out of being hired by a firm that had him on its blacklist. But that now involved more trouble for him. He'd given the personnel manager a fake I.D.

The police would have one more reason to hold him. They'd never believe that he could only escape starvation by assuming a false identity. If he tried to tell them the truth, he'd be subjected to psychiatric tests. He'd probably be sent to the state funny farm. Who besides himself, and the conspirators, of course, would believe that Micawber was persecuting him?

"Aha! Paranoia, not to mention schizophrenia and delusions of grandeur!"

And if he reacted violently, which he was likely to do. "Aha! The padded cell for you, my boy! For your own good, of course!"

And old Bendt Micawber, smiling as he smoked a twenty-dollar cigar over a hundred-dollar brandy, would give orders that G. Silver stay locked up forever. For the good of society, of course. Which meant, in Micawber's parlance, for the good of Micawber.

Why, oh, why did Micawber hate him so? Why the excessive overreaction?

He'd blamed Silver for the loss of the one hundred fifty million dollar Zeppelin, though Silver was not its commander. Surely, firing and then blackballing Silver should have been enough. But Micawber hounded him even when Silver got jobs unconnected with Micawber's holdings. He exerted pressure, secretly, of course, and Silver was suddenly fired again—and again—with the feeblest of explanations.

Micawber was the genuine paranoiac in this situation, the man who should be in the padded cell. However, Silver was the only one to know this, and he was a penniless bum. Who'd believe him?

He looked in the mirror as he picked up the phone. No wonder he looked like a skid-row wino. He had no money to get a hair trim, to keep his thick reddish mustache unragged. His

cheeks were sunken, and his eyes were red. And the handsome hawkish features had somehow become a starving vulture's.

He punched the emergency police number. Busy. Maybe he should forget it. No. He couldn't forget about Regina's look of terror. If he hadn't known her so well, so intimately, in fact, then he might . . . no, he wouldn't. She was a human being, and he wasn't going to abandon anybody, known or unknown, in that plight. No matter what the cost to him.

He started as, simultaneously, a voice spoke in his ear and sirens screamed through the window. The police were near, which meant that somebody had called them.

"Who is this?" the policeman repeated.

Had whoever called in *seen* enough to put the cops on the trail? Or had somebody just *heard* the shooting? The police needed a good description of the criminals. And Silver might be the only one who could give the license number of the getaway vehicle. In a situation like this, quick action was vital. Possibly, the gang had already transferred from the panel truck to a car.

Another consideration. The police were going to catch him before he got out of the building. He might as well tell all—except for being in Regina's apartment.

"This is Greatheart Silver," he said. "I want to report a kidnapping."

"You're the kidnapper?"

"No, but that's about what I expected you to say."

3.

Seymour Sheester breezed into the "interview" room. As always, he was smiling. He threw his attaché case onto the table and held out his hand across it. "How ya doing, baby?"

Silver ignored the hand.

"*You're* my public defender, appointed to *me*?"

Sheester looked down at his hand and then shook hands with himself. "I get it. You've adopted the old Chinese custom, heh? It's spreading like wildfire. More sanitary that way."

He sat down. "But I notice you aren't shaking hands with yourself. What's the matter? Haven't they allowed you to wash your own hands? Police brutality . . ."

"No," Silver said. "I just remember how you handled my case when I wanted to sue Micawber. Forget it, you said. We can't possibly win, you said. Never mind justice, you said. Roll with the punches of reality, you said. So why did you accept my

case now?"

"I get paid the same whether I win or lose," Sheester said cheerfully. "So, what can I do for you, however hopeless your case might be?"

"Get me a good lawyer."

"Haw, haw! Still haven't lost your sense of humor, have you? Very admirable! Most men in your position would be thinking about hanging themselves. You got real guts, Silver, though I can't say you're very bright. But God distributes His gifts in ways too mysterious for us mortals to comprehend. The Great Lawyer prepared briefs for us before the foundations of the cosmos were laid . . . speaking of which, did you ever track down Regina?"

His big bright eyes glazed in a hot reverie for a minute.

Silver said, angrily, "I *knew* you were having an affair with her while I was your client, lying sick and desperate in the hospital! With you and the cop and Lord knows how many others. What kind of ethics are those?"

"I admit nothing," Sheester said, coming slowly out of his memories. "Anyway, my personal life has nothing to do with my professional activities. Now, we got to have something, no matter how laughable, as a defense. But the Great Legal Eagle only knows what we can use. How'd you do it, Silver? You put yourself in a situation where they got you coming and going, fore and aft, up and down, sideways.

"Maybe you can beat the kidnapping charge, I don't know. But you forged those I.D.'s. You were concealing an explosive in your plastic leg. Your fingerprints were found in Regina's apartment, so they got you on suspicion of burglary. Regina also claims her jewels are missing, and she wants you to pay for a new door and the replastering of the wall. To top it all, the twenty dollar bill in your wallet was counterfeit! They're thinking of charging you on that count!"

"Ridiculous!" Silver said indignantly. "I won the twenty in a crap game by betting the only money I had, a dollar. If I ever find that guy. . . ."

"You'll both be so old you won't recognize each other," Sheester said. "Listen, we just have to come up with something. How about permanent brain damage? Battle fatigue? It was like the siege of Stalingrad at Shootout, and what with all those explosions. . . ."

Silver saw the door swing open. Four hard-looking husky men came in. They looked around and then arranged themselves by two's on each side of the door. Another equally

tough-looking man stuck his head in the doorway.

"O.K.?"

"O.K.," one of the four said out of the corner of his mouth.

A fifth man appeared, framing himself for a moment in the oblong of the entrance. Silver reared up, glaring. Sheester jerked his head around, paled, and groaned.

"Mr. Micawber!"

4.

"Out, out, Sheester, you shyster!" blared the trumpet voice.

Sheester jumped up, grabbed his case, and slunk out muttering. His voice was low to begin with and by the time he passed Micawber his words were wholly unintelligible. Silver caught the initial ones, something about suing for public libel. Sheer cowardly bravado. He knew he stood about as much chance in court with the tycoon as a hummingbird in a typhoon.

Bendt Micawber remained in the doorway, forcing the lawyer to exit sideways, scrunched up to avoid contaminating the great one with his unclean touch.

Silver, trembling with rage, sat down. If he continued to stand, he might give Micawber the impression that it was in respect for him.

For a minute, Micawber stared at Silver without leaving the doorway. He was about five-feet-two-inches tall, rotund, baldheaded, and huge-skulled. His jowly face was streaked with broken veins. His forehead was ridiculously high, like that of the mad scientist so often depicted in the illustrations of science-fiction stories of the 1930s and in modern cartoons. His eyes were big and staring, the irises green with large yellow flecks. They looked like the eyes of a duck who had just heard the blast of a shotgun from a blind, Silver thought. His nose was huge and curved, like a flamingo's. His jaw was massive; his chin, bullet-shaped.

His mouth was peculiar. The upper lip was very full, but the lower was a thin line. The teeth were false, yet the canines were excessively long and pointed. It was rumored that Micawber had ordered them shaped so in order to frighten his opponents. Or for that matter, anyone within seeing range. This gave everybody the impression he was in the first stage of turning into a werewolf.

Full moon or not, Micawber was a wolf, though strictly of the Wall Street species. It was true that he was usually accom-

panied by a gorgeous secretary, Miss American Virgin of 1984 and American Mother of the Year nine months later. But that was strictly for show. It was no secret that Micawber's virility—and just about everything else—was channeled toward one goal. Money/power.

Everybody, and this probably included Micawber, had been surprised when his wife got pregnant. Possibly, Micawber was also indignant, even outraged, since he had divorced her a year after his only child was born. The settlement, of course, was immense. On the other hand, Micawber could use all the tax exemptions he could get.

The financier advanced. His men kept their eyes unwaveringly on Silver; their hands, in their bulging pockets.

Greatheart wanted to force the financial titan to speak first. But he couldn't control himself.

"What're you doing here?" he said. "Did you pay off the United States Supreme Court so it'd give you permission to execute me? And so save the state some money?"

Micawber halted and removed a huge green cigar from inside his coat. A bodyguard stepped forward, whipped out a knife, and slashed, cutting the tip off the cigar. Silver's eyes widened. If the display of savage precision with a knife was supposed to impress him, it had succeeded.

Another bodyguard brought out with a blur of speed a cigarette lighter, snapped it, and held it under the end of the cigar. Micawber sucked and puffed, and presently the room was thick with green, richly odorous fumes. Silver breathed in the smoke with pleasure. He hadn't been able to afford tobacco for a long time.

Micawber removed the cigar and stabbed its glowing end toward Silver.

"There's no need to smirch the great institutions of America with your baseless accusations," he bugled. "They're not all rotten, my boy, not by any means. And no, to be specific, no, I don't have the nine old men in black in my pocket. Just about everybody else, yes, but not the incorruptible justices of the highest bastion of the American system. At least, not so far."

He puffed out some more clouds, all shaped like green dragons.

"I'm here to deal with you!" he barked.

"Deal me *out*, you mean?" Silver said.

"Such cynicism! No, by the Lord Harry, I mean *with*! I don't like doing it, I confess, but I'm a realist. You have me by the short hairs, and you can twist them! But I warn you, any

twisting, and I'll see that your nose—not to mention other protuberances—is wrung off! Off, I say! Off!"

Silver wondered if the cigar was injected with a drug. He felt as if the room and all in it, including himself, were unreal. What was going on?

"I, like everybody else, at first assumed you were guilty," Micawber said. "Guilty as Satan himself and twice as deserving of eternal damnation! I never assume anything, my boy, never! Well, hardly ever. In this case, I did! So, I accuse myself of assumption in the first degree. And I plead guilty. I throw myself on the mercy of the court!"

"Me?" Silver said incredulously.

"No, *me*! And I suspend, no, in fact, cancel the sentence. Everybody's entitled to one mistake, well, almost everybody!" he added, looking hard at Silver.

"What's the point of all this?" Silver said. He thought, no wonder Micawber was so successful in his personal dealings. He threw up such a smokescreen and gas attack of verbiage that he confused everybody. By the time he did get to the point, he had his hearers reeling. They'd agree to almost anything to shut him up.

It was also no wonder that Micawber had had such a short-lived marriage and long lack of mistresses. By the time he quit talking, any potential passion in him or his *objet d'amour* would have been blown away in the storm of talk. What had happened the night his daughter had been conceived? Had Micawber suffered from laryngitis? Or had Mrs. Micawber stuffed cotton in his mouth?

"The point? Points, you mean. With a big S. A very big one. A point is that I know you're *innocent*!"

Silver could only boggle.

"And I alone know that," Micawber said. "Well, my agents do, too, but they don't count. What I don't know, what I don't say, they don't either. If they know where their bread is baked.

"And be informed and believe, Silver, that the police aren't going to know you're innocent unless you agree to my terms."

"How do you know I'm innocent?" Greatheart said. "I presume you're talking about my alleged participation in the kidnapping of Ms. Regina Lear?"

It was Micawber's turn to boggle. His eyes bugged out and rolled, and he almost quacked around the cigar rolling in his mouth.

"You really *don't* know?" he said finally. "Or are you so pig-headed, so utterly rottenly obstinate, that you can't admit to

yourself you're guilty? Or perhaps you are afraid to admit guilt because of reprisals from me?"

"I don't understand you," Silver said. "First, you say I'm innocent. Now you say I'm guilty. Of *what*, whichever the case you think it is?"

Micawber jerked his cigar out, and he shouted, "Damn it, man, don't you really know? Don't you know that *Regina Lear is my daughter*?"

5.

There is a time to be clear-headed and certain and unruffled. There is a time to be confused and bewildered and anxiety-ridden.

Today was undoubtedly his day for the latter.

"How . . . how . . . how?"

"I know you're part Indian!" Micawber shouted. "But this is ridiculous!"

"Yes, but how . . .?"

Micawber jerked his thumb at Silver and spoke to a bodyguard. "Give that man a belt."

Silver said, "Don't think you can beat me up here. This is a police station; you can't . . ."

He stopped. The guard had pulled a wide flat silvery flask from under his coat. He unscrewed the cap and held it out to Silver.

"Oh!"

The brandy fired up his circulation and warmed his empty stomach. But it didn't help to clear his head. Quite the contrary.

He set the flask on the table and said, "If she is your daughter, that explains something. But not a whole lot. For instance, when we were students at UCLA, I was a senior and she was a freshman . . ."

"I know all that," Micawber trumpeted. "So, she never told you her real name was Jill Micawber? Not a hint that she might be my child? Well, if that's true, then you didn't know what you were doing when you split up with her. You didn't, did you, know that she was pregnant? Or that she was still in love with you?"

"I swear. . . "

"I wouldn't believe you if you swore on a stack of my financial records. But then . . . O.K., my boy. Here's what happened, just in case you're as ignorant as you claim to be. You two had

a violent quarrel just before you graduated, right?"

Silver nodded so hard he could almost feel the brandy sloshing around in his skull.

"So you left immediately after the ceremony for Friedrichshafen, West Germany, where you entered the officer's academy for the Acme Zeppelin Company. My company. If I'd known then what had happened between you two, I'd have made certain you were booted out on your rear. But I didn't know.

"Jill had her stupid pride, she got it from her mother, and she said not *word one* to me. She was going to have the baby and bring it up by herself, like too many women in this crazy permissive society. But she knew my agents were watching her every move, so she left college and assumed still another name . . ."

"Why did she enter college under a fake name in the first place?" Silver said.

Micawber's face purpled.

"She didn't want people to know she was my daughter! She said people were either awed—after all, I am the richest man in the world—or else they would be trying to get something out of her. I had to go along with that. In addition, she pointed out that criminals had tried to snatch her for ransom a couple of times before. If she went incognito, that would eliminate that danger. So I gave my permission."

"I think she had another reason, too," Silver said. He regretted saying it at once. The brandy was making him indiscreet. But, what the hell. Why should he spare the old curmudgeon's feelings?

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, why did she pick the pseudonym of Regina Lear?" Silver said. "Didn't that strike you as significant?"

"So it's Irish," Micawber said. "I would've preferred a good old English name, since our family was founded by an Englishman, you know. He emigrated to Australia early in the nineteenth century and became a well-known farmer and magistrate. Very respected, even though he'd been in debtors' prison several times in London. Then one of his great-grandsons emigrated to the States, and . . ."

"Regina Lear isn't Irish," Silver said. "It's really Welsh, or ancient British. Don't you know what she was trying to tell you by adopting that name?"

"Maybe I don't want to hear it," Micawber said.

"Probably not. But if you've read Shakespeare's *King Lear*

. . ."

"There's no profit in spending time on such trash," Micawber said. "Besides, I never went to college."

"Too bad. Anyway, Regina was a daughter of King Lear. Lear abdicated his throne and gave each of his three daughters a third of the kingdom. Two of them turned out to be real stinkers. They kicked the old man out on his ear. Regina was the only one who stuck by her father. But he thought she was giving him the shaft, and he hated her. He found out too late that she was the only one who really loved him. Now Lear was a crazy old man . . ."

"Stop! That's enough!" Micawber shouted. "Silver, I need you! But if you go too far, try my patience too much, you'll regret it. Bitterly! Bitterly, even ruefully, I say! My daughter doesn't like some of the things I do—though I notice she took the money I made from my so-called evil deeds—but she loves me! And I love her! She's the only person I truly love."

"No use wasting time arguing," Silver said. "Anyway, I did write her from Germany, but I never got an answer. So I figured that it was all over, as far as she was concerned anyway."

Micawber coughed violently for a minute. He wiped his eyes with a garish violet-and-orange-striped handkerchief.

"I knew nothing of that. Not for a long while, anyway. You see, my boy, my agents were watching her, reporting her every move to me. They were supposed to keep her, ah, inviolate, as it were. They failed. You two apparently were so secretive that by the time they found out you were having an affair, you'd quarreled. And since you were going to Germany, they figured they'd just drop the matter. The truth was, they were afraid to admit they'd failed. They knew my wrath, a righteous one, would be awful."

"Wait a minute," Silver said incredulously. "You mean your men had orders to make sure she stayed a virgin?"

"Naturally! If my daughter had to get married, if she must leave me, then I wanted her to be a valuable commodity. Undamaged. I had several candidates in mind for her—if she insisted on getting married—young men whose fathers had vast holdings."

"What century were you born in?" Silver said.

"In 1925, if it's any of your business," Micawber said harshly. "You don't understand these things, a father's love, the finances involved, mergings . . . you're a penniless bum, Silver . . . no prospects at all . . ."

"Thanks to you," Greatheart said. "Look. We're wasting invaluable time. Tell me what's going on, and spare me the adjectives, the divagations."

"Divagations? What the hell's that? Very well. Briefly, and to sum it up economically, Jill lost the child. Just how, I don't care to know. I belong to the Right to Life organization. After all, the more babies, the more consumers, the more profit . . ."

"Briefly and to the point," Silver said.

"To be short, I didn't find out about all this until I suspected that my agents' reports didn't ring true. I put other men to check on them, and the whole sad, sordid, heart-wringing story came out. I won't tell you what happened to those who had betrayed their trust. I didn't kill them; after all, this is a civilized age, in some respects, that is, in many others . . ."

"You're off the course by ninety degrees."

"Ah, yes. So, to report only the essentials, I had Jill brought to me. She told me the whole thing, and she wept bitterly, bitterly, my boy, and I don't mind telling you that I too shed those pearls of woe as some poet or other . . ."

6.

This scene had taken place the day before the piracy and wrecking of the AZ-8 occurred. Now, Silver could understand why Micawber had been so irrationally vindictive. And why he had hounded him so. It was unfair, unjust, since Silver had not known anything about it. But to expect fairness and justice from Micawber was to expect the impossible.

His heart ached. He had never really gotten over losing her, especially since their quarrel, seen in retrospect, had been about a trivial issue.

Micawber knew that he wasn't involved in the kidnapping. His shadows had kept a close surveillance on Silver. Any contact by him with the gang that abducted Jill would have been detected.

It was only the wildest coincidence that he had applied for work at the Acme W-W Cleaners that morning. Or perhaps not so wild. What must have happened was this. A gang of young terrorists, NADA (not to be confused with the National Automobile Dealers' Association), had found out about Jill's new identity and location. How, nobody knew as yet. Even her father was ignorant of her whereabouts. She had quarreled with him again after their latest reconciliation and slipped away.

(Which meant that she must be very resourceful and clever.)

As Lotta Shekels (she had a sense of humor, too), she had rented an apartment on the same floor as Regina Graves'. NADA (Neo-Anarchist Decorticate Association) had kidnapped an entire crew of Acme W-W Cleaners as the first step in their plot. When the crew failed to report, the Acme personnel manager had hired the first to apply for work at the shape-up that morning. Naturally, the NADA members were at the head of the line.

But Silver had been there, too, and he was assigned to the crew. The NADA's hadn't liked it, but there was little they could do. They must have planned on getting rid of Silver later. He, however, on finding, to his delight, that Regina lived in the building to be cleaned, had sneaked away. He'd been trying to figure a way to get into the security-safe building for two days. Now, Fate or coincidence or sheer dumb luck had opened the door for him.

While he was frisking her apartment for the painting, the terrorists had seized Jill.

"O.K., so you know I'm clean," Silver said. "But why are you here? I know you too well to think you just want to apologize."

"Apologize?" Micawber said. "Why would I want to do that? Everything I've done has been for Jill's sake. Sheer unselfish self-sacrificing paternal love. I've given up hours, days even, I could have devoted to business in order to recover her.

"No, I'm here because I want to fully utilize every means to rescue my daughter. I have a thousand agents out now on her trail, a thousand, my boy. Spare no expense is my motto. Anyway, it's tax-exemptible. Though my men and the FBI and CIA (NADA is connected with foreign groups, you know) and the LA police are scouring the city, they are not enough. I need a man who's thoroughly unscrupulous, crooked to the marrow of his bones, heartless, as greedy and as clever as a fox, villainously unconventional . . ."

"I suppose that's your image of me," Silver said.

"I found out you sneaked into the Acme Security Southwest Phoenix office and reprogrammed the NYC computer," Micawber said. "You got the computer to falsify the data on you. You even arranged it so I had seemed to validate your employment. Highly admirable, my boy, and if I didn't hate you so much, I'd make you a general manager of my security outfits.

"In addition, that is, furthermore, you alone survived the

Shootout holocaust. That speaks well of your S.Q."

"But I'm mainly interested, for my daughter's sake, in your detective talents. You were trained by that old man, Phwombly, I believe he called himself. Though his real name was Ken Tallard, something like that. Anyway, he was tops in his field in the good old days, right up there with Doc Ravage and Dick Bendsome the Punisher and Richard Windworthy the Arachnid. So you have the real McCoy, an education millions couldn't buy.

"But you also have something even better. Motive. Motive! If you don't track down my daughter, you've had it, Silver! You won't be able to get a job cleaning out a monkey cage. You'll starve to death. And don't think you can always go on welfare. I got connections; I'll see to it that your records get lost time after time after time. And so on et cetera forever amen."

"You don't have to threaten me," Silver said. "I'm eager to save Jill. After all, she and I . . ."

He shut up. It would only anger her father if he heard how he felt about her.

"What about the charges? Will they be dropped?"

"Of course. If that is, and it's a colossal subjunctive, if you rescue Jill or find her so that my men can rescue her."

"You no good . . .!" Silver swallowed the rest of the invective. "In other words, if I fail, I go to the big house for a long long time."

"Till death do you part, if I have my way about it. And I will."

"What about the million dollar reward you offered?"

"That's open to everybody—except you."

"In other words, my only reward will be that the charges will be dropped."

"Exactly and precisely."

"What about reinstating me as first mate on one of your Zeps?"

"Forget it. I'd rather have a chimpanzee there."

"Could you drop the blackball, at least?"

"I'll think about it."

"Which means no," Silver said. "I'll be doing this for nothing; you'll save a million dollars if I succeed. Well, I won't quibble. Jill's life is at stake, yet you bargain like a used car dealer. You don't love her, Micawber, not really. Or else you hate me more than you love her. Okay, I have no choice. But I will need operating expenses. A couple of thousand dollars, to begin with."

"No trouble, my boy. If you get Jill back for me, it's on the house. If you don't, you owe me two thousand, which I'll have taken out of your hide if you can't pay it back."

"How could a sweet beautiful girl like Jill have been sired by a soulless double-ugly like you?" Silver said. "Are you sure she's yours?"

The veins on Micawber's forehead swelled like snakes force-fed with cyanotic milk.

"I'm warning you, Silver!"

Greatheart stood up. "Give me the money. While you've been blowing hot air, the trail's been cooling off."

7.

Showered, shaved, well-fed, and dressed in new clothes, Silver paced back and forth in his room. Though his quest seemed hopeless, he did not feel so. There was nothing like a full belly and a quart of Duggan's Dew of Kirkintilloch to generate optimism. Even the walls emanating the stale muscatel-saturated sweat of three generations, the peeling plaster, the threadbare carpet, the dead flies in the spider's web across the window, the furtive movements of many-footed antennaed creatures under the scarred bureau, did not now depress him.

Even the two ravens, Huggin and Muggin, gifts from his Sioux grandmother, looked happy now. They'd been sad-eyed, reproachful-eyed for a long time. The little food he'd been able to give them had been scrounged out of garbage cans. And sometimes he'd kept part of that back for himself. Now they were stuffed with steak, spaghetti, salad, and garlic bread, topped off by a thimbleful of Drambuie.

Silver had a clue. He'd given it to the authorities along with everything in a complete report. He'd held nothing back. Except one thing. The *significance* of the one clue. At first, he'd not revealed its importance because he had wanted something to bargain with if the charges were not dropped. After talking with—or being talked at by—Micawber, he had determined that he wouldn't part with the item. If he did, then the police or the FBI or the CIA would beat him to NADA and it would be just like Micawber to go back on his promise.

His conscience did hurt him somewhat, since Jill's life was at stake. But he salved it by telling himself that one man could accomplish what a horde could not. If any army rushed around,

scaring everybody, making a big noise, it would spook NADA. One man, working stealthily, quickly, cleverly, could find them. And would thus make sure that NADA wouldn't panic and kill Jill.

Okay. So now he was ready to venture forth. He spoke to the ravens, who sat side by side on the back of a stained and ripped-open chair. "Sorry, boys, but I can't take you with me. You'd be too conspicuous."

The ravens didn't care. They'd fallen asleep. Muggin even sounded as if he were snoring.

He turned the knob of the door. The phone rang. He swore, hesitated, then decided he'd better answer it. Maybe one of the informants whom he'd paid a handsome advance had something for him. More likely, it was from one of his wino buddies. He'd probably heard the news that Silver was flush and he wanted to borrow money.

The voice from the phone was so sultry and sexy that it had to be Micawber's personal secretary. It was.

"Mr. Silver? Bon-Bon Heisszeit speaking. Mr. Micawber told me to tell you that he got a note from the kidnappers. They want thirty million dollars for the safe return of his daughter."

Silver whistled and said, "Did it say anything about where the money should be dropped?"

"No. It said another note would be sent later. They're playing it real cool. But they did say that if Mr. Micawber doesn't call off the police and all those government agencies, they might send him one or two of Jill's ears to kind of help him do the right thing."

"He wants to call me off, too?"

"No. He says you're to keep operating. But if you, fu—, uh, mess it up, he'll mess you up. However, he says he has great faith in you."

"Thanks," Silver said. "But he's wasting his breath. Not even Micawber can force the authorities to drop the case now."

"He's talking on the phone to the U.S. attorney general now. Mr. Micawber always goes right to the top."

"Whatever he does, it's not my concern," Silver said. "I just want to be left alone so I can operate without interference or obstacles of any kind."

"The authorities promised Mr. Micawber they would cooperate fully."

Silver hung up. He turned the knob again, then hesitated once more. There was a lot of noise coming through the window from the street below. He'd better check it out first.

BEERO
REPENT THE END OF THE WORLD IS NEXT WEEK END!
CATERING

REPENT THE END OF THE WORLD IS NEXT WEEK END!
CATERING
MOVING
BEERO

MOVING

He strode to the window and rubbed away the spiderweb and the dust over the glass. The late afternoon sun shone down on the mean dingy street. Normally, it would have been occupied by a few cars passing, a few winos here and there, some women, residents of the neighborhood tenements, shopping, and a few kids playing stick ball. The only loud noise would be from the amplifier over the second-hand record shop across the street. Nobody ever purchased the advertised wares, though furtive individuals slipped in and out now and then. Everybody knew it dispensed drugs in the backroom, including the cop on the beat. But he got his share of the profits, so there was seldom a discouraging word heard from the authorities.

Now the street was jammed with cars, and horns blared and honked loudly. The sidewalks were jammed. Down at the corner a sewer manhole was open, and two men were putting up a barricade around it. Their city sanitation department truck was double-parked, contributing to the stoppage of traffic. Below him, a car was double-parked, its hood open, while two men poked around the motor with screwdrivers.

On his right, down the street, a big delivery truck was being unloaded. Two men were hauling cases of beer into the tavern opposite the truck.

A streetsweeping machine was trying to back into a parking space that was obviously too small. The driver gave up while Silver was staring at him. With the machine sticking out into the nearest lane, the driver took a cigarette break.

Passing by the tavern slowly, playing an accordion, a blind man walked slowly. His monkey passed a tin cup hopefully, but vainly, to passersby.

Two winos he'd never seen before sat on the sidewalk, their backs against the record shop front. Each had a brown paper bag and spoke now and then to the bag. Once, one addressed the other man. Silver couldn't read his lips, but his actions made it evident he was asking the other to move along.

On his left hand, a huge diesel semi was stopped halfway around the corner. It had a flat tire.

A woman was pushing a baby carriage back and forth, though why she'd pick out this crowded place for a stroll was a mystery to contemplate.

Just then, a group came around the corner to the right. One man was carrying a large TV camera, and two were carrying electronic equipment. Another carried a folding chair, presumably for the director, a tall red-faced man in a checkered shirt and riding breeches. Behind him pressed a horde,

technicians, a script girl, a man with a case that probably held makeup, two men with giant klieg lights, two girls and three men who couldn't be anything but actors, and four cops to handle the crowd for the company.

If they were hoping to make a TV commercial or shoot a scene for a movie, they were out of luck, Silver thought. Nevertheless, they looked as if they were determined to stay.

There was a picket line of six men and six women parading back and forth in front of the one-armed hash joint by the tavern. That was strange, since only two men worked in the place in one twelve-hour shift. And it was a family business, run by a man and his son. Yet all the signs bore: "NON-UNION SHOP."

And here came a Salvation Army band, drum banging, trumpets blowing, marching bravely. Only to disperse into the crowd that pressed around and among them. The musicians—if they could be called that—continued to play. But their director disappeared somewhere, presumably knocked over and walked on, and presently three different hymns filtered through the clamor to Silver.

One of the vehicles blocking traffic was a catering truck. Its operator had left it in the middle of the street. He was opening the panels on its sides now, preparing to sell coffee, sandwiches, peanuts, candy bars, and hot dogs to pedestrians or passengers alike.

Hearing a faint buzz, he looked up. There was a helicopter circling back and forth about a hundred feet above the street.

He gripped the window ledge. Yes, believe it or not, here came the Goodyear blimp. Yes, it was turning, intending to circle, no doubt, above the chopper.

And here came a troupe of Hari Krishna chanters around the corner. Shaven-headed youths, dressed in orange robes, adorned with caste marks or whatever they were, ear and nose rings, beating drums, jingling tambourines. And there they went, striking the outer edge of the crowd like a tidal wave dashing into a cliff, breaking up into orange clots.

And here came a troupe of blue-clad harness bulls, on foot since the patrol cars would have been stopped blocks away. Their mouths were open, roaring orders that couldn't be heard above the bedlam, their billies raised threateningly, but unheeded by anybody not within striking distance. Evidently some citizen, unaware of the true nature of the mob, had called in the cops to break up the jam, to avert what seemed an inevitable riot.

Greatheart ground his teeth with rage and frustration. Well, maybe he could get out the back way, though he doubted it. He left the room and went down the hallway, passing three men in coveralls. They glanced furtively at him and then went back to their work, which seemed to be repairing the switchbox at the end of the hall. This controlled the lights on the third floor. Yet, the naked bulbs in the peeling ceiling were blazing brightly.

Though he knew it was useless, he crawled through the window at the hallway's end and onto the fire escape. He looked down. Yes, just as he had thought. There was a score of men in coveralls in the courtyard, all busy carrying out the trash and garbage. In fact, there were so many that they had cleaned up the yard and now were forced to bring the refuse back so they'd have an excuse to be present.

The bedlam of blaring horns from the nearby freeway attracted his attention. He looked through the open part of the U-shaped courtyard and down onto the freeway. The nearest lanes, the southward-going, were filled with stalled cars. Undoubtedly, the freezing of traffic on the street outside had spread around the neighborhood. How far, he could not determine. But the off-ramp was two blocks south of the hotel, and the stopping of cars on it had resulted in halting traffic for miles down the freeway.

Silver snorted with disgust and returned to his room. He called Ms. Heisszeit back (Micawber having given him his telephone number).

"I want to speak to your boss. Right now!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Silver. Mr. Micawber is still on the line. He's talking to the President now. I mean, the President of the United States."

"Very impressive,!" Silver snarled. "Look, you tell him he lied to me. He said he'd called off everybody. I was to have a free hand, and I sure as hell wasn't to be shadowed. You tell him I can't even get out of my hotel, there are so many agents out there!"

Something crashed below, and the hotel shook. Silver said, "Just a minute," and he strode to the window and looked out. He whistled. The pressure of the bodies in the street had been so great that all the street-level doors had suddenly burst in. And the plate-glass windows of the tavern, grocery store, and record shop had shattered, too. The lobby of his hotel must be packed with the people who'd been forced into it.

Yet, the discharge of pressure had not resulted in thinning out the population of the street. A horde had flowed in to fill the

vacuum. These must have come from around the corner. Silver couldn't distinguish many of them, but he did make out a Good Humor man, three men in the uniforms of ambulance attendants, a TV news crew holding their equipment above their heads, attempting to keep it from being smashed, a white-robed man carrying a sign: "REPENT! THE END OF THE WORLD IS NEXT WEEK-END!," and a man on a horse. The latter (the man, not the horse) was in the uniform of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. On seeing him, Silver shook his head. The man must be advertising some movie. Surely the northern neighbor of the U.S. couldn't have sent down somebody to keep an eye on him.

He returned to the phone. Micawber's voice screeched in his ear. "What in thunderation is going on, Silver? I thought you'd be on your way by now?"

Silver explained as best he could. There was a silence—except for Micawber's heavy breathing. Then the tycoon said, "I'll call the governor and get him to send down the National Guard. But it'll take hours to clean up that mess. There's a helicopter watching you, too, you say? Very well. I'll see to it that it lands on the roof of your hotel and drops you off wherever you want it to. And then, my boy, I'll see to it that heads roll! Roll, I say! You see now why I complain so bitterly about government interference. Private enterprise is the only . . ."

"Get the chopper down here," Silver said, and he hung up.

8.

First, it was necessary to clear the hotel roof of forty or so people. Silver roared at the crowd to get out—at once. They seemed reluctant, some even giving him the finger, until he used the magic name of Micawber. Then, slowly, casting vindictive glances, muttering, they strolled to the exit.

A number of times a fit of coughing interrupted Silver. Four separate crews had been tarring the roof, poisoning the air with the heavy fumes, getting in each other's way. There were at least thirty sunbathers, men and women on folding chairs or blankets. These were complaining about the heat and gases from the tar between racking coughs. When their sandals got stuck in the still soft tar, they bitched to the crews. The "workers" shrugged their shoulders and replied that they were only doing their duty. Some suggested that the complainers file

their protests at the appropriate agency—in triplicate, of course. Others suggested that a leap off the roof would make everybody happy.

Finally, the roof was vacant except for Silver and a walkie-talkie someone had forgotten.

The chopper landed. Silver, swearing at the sticky stuff on his shoes, climbed in. "Any place in North Hollywood is all right," he said to the pilot. "But don't you dare to tell anybody where I am. If you do, Bendt Micawber will have you fired and then blackballed. You'll never fly a chopper again."

The helicopter swung toward the northwest. The pilot jerked a thumb behind him. "O.K. But I can't help it if they see where I put you down."

Silver looked behind him. The Goodyear blimp was following them.

"Who's in it?"

"Treasury agents. They rented the blimp a few minutes before my outfit got to the field. My boss was really teed-off."

Silver didn't comment. He figured that the U.S. Treasury was on his tail not because of the kidnapping but due to its interest in the counterfeit money found in his wallet.

A few minutes later, he got out on a vacant lot near a big new shopping mall. The chopper disappeared, but the blimp cruised in a circle above him. Silver walked to the mall and went into a men's clothing store. Ten minutes later, he emerged in the garish neck-ruffed, knee-ruffed garments so popular this year. He was wearing a huge white plumed hat with a floppy wide brim.

Restraining himself from looking upward (the blimp personnel must be scanning the area with high-power binoculars), he hailed a taxi.

"The House of Masterpieces."

"You mean the porno publishing outfit?" the taxi driver said. "Listen, it ain't any of my business, but if you're a writer looking for a job, forget it. They're going out of business, from what I hear. Besides, I heard about their working conditions. Enough to raise the hairs on the back of your neck."

"You're right. It isn't any of your business," Silver said.

He got out at 34½ Wonmissin Street and entered the triangular doorway of House of Masterpieces. The receptionist was a disappointment. He'd anticipated someone who'd reflect the spirit of the establishment. A young busty woman with a low décolletage and exuding an aphrodisiacal perfume. Instead, he found a seventy-year-old woman who looked and dressed like a maiden aunt circa 1940. She, it turned out, was Mrs.

Roger Beaver, the wife of the publisher.

"You sure you ain't a bill collector?" she said harshly.

"I'm what my card says," Silver said. "*Wellington Q. Hackman, Non-Fiction Author*. I'm doing a book on the specifically erotic industry. *The Last Bastion of Freedom*."

"The last what?"

"Bastion. I'd like to interview the publisher and the president, if I may."

"They're one and the same," Mrs. Beaver said. "He's also the office boy and the janitor. Things ain't been too good the last coupla years. We're having a hell of a time competing with that computer."

"What computer?"

"Let my husband explain," she said. She punched a button. "He'll be along in a minute."

Silver whiled away the time by looking over the wares displayed on the reception room shelves. Apparently, the company had several lines: Brandiron House, Broad Education Library, Ecksex House, all paperbacks. There was one hardback reprint line: Grossessen & Downlap, Inc., however.

Silver picked up one by Lorenzo Dummox, *Lust Hounds of Slaverland*, and leafed through it. He couldn't say much for the prose, but the illustrations were intriguing.

A door opened, and a short, fat, bald man hustled into the room. He was carrying a scrub brush, a can of Vanish, and a harried expression. Mrs. Beaver introduced her husband; Silver told his story; Mr. Beaver was gratified.

"Maybe you can enlighten the public," he said. "After all, we are doing a public service, you know. And we could certainly use the publicity. I don't know, though. By the time your book comes out we'll probably be out of business."

"Why's that?" Silver said, following Beaver through a hall and then stopping before an iron door secured with a huge steel lock. Beaver pulled a huge key out of his pocket and unlocked the door. "You first, Mr. Hackman. I'm going broke on account of I ain't got enough money to keep up with the times. The Fokker D-LXIX Press has cornered the market, you know."

Silver stepped in, saying, "No, I don't know."

The room was vast, as big as a dance hall. A broad aisle ran straight from the door to a platform at the other end. On either side of the aisle were rows of desks, six in each, forty rows in all.

"This was once a hive of industriousness," Beaver said. "But, as you see, we only have a few writers now. We had to let many

of them go; some died; some went nuts. As they disappeared, one by one, we sold their typewriters. Actually, that's what kept us going for a long time, selling the typewriters."

There were three rows at the far end occupied by men and several women. They typed away feverishly, pausing only to insert new paper and carbon or to drink coffee. A squat shaven-headed man, wearing only a leather apron, stalked up and down the aisle, shouting at the writers. Now and then his long whip cracked out, coming close but never touching the bare skins of the persons behind the machines.

"Yes, I know, it looks brutal," Beaver said in answer to Silver's raised eyebrows. "But they are a lazy lot, and they are *such* swine. Besides, the faster they work, the closer they are to buying their freedom. It's for their own good."

Silver followed Beaver down the aisle. He noticed that the leg of each writer had attached to it a chain and a leg iron.

"Yes," Beaver said. "They're shackled. It has to be done. Otherwise, they'd just disappear, drop out of sight. And they'd never never pay us back for the advances on their salary. They have no regard for the sanctity of contracts, you know."

Silver didn't comment. He knew that publishers of this type of literature paid pitifully little and kept all the reprint and movie rights. He hadn't known about this version of the old coal-mine company store. But he wasn't interested in the economics of the business. He only wanted some information.

Beaver nodded at the platform. "Used to have a man there beating a drum," he said. "Got the idea from the movie, *Ben Hur*. But I had to let him go, couldn't afford him after he joined the musicians' union."

They turned right between the rear row of desks and the platform and entered a door. After passing a large room filled with three-tiered bunk beds, all sporting chains and leg irons and exhaling the effluvia of unwashed bodies and despair, they went into Beaver's office. Its walls were decorated with covers from paperback books. *I Was Frocked!: The True Tale of a Nun. While Moses Was Up the Mountain: Extracted from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Evening Shape-Up*, by Mrs. Brigham Young. *Galilee Gal*, by Mary Magdalene, translated from the Aramaic. *Shiva Chivaree*, by Rambam Thankoomam. *Voodoo Votary*. And so on.

Beaver filled two glasses with a vile-smelling bourbon and handed one to Silver. "That religious line went over great for a while. But some fanatical cult—Temple of the Prince of Peace and Divine Love, I think it was called—threatened to bomb us

if we didn't drop the line. So we did. Too bad. It was a great money-maker."

Silver said, "Too bad." He set the whiskey down without tasting it. "Listen. My name isn't Hackman. I gave you a false I.D. so I could get in here. No, I'm not a cop. I'm a private detective. Listen."

Beaver became less agitated as Silver explained what he was after. He looked at the pencil sketch Silver had made, and he said, "Sure. I remember him. Most porno writers are faceless, the miserable wretches. And their personalities are interchangeable. But this guy, Peter Stamboek, was the best writer in my stable. He was a genius; that is, he made lots of money for me.

"He took *Bomba the Jungle Boy*, it fell into public domain, you know. And he wrote, rewrote, I mean, an entire series based on it. First, he wrote a straight heterosexual, *Bomba and His Aztec Princess Feel the Pyramid Move*."

"Aztec?" Silver said. "Bomba operated in South America, didn't he? The Aztecs were in Mexico."

"Yeah? Well, our readers wouldn't know the difference. Anyway, it took place on Easter Island. All those giant stone heads, you know. You shoulda read the scene where this Aztec medicine man brings a stone head to life, and it goes after the princess with . . . well, never mind.

"Anyway, Pete took that book and rewrote it as *Bomba and the Jungle Boys*. That got rave letters from the gay crowd. Then he rewrote it for the lesbians as *Bomba Meets the Amazons*. The sequel to that was *Bomba and the Passionate Panther*. That really rocked the bestialists. Then he put out *Bomba and the Shoes of the Inca Princess*. The fetishists went wild over that one. Before he took off, he'd written fifty Bombas, not one a bomb.

"The beauty of it was the speed with which he could rap them out. He'd just change the names of the characters and locations, change the sexes, rewrite some passages here and there to adapt it to the theme, twist some dialog here and there, change the title, and presto! change-o! he had another book.

"In the end he was putting out a book a day, each essentially the original book, you understand, with maybe only a few thousand words changed. Man, I tell you . . ."

"That's interesting but irrelevant to my purpose," Silver said. "You say he took off? You mean he escaped?"

"Yeah, the ungrateful wretch. He slipped his leg iron one night, how I don't know. I won't tell what he did to his

typewriter, but it took my wife two days to clean it up. Anyway, I found out he'd gone to work for the Fokker D-LXIX Press. Micawber had just bought it up . . ."

"Micawber!"

"Sure. The Fokker Press is a subsidiary of the Acme Zeppelin Company. Anyway, Pete only worked for it for a short time. He was hired to help program the computer that writes all Fokker's stuff. What happened to him after that, I don't know."

"Thanks," Silver said, thinking that the Fokker Press would be his next step. "I'll say goodby now."

But Beaver wouldn't let him go. He took four books from the shelf behind him and handed one to Silver.

"These are Fokker books. I got some because I wanted to study them. I wanted to find out what makes them so special. You see, it ain't just quantity that's enabled Fokker to run the rest of us out of business. It's also quality. Every one of their new books sells like wildfire. And they go into many reprints. People that wouldn't be caught dead reading porno are buying them. Under the counter, of course. And the big critics are giving them rave notices. All of a sudden, Fokker porno is popular.

"I don't understand it. I've read some of them, and when I read them I think they're great. Real classics. Not just in my field, you understand. Classics that stand up to Tolstoy and Flaubert and Hemingway. Of course, I ain't never read those guys, but that's what the critics are saying.

"But I just don't understand it. The writing is about what you'd expect from a computer. The spelling and grammar are correct, and you sure don't get that from the human writers in this business. So it must be the excellence of the prose. But when I run the passages over in my mind, they don't sound like nothing special. The same old crap in everybody's books

"Then I read them again, and I'm enthralled, fascinated, spellbound. It's the greatest stuff I ever read. I'd say it's orgasmic. Only don't tell my wife I said that."

Silver put the book on the desk and said, "I don't have time. I have to get . . ."

He stopped. A figure had formed itself out of the air, a semi-transparent man in late eighteenth-century clothes and a wig. It stood in the corner behind Beaver, who thus couldn't see it. Not that it made any difference. Silver was the only one who ever saw such wraiths.

The man was handsome, intelligent-looking, and of aristocratic bearing. He pointed a finger at the book on the

desk, nodded, and then faded slowly away.

Silver looked around. The appearance of such figures had always indicated an immediate danger somewhere in the neighborhood for him. The apparitions of Long John Silver, of his grandmother, White Spots, and of Sally Hemings, another remote ancestor, had warned him a number of times that he was in grave peril.

But how could this situation threaten him? Beaver was standing there, blinking at him, apparently wondering what was wrong with him. He'd never seen Silver before. He'd have no reason to attack him. Had somebody who was after him, for some reason or another, entered the building? Was he on his way now to kill him?

Perhaps the fact that this particular figure had materialized meant that this situation was different from past ones.

Though he'd never seen the man in the flesh or as phantom, he recognized him. He was Thomas Jefferson, whose portraits he'd often viewed. Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), third president of the United States, statesman, planter, inventor, co-formulator of the Declaration of Independence. And Silver's ancestor.

The descent came through Sally Hemings, the quadroon half-sister of Jefferson's wife. After Mrs. Jefferson had died, Thomas had taken Sally as his mistress. She had borne octoroons, and their progeny in the succeeding generations had become white or black.

Sally had appeared several times before when Silver needed a warning. But this was the first time for Thomas.

Why this time?

He had pointed at the book. Was this because he was a man of high intellectual attainments, and he would naturally be associated with a book? Perhaps he was not indicating danger. He merely wanted to urge Silver not to ignore the book.

Silver decided he should take his advice.

It wasn't superstition that made him change his mind. He did not believe that the phenomena, the "visitations," were actually the spirits of his ancestors. He had long ago rationalized that they were exteriorizations of his subconscious thoughts. He had a peculiar mechanism down there, in the cerebellum, that acted like radar. It picked up things which his conscious mind missed. It scanned the gestalt, the totality of a situation, and signaled to him by means of the "phantoms."

Maybe he did have some sort of ESP. He didn't know and had no way of finding out. All he could do was to react to his in-

ner workings.

The paperback had a garish cover which showed a nude nubile girl running across a meadow. Behind her, obviously out to horn her, was a huge black bull. In the background was a red barn and a farmhouse.

"*The Secret Life of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*," Beaver said. "It's one of the many 'secret lives' Fokker publishes. They got a whole slew of them. Fokker calls them *euphoric classics*."

He snorted. "A high-class name for a ripoff! But they pay off, man, how they pay off! Let me show you why I want you to look at it."

He took the book back, opened it, and handed it to Silver.

"Feel along the outer edge of the page. Notice a very slight thickening? Every page, and the cover too, has that extra thickness. Why? I asked myself. So I took some copies to a friend of mine, a scientist, and he looked at it under the microscope. He also analyzed it chemically. And do you know what he found?"

Silver shook his head.

"It's a spray-on microminiature circuit! Made out of selenium and other elements!"

"What?" Silver said. Then, "But why?"

"I wish I knew," Beaver said. "I just found out, you know, and I've been racking my brains ever since trying to figure it out. It has to be an expensive process, yet his books are sold as cheap as mine. So there's something sinister about it, something sneaky Micawber has up his sleeve. It's something illegal, too, you can bet on that!"

"I'll tell you what," Silver said slowly. "You keep this to yourself. I don't have time to investigate it now. But when this is over, I'll look into it for you."

"I can't pay anything," Beaver said. "As you can see, I'm going down and under."

"I'll do it for nothing," Silver said. "Only, don't let a word of this out. Micawber's a dangerous man."

Beaver turned pale. "You telling me! That's why I've been so cautious! I only told you because I heard about what you did at Shootout, and I know you're a tough hombre, mucho macho. And you hate Micawber's guts, too. So, if you can find out what's going on, maybe, just maybe, we could get Micawber over a barrel!"

His face had regained its normal liverish color, and he was rubbing his hands. Silver could almost see his eyes spinning, almost hear the click, click, click as they stopped, almost see

the three cherries in a row.

"Millions!" Beaver whispered gleefully. "Millions!"

"Or cement overshoes in Davy Jones' locker," Silver said. He looked down at the page and read a line. Wow! Wow! Wow!

Suddenly, the book was torn from his hands, and, wide-eyed, panting, he emerged from his trance.

"Do you know how long you've been reading, turning over one page after another?" Beaver shouted.

"Turning the pages?"

"Yes, turning the pages. You've read a quarter of the book!"

Silver looked at the wall-clock. "Oh, my God! A whole hour!"

"Now you see what I mean?"

"I've been wasting time with that trash!" Silver cried. "And Jill . . . listen, I got to go! Call me a taxi, will you?"

"Sure," Beaver said. "But ain't that something? That book, I mean."

Silver shook his head to clear it, and he said, "Yeah! But I have to be on my way. See you later, Beaver. Remember, keep this just between us."

"Yeah. Between you and me and a glorious future."

9.

"Hey, mister, we're here," the cabbie said.

Silver looked up. "What? What?"

"That must be some book, mister," the driver said. "I could hear you panting through the glass."

Silver got out and handed the grinning cabbie his fare plus tip. "Here. You take the book, too."

The cabbie shook his head. "No, thanks, mister. My wife's hung up on them euphonic classics or whatever they're called. They really charge her up, so I ain't complaining. But they're not for me. I don't read nothing but the racing forms."

Silver slipped the book into his coat pocket and went into the phone booth outside the Fokker D-LXIX Press building. He punched Micawber's number. Two minutes passed while the busy signal beeped, then two more before Micawber answered.

"Yes, Silver, what is it?"

"Heard any more from the kidnappers?"

A string of invectives ripped from the phone. Finally, after a series of snorts and choking sounds—like a bull buffalo drowning in quicksand—Micawber said, "Yes, I heard! They want

me to deposit thirty million in a coded account in a bank in Minerva! You know where Minerva is, don't you?"

"I read the papers," Silver said. Minerva was a new republic founded on a small island in the south Indian Ocean. It had no extradition treaty with anyone, and its banks were replacing Switzerland's as an untouchable repository for clandestine funds.

"It's a foolproof scheme!" Micawber snarled. "Or so they think, anyway! I deposit the money and airmail the coded book to Minerva. As soon as their accomplice in Minerva reports that the deal is validated, they'll release Jill! But they don't know me if they expect to get away with that! If they think they'll be safe, lolling around in Minerva on my hard-earned money, they're wrong! Dead wrong! I'll find out who they are, and . . ."

"How long is this transaction going to take?" Silver said.

"About six days. Then they'll release Jill somewhere in this area."

"Let's hope they keep their word," Silver said grimly.

"And how much progress have you made? Where are you?" Micawber bellowed.

Silver hung up. A minute later, he was in the splendidly furnished lobby of the building, presenting his card to the splendidly furnished receptionist.

"Ah, Mr. Tulkinghorn, attorney-at-law? I'll see if Mr. Starling isn't too busy. Ordinarily, the personnel manager would be the one to see, but we don't have one any more. Mr. Starling takes care of all executive functions since we started using the computer."

Silver waited patiently, eyeing the receptionist, wondering if she was one of the "executive functions" Mr. Starling had under his jurisdiction.

A minute later, a door opened behind her. A sharp sallow-skinned ferrety face appeared. It smiled, exposing crooked teeth. Silver recognized him. Rade Starling had been the producer-director-writer of a once famous TV series: *Weird Clime*. His face, such as it was, had been familiar to millions, since he had introduced each show.

Unfortunately, Starling had contracted to write all the shows himself. Finding himself unable to do this, he had plagiarized at least a score of stories and presented them as his own works. Also unfortunately, ten of those ripped-off were *Weird Clime* fans. Righteously outraged, they overwhelmed Starling and Taurus-Magnum Production with suits. Though Hollywood

had a long history of tolerating plagiarism, it could not forgive getting caught. Not on such a large scale, anyway.

Starling lost the series and was blackballed in the industry. His fortunes sank lower and lower, hitting bottom when he became manager of a porno firm. But he certainly looked prosperous enough now.

He advanced and shook Silver's hand vigorously in a weak grip. "What can I do for you, Mr. Tulkinghorn?"

Silver explained. Starling frowned. "Well, yes, I remember Pete Stamboek. But he hasn't been in our employ for a long time. We got rid of all our writers when we put in DRECC."

"DRECC?"

"Digital Rewrite Euphoric Classics Computer."

"It's urgent, vital, in fact, that I track down Mr. Stamboek," Silver said. "An uncle, a very wealthy one, died and left him a large sum of money. From what I've learned about Stamboek, he would be in need indeed. You would be performing an act of charity, of benevolence, in fact, if you would allow me to see your records.

"Even if, as you say, he left no forwarding address, his records might contain some clues which would enable me to trace him."

"What would your fee be?" Starling said, smiling lopsidedly.

"There's no need to be cynical, Mr. Starling."

"Sorry," Starling said. "I worked in the movie industry, you know."

"Apology accepted. May I say, Mr. Starling, that I thought your series was the work of a genius."

Starling melted. "Well, thank you. Perhaps there would be nothing wrong in showing you the files. They're supposed to be confidential, but this case is urgent, as you say. Step in, Mr. Tulkinghorn, and I'll see what I can do for you. While we're at it, I'll show you the resident genius of the place. We're quite proud of him, you know."

They entered a vast high-ceilinged room, a contrast of brooding shadows and squares and cones of light. The ceiling was upside-down V-shaped, adding to the cathedral effect. At the far end, illuminated by lamps placed in the floor around its base, towered a cylindrical ball-topped structure. The shaft was bluish-white; the onion-shaped ball, a dark red. About five feet from the floor were two round glassy ports, or CRT displays, flashing with pinpoints of bright lights. Below these "eyes" was a triangular opening, the "mouth."

An attendant, technician, rather, shuffled around the vast

computer in bare feet. He was shaven-headed and clad in very loose yellow coveralls.

Silver and Starling advanced in the hush. When they were within a few feet of the machine, Starling halted. He spoke softly. "Behold! DRECC!"

"Very impressive," Silver said, almost whispering. "Tell me. How does this . . . this thing . . . work?"

Starling spoke to the technician. "Bons, initiate the gentleman."

Bons bowed and then opened a panel downward, revealing a control panel. He punched a button, and the lights in the ports changed configuration.

"He's stopping the present cycle," Starling said. "After he's shown you how it operates, exteriorly, of course—we can't display the mystery of its inner workings—he'll reset it, and the suspended cycle will resume."

"You really don't have to go to all that trouble for me," Silver murmured. He was interested, but he did not want to be diverted from his quest.

"No trouble at all."

Bons padded to the nearest wall, pressed a button which was almost invisible in the shadows, and a section of wall slid sideways. He reached in and removed a book, pressed the button, and the wall closed. Starling took the book from Bons and showed it to Silver.

"*Glinda of Oz*, by Frank Baum." He handed it back to the attendant. "Bons, epiphanize it."

Bons stabbed a few buttons, turned a few dials, closed the panel, and dropped the book into the triangular hole. Starling looked at his wrist watch. "Sixty seconds at a maximum."

Forty seconds later, a bell chimed within the opening. A book appeared within the shadowy recess. Starling removed it and handed it to Silver.

The dust jacket was bright with colors, mostly yellow and greens. In the background was a city, emerald-green, walled, towered. In the foreground was a fat elderly man, his clothing torn, riding a galloping sawhorse. Both had a desperate expression, generated by a desire to escape the desire of the woman in hot pursuit of them. She was tall and beautiful, wearing only a crown and a flimsy transparent robe. Her physique reminded Silver of Starling's receptionist. He would have bet money that she had modeled for the illustration.

Silver read aloud: "*The Secret Life of Glinda of Oz, or The Good Witch Goes Bad*. By Anonymous."

In small letters along the bottom was: A Euphoric Classic, The Fokker D-LXIX Press.

Silver riffled through the pages, noting that the outer edges were thicker than the inner. He was careful not to keep his thumb on any page very long, and he avoided reading any of the text.

"Magnificent, isn't it?" Starling said. "What hath DRECC wrought? Well, to put it in basics, another best seller, another two million dollar profit."

Silver handed the book back and pointed at the attendant. "If it only takes sixty seconds to rewrite and illustrate and print a book, why did you bother to interrupt the cycle of the previous book?"

"Oh. Well, that cycle takes a little longer. We're running through the entire Tarzan corpus, all twenty-four books at once."

The bell chimed, and Bons, at a gesture from Starling, handed him a book. "Volume 1," Starling said. "The first of an assured triumph. *The Secret Life of Jane, or Getting High in the Tree-House.*"

"Very impressive," Silver said. "But I really would like to see Stamboek's files."

"Of course. It will just . . ."

Starling paused. A loud buzzing was coming from somewhere. Starling said, "Excuse me," and walked to the wall. He opened a panel, revealing an intercom box. He spoke into it for a moment in a voice too low for Silver to hear. Once, Starling looked up at Silver. Then, after lowering the panel, he walked back. "I have an urgent call. But I'll conduct you to the files first."

Silver followed him to the southeast corner and through a deltoid, fur-trimmed doorway. They went through a narrow hall and then turned left. The room was large and half-filled with boxes and cartons. "Books ready to be shipped out," Starling said.

The room was used for more than that, however. On his left Silver saw a metal cube extending from the wall. This was about twelve feet high and apparently led into the computer through the wall. Probably, he thought, it provided access to the circuits in case of malfunction. Its door was closed.

No, he was at least partly wrong. Starling stopped before it, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked it. He turned the knob and swung the door open, saying, "After you, sir."

"Are the files in there?" Silver said.

And then he saw, standing beyond Starling, by the corner of the cube, a thickening of the air, a swirling, a swift clotting. And suddenly, semi-transparent, his grandmother was standing there, the long straight white hair, the dark wrinkled face, the checked calico dress falling to the ankles, the blanket over her shoulders, the buckskin boots. She pointed at Starling and then beyond Silver and then drew her finger across her throat.

Silver came out of his paralysis and whirled.

Too late.

The attendant was bringing down the butt end of a huge automatic pistol.

10.

He awoke on his back on a hard metal floor. The top of his head hurt. He would have been surprised if it hadn't. The back of his head was on a soft lap, and tears were falling on his face.

"Jill!" he said.

"Thank God you're all right," she said. "But . . . how . . . why . . . are you here?"

"That's a long story," he said. He turned his head, wincing, and looked around. The cube looked as bleak and bare from the inside as from the outside. It was, however, furnished with a chemical toilet, a water cooler, a washbowl on a metal stand, a roll of paper towels, a roll of toilet paper, and a pile of blankets.

He rolled off her lap, groaning, and got to his feet. Though he knew the door would be locked, he tried it. Yanking on the knob drove pain through his skull.

"Did they frisk me?"

Jill was on her feet and wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. Even with a sorrowful expression and no makeup, she looked beautiful. A pang of longing and regret for all the lost years shot through his heart. Unfortunately, the abrupt rise in blood pressure made his head hurt even more abominably.

"They took your watch, wallet, and pocketknife," she said. "Oh, Greatheart, it's been so long!"

She needed holding, and he didn't mind some himself, so he held her for a while and kissed the top of her head. Jill sobbed out her story, most of which he already knew. She remembered nothing between being put in the panel truck and waking up here. One of the men had jabbed a needle into her arm, and she had become unconscious immediately.

He told her what had happened to him since they'd parted at

UCLA. It took a long time, but while he was doing it he looked around. He hadn't been altogether wrong about this place. One wall did hold a panel which could be removed so the troubleshooters could get into the computer. It was secured by six large Phillips-head screws.

Jill said, "Do you really think they'll let me loose after Daddy pays the ransom?"

"I hope so," he said. "But more's going on in this deal than appears on the surface. What, I don't know. But that spray-on circuit on the books has something to do with this. Your father's up to no good, as usual . . ."

"Greatheart!" she said. "You can't mean that he's in on the kidnapping? That doesn't make sense!"

"No, I mean that Starling, a genuine Hollywood rip-off artist if ever there was one, is probably after more than just thirty million dollars. He's shrewd, a real coyote, and he must realize the potential of this, ah, euphoric circuit on the books."

Laughter burst out of a wall, maniacal laughter that would have done credit to the Shadow of the old radio show.

Silver leaped, saying, "What the?" and then he groaned. The sudden violent movement had shot pain through his head. It was comparable to the pain felt by a hemorrhoidac sitting down on a tack.

"You just signed your death warrant, you fool!" Starling's voice said. "Yours and that of Micawber's daughter, too! I can't let you go now. You'd spill the whole thing, and it'd be ruined! Ruined!"

Silver bit down on his tongue in an agony of self-reproach, yelped with the pain, and then swore. Somewhere in this cell was a voice transceiver. He should have checked for bugs before he said a word.

"Yes, you're right, you dumbhead! Old Rade Starling has more up his sleeve than thirty million dollars, though that isn't to be sneezed at! It is, however, just something to prime the pump. I'll use the ransom to make a hundred times thirty million dollars. But making money isn't primarily what I'm after. I want power, power such as few men have ever had, maybe no one ever had before.

"And I'll have it. Once I'm in Minerva, I'll start my campaigns, and I'll win them all. I'll buy up a publishing house in the U.S. first. It won't make any difference what kind of fiction it prints. Its readers will get hooked on its books because the euphoric circuit will ensure it. With the profits from that, I'll buy more publishing outfits. And then local TV stations and

newspapers. And then I'll take over the national TV channels and cable TV.

"You see, the circuit strips can be used in radio and TV sets, too. All it takes is a much larger circuit; actual physical contact between the circuit and the subject isn't necessary with a large circuit. Its magnetic field can be extended to a range limited only by the power available.

"And then, ah, then, I'll back my candidates for office on the national, state, and local level. One by one until I've got the whole country in my fist. Why, the circuits can even be sprayed on political pamphlets, you know! And their readers will become hooked on the pamphlets themselves but will associate the euphoria with the candidates praised by the pamphlets."

"He's mad, mad!" Jill whispered.

"Which doesn't mean that he won't succeed," Silver said.

"Eventually, I'll have enough power to ruin Micawber! By the time he finds out what I'm doing, it'll be too late for him! I'll expose his nefarious activities . . ."

"He's talking about *nefarious*," Jill said indignantly. "He's the most nefarious person that ever lived!"

"He'd like to be, yes," Silver said. "But he's just dreaming. So far."

"And then," Starling screamed, "I'll buy up the whole Hollywood industry! And I'll fire those hyenas, fire them, hound them, break them. They'll regret having booted me out, they'll . . ."

Starling raved on and on. Silver whispered to Jill, "That's the whole thing. Revenge on Hollywood. The rest is just gilding, or afterthought."

He walked around, turning this way and that, until he had located the source of the voice. Yes, just as he had first thought but had not believed.

The voice was coming from the chemical toilet.

Well, that was appropriate enough.

He closed the lid, and the volume diminished.

"I don't think he can see us," Silver said. "We'll find out quickly enough."

He sat down on the lid and rolled up his left pants leg. Jill said, "What are you doing?"

Silver held his finger to his lips and then disconnected the neural-wire endings and unscrewed his leg. Holding the leg in one hand, he rose on the living leg in a sudden movement which practice had perfected, and he hopped unipedally to the door. Balancing himself, he opened a small section in the mechanical

leg. A tiny control panel with switches and pushbuttons nestled in a recess.

He gestured with one hand for Jill to come to him. When she was at his side, he said, "Get behind me and balance me. And when I give the word, shove against me as hard as you can."

He removed the shoe from the plastic foot, and then turned a tiny slot on the bottom of the foot. After maneuvering the foot so that the exposed hole was aligned with the keyhole, he leaned forward, pressing the leg against the door..

"Okay, push hard," he said. "This has a hell of a kick."

He flicked a switch. Immediately, a needle-thin jet of flame roared out of the hole. Smoke rolled out, causing them to cough. Jill was so surprised that she almost jumped back. Silver started to go backward. He cried out, "Push, Jill, push!"

She threw her shoulder against his back and strained. The vibrations from the leg rippled through Silver and shook her. The leg oscillated like an air hammer, but Silver, sweat running from his face, staining his shirt, kept the flame against the hole.

Just as Jill thought that she could hold no longer, could feel herself and Silver being moved backward no matter how they resisted, Silver flicked the switch. The roar and the bright light died away.

Starling screamed, "What the hell is going on in there? What're you doing? Silver, I demand that you tell me!"

Silver ignored him. Jill, looking around him, saw that the lock was melted shut.

"Oh," she said, "I thought you were cutting it out."

"I could have," he said. "But we'd never make it out that way. They'll be here soon enough . . ."

He stopped. Somebody was hammering on the door; somebody else was cursing.

"Go get the acetylene torch!"

"That's what I was afraid of," Silver said. "O.K. Phase Two now. Pray that we have enough time."

Jill helping him, he hobbled to the opposite wall. Opening another section of the leg, he removed a screwdriver handle. Then, a quarter-inch Phillips-head screwdriver shaft.

"What all do you have in there?" Jill said.

"You'd be surprised. Normally, I don't pack so much stuff in it. But, like a Boy Scout, I wanted to be prepared. So I used your father's advance to buy everything I thought I might need."

After screwing the shaft into the handle he went to work on the removal of the panel. That done, he entered the dark

cavelike opening. With the aid of a small slender flashlight, extracted from the leg, he found the light switch.

The bright lights revealed a two-and-a-half story structure, a maze of girders, beams, wires, circuit boards, plastic boxes, cables, and pipes. Many of the upright beams had rungs leading up to platforms here and there.

Silver moved the flashlight beam around until it lit on several boxes attached to the wall.

"Ah! I was hoping the schematics would be in here!"

He removed the flat bundles and began unfolding them.

"But Greatheart," Jill said. "What are you going to *do*?"

"We'll see. I took enough courses at UCLA and the Friedrichshafen Academy to qualify for an E. E. The Acme Zeppelins were computerized, you know. I could take the computers apart and put them back together blindfolded, had to in order to pass my final examination in electronics."

"But you don't *know* this computer!"

"Don't have to," he said cheerfully. "I just have to locate a few circuits and then do some reconnecting. I hope, I hope."

He sounded more optimistic than he felt. He needed time to study, more time probably than he would be allowed. And even if he got it, he might find that his plan was unworkable.

Jill left while he traced frantically through the schematics. As he was moving his finger through the lines and symbols of the fourth, she returned.

"They just cut a small hole above the lock!"

"Then it won't take them much time now to cut out the lock," he said. "O.K., I don't like to take the time to show you how to operate my leg. But it might buy us a few more minutes."

Standing on one leg, leaning against the wall, he showed her the controls to the flame-jet. Looking grim but determined, she left with the leg.

Silver went to work swiftly then, having found out all he needed to know. Or so he hoped. It wasn't easy getting up the rungs to the platforms because of his handicap, but he had powerful arms and the agility of youth. He also had a powerful motive, the most powerful: survival.

He had to disconnect that, reconnect that, install that, unplug and replug that, reverse the outputs and the inputs of a certain circuit board. Fortunately, there was no rewiring necessary. All the wires terminated in quick disconnects. If he had had to work with bare live wires or use insulation tape, he would have been out of luck. Besides, he didn't have time for that.

Up and down and on his belly, crawling under the platform or the cable assemblies above him, turning on to his back, opening boxes, identifying circuits by their coded numbers, disconnecting, removing, replacing, rerouting.

He was soaked with sweat despite the internal airconditioning; he was panting with the combined exertions and tension.

Ah, now, at last!

He opened a box, examined it, checked it again to make sure. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out *The Secret Life of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. He opened it at page ten—that was the sexiest scene in the book as far as he had read and seemed to have a slightly thicker strip than the others. Almost, on looking at the text, almost, almost, he was caught, seized, gripped and snared. But with a wrench of will, he removed the thumb which he had inadvertently placed on the edge of the page.

He tore the page lengthwise, separating the thickened margin from the printed portion. He put the book down, and then he placed the strip on top of the circuit he had reversed in the box.

Positive to negative at both ends.

He had no means to make sure that the contact of the poles would be firm enough. He would just have to pray that it would be sufficient. Wait a minute! His heart and his brain were going too fast. He could put the book down on top of the strip. Its weight would be enough to press the two circuits together.

Which he did.

Jill called from down below. "Greatheart! I did like you said to. I shot the jet through the hole. I must have burned the guy with the torch. He yelled, and the torch clattered on the floor. When I left, they were still talking outside. I don't think they'll try again for some time."

"That's good," he said. "Wait! I'll be right down."

She helped him down the final rungs. Panting, he said, "They won't be held up long. They're bound to have some plastic explosives around. They'll get that and slap it against the door and blow it in."

"I heard Pete Stamboek's voice," she said. "Starling must have called in the NADA gang."

"Yeah, I expected that. Listen, they're going to think about trying a two-pronged attack, if they haven't already. They'll be removing the front access panel in the computer room. And when the back door blows, they'll come in fore and aft. Unless . . . here. Help me up. No time for dignity or pride or all that

crap."

Having gotten onto his foot, he said, "I also hope that they don't turn off the power to the computer. If they do, we're sunk. But then why should they? They don't know what I'm doing."

"Neither do I," Jill said.

He explained. When he was finished, she said, "But that's so fantastic! Do you really think it might work?"

"In theory it should. In practice . . . well, we'll find out soon enough. Just remember, the euphoric circuit is only effective when operating in conjunction with the written or spoken word. At least, I think it is. So don't look! Under no circumstances, look!"

"I won't. But what about those men who'll be breaking in from the rear? They'll follow us out into the front, and if they don't see it either, then they'll be able to do what they want to do. Which'll be killing us."

"We'll hold them for a while. Maybe long enough to let us get away. Help me with the panel."

It only took a few minutes to get the panel through the opening. While Silver leaned against it, Jill screwed the panel against the frame on the inside.

"They can blow that up, too," he said. "But it'll delay them for a minute or two. Oh! Oh!"

He pointed through the walkway leading to the front of the computer. Light had appeared at the end of the walkway. First, a thin bar about two feet above the floor. Then, suddenly, a square of illumination blazed, and the legs of a man appeared.

"They'll have to crawl in," Silver said. "But they'll be reluctant to do so. For all they know, we'll be above them, waiting to spray them with the jet. Come on, come on!"

"Come on what?" Jill said.

"The effect! The effect! Oh, oh!"

"What is it?" Jill cried.

"Don't you feel a slight tingling? A tingling that comes and goes?"

"Yes," Jill said. "What's the matter? Is something wrong?"

"It must be even more powerful than I thought," Silver said. "Maybe I connected it to too many step-up generators."

Jill opened her mouth to say something, but a loud explosion made her jump forward into Silver's arms. He fell backward, unable to support both of them with only one leg. As he tilted, he saw the panel bulge under the pressure of the expanding air in the cell.

For a moment he lay on his back with Jill on top of him. The

impact of the back of his head against the cement had reminded him that he was suffering from an intense headache. Jill rolled away, and he sat up.

"They've blown the door," he said unnecessarily. "They'll blow the panel next. Hand me my leg, and I'll put it back on."

While he performed an improvised reconnection of his leg, reconnecting it to his stump, she crouched, staring through the front access. "I can't see anybody now," she said. "What do you think they're doing?"

"Nothing, I hope, except enjoying themselves."

He rose, and they walked together to the access. They got down on all fours, Silver in the lead. He hesitated, since he might get his head shot off when he poked it out. But the pulsating tingling over his entire body, strongest where unclothed, was increasing. Maybe it would work. Just maybe, just . . .

The roar of the plastic explosive against the panel at the other end of the walkway propelled him through the opening and sent him sprawling on his face. Jill cried out, and he turned his head to see if she was hurt. If that panel had been expelled with enough force to hit her, it might have injured her seriously. But he could see nothing except smoke pouring out of the hole.

"Jill!" he shouted. He crawled forward into the smoke, and something rammed into his head. He stopped, half-stunned, groaning. His head was a huge sponge soaking in all the pain in the world.

The smoke cleared. Jill was sitting down, holding her head. "We bumped into . . ."

"Never mind! They'll be coming through! If we can get to the front door, we might make it! Come on! Come on!"

He got to his feet and looked around quickly. What he saw would have made him smile triumphantly—under less urgent circumstances. Starling, his receptionist, and three men and a woman he recognized as NADAs were standing there, immobile, their gazes fixed on the upper part of the display panel.

So far, so good. But the waves of tinglings were becoming even stronger, even faster. His fear that the second explosion would shake the computer enough to cause a malfunction had been groundless. But he might have hooked up too many electromagnetic amplifiers in a series. The computer might become overloaded and burn up or throw out a switch. And if that happened in the next thirty seconds . . .

A shaven head protruded from the access hole. Silver leaned over, flicked the leg control, straightened up, and, balancing on his right leg, stuck the left leg three inches in front of the man's

face. The three-second delay in activation of the flame-jet mechanism was just enough for him to maneuver the leg. It was not enough for the startled Bons to get out of the hole and onto his feet. The pencil-thin flame spat out, missing Bons' nose by a quarter-inch because Silver had turned the leg just enough to do so. But the heat singed the nose. He screamed and scuttled backwards into the hole.

Silver turned the jet off. It wasn't likely that those inside the computer would venture forth for some time. They would not want to be exposed to third (or even fourth) degree burns. However, there was nothing to stop them from going back down the hallway and then through the doorway in the southeast corner.

"Let's go," he said. He grabbed her hand and pulled her after him. He expected at any moment to hear shouts, or worse, shots behind him. The people inside the computer could race around quickly enough to make it to the doorway in the southeast corner if they reacted swiftly.

He stopped and turned the knob of the door.

It was locked.

"Oh, no!" Jill said.

"Starling!" Silver said. "Starling must have the key!"

"Stay here!" he shouted. "And don't look! Keep your eyes straight ahead!"

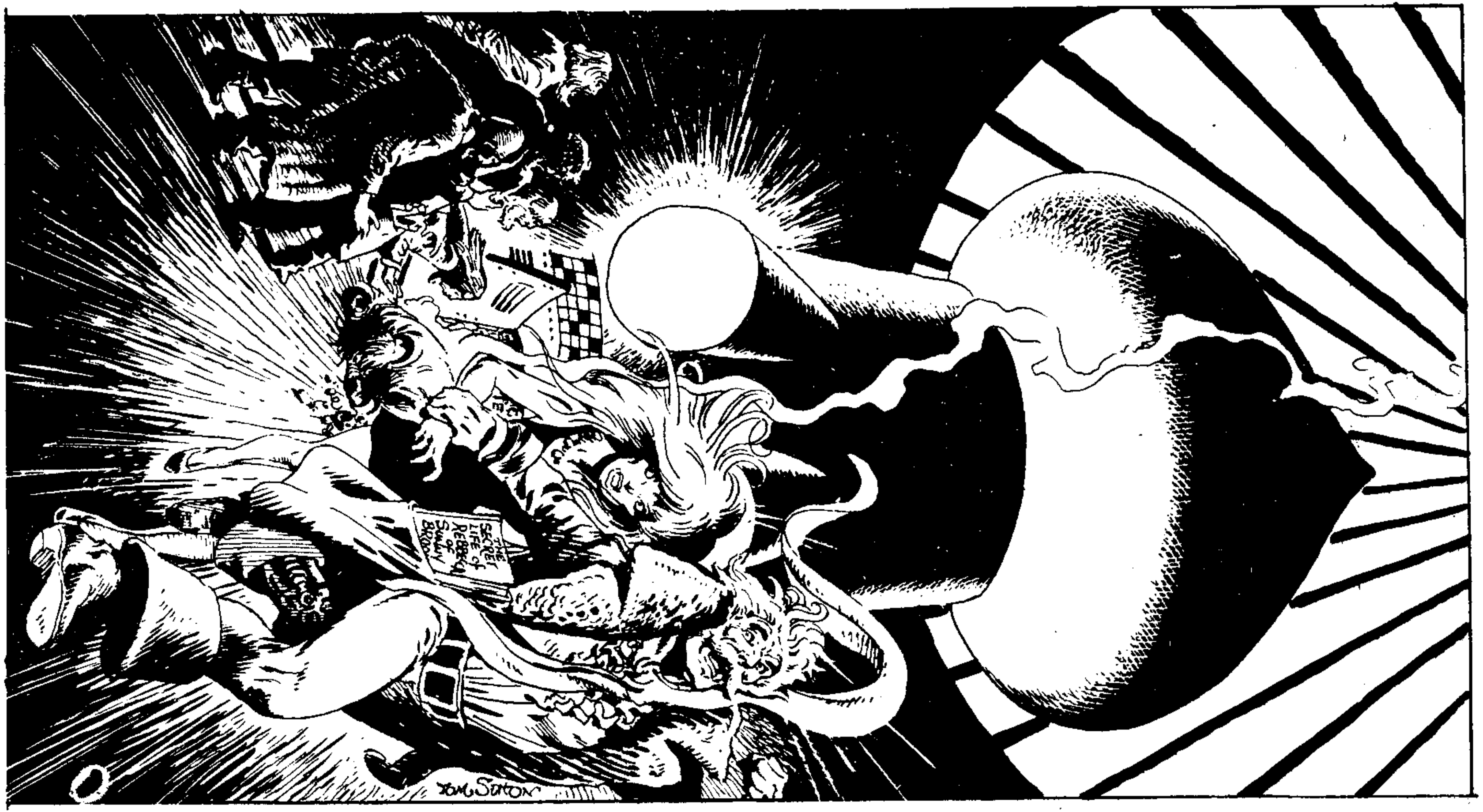
He whirled, putting his right hand at a slant over his right eye to block out the display panel. He ran back, looking at the southeast corner door as he did so, hoping he would not see anybody come through it, wondering what he could do if he did. The answer: not much.

He skidded to a halt. Starling was standing rigid, vibrating, his eyes fixed on the computer. He had an ecstatic expression which made his face even uglier. Most people with such an expression would look beautiful, transfigured. Not Starling. His features were not built to carry beauty. Ugly is as ugly does.

"Caught in your own trap, heh, Starling?" Silver snarled. Then, for some reason feeling ashamed of himself, he dug into the pockets of the transfixed man. The pants pockets were empty. Silver swore, and the sweat ran down into his eyes and stung them. The shirt pocket was empty, too. What if he'd given the key to his receptionist? What if he'd given it to one of the people in the back? What if he'd swallowed it?

Ridiculous, Silver told himself. You're getting panicky now.

He forced himself to pause, to simmer down. Where could it be?


THE SECRET LIFE OF REBECCA SUMNER BROWN
TOM SUTTON

Starling's eyes did not waver. They remained glued upon the display panel, upon the two "ports," the CRTs. The CRTs which bore two words. One was a five-letter word; one, a four-letter word. When Silver had programmed the display circuits, he had picked two basic words to be shown on the CRTs. Two words which would hold a multitude of meanings, which would grab right down to the roots, to the bottom, which would reverberate through each person who saw them with their personal interpretations, denotations, connotations, and annotations. Acting in conjunction with the vampirish positive feedback from the euphoric circuit—or negative, if you took that viewpoint—the words had clenched deep into each of the beholders.

"Ahha!" Silver cried.

He'd spied a section of the chain around Starling's neck. Fearful that jerking it off might bring Starling out of his reverie, he lifted it carefully up and around the man's head.

He then sped toward the door but halfway across the room broke his stride.

Jill was standing with her face upturned, staring at the display.

Like Lot's wife, she had disobeyed the vital imperative. She had turned to look, and now, though no pillar of salt, she was as immobile as one.

He resumed running, at the same time swearing at Jill and expecting to hear the bellow of a pistol behind him. If he would hear it, that is. You never heard the shot from the gun that sent the bullet that killed you.

He inserted the key and turned it, pushed the door, turned to grab Jill's hand, and hauled her through into the hallway. Jill suddenly tore her hand from his and started to run back. Yelling at her to stop, he whirled and ran after her. She almost made it, but he leaped in a football tackle and snagged her legs and brought her down with a crash.

She sat up after he'd released her, shook her head, and said, "Listen, Greatheart! You have no right . . ."

He rose, reached down to get her hand and straightened up. Somebody had shouted, and sure enough, here came the first of the gang through the southeast doorway.

He leaped forward, grabbed the knob, and slammed the door. He leaned down to lock the door, which was a good thing to have done even if it was accidental. Two holes suddenly appeared a few inches above his head.

Still bending down, he returned to Jill, yanked her upright,

yelled, "Keep down!" and pulled her along. Not until they were around the corner of the lobby did he stop.

Jill said, "Greatheart! I was having the most wonderful . . ."

"Later! Later!" he panted. "We got to get out now! I'll bet Starling planted explosives in the computer. He'd want to blow it up if the authorities, or your father, got too close. He'd blow it up anyway so he wouldn't leave any evidence for the police when he took off for Minerva! If that computer starts burning . . . come on!"

As they went through the door to the outside, he heard shots faintly. One of them was shooting the lock off the door. Which meant that if he and Jill didn't put a lot of distance between them and the building—and also find a hiding place—they'd be shot down. In a very short time.

Still pulling the protesting Jill, he ran out into the streets. Horns blared; tires screamed; drivers cursed at them.

And then, halfway across the street, the world seemed to go up and out.

11.

They were limping down the sidewalk, breasting the tide of people running toward the pillar of smoke. Patrol cars, sirens whooping, lights flashing red, and fire engines, painted red, manned by red-faced firefighters, raced by.

"What do we do now?" Jill said.

"We'll step into that cocktail lounge there," Silver said. "We'll wash up and then we'll sit down and have some booze and some salted peanuts and popcorn. Restore our bodies and souls. And we'll talk about our future."

"How about getting married?" Jill said.

"I thought you'd never ask," Silver said. "Let's do it right after we get things talked out. Although I'll admit I don't feel up to a honeymoon."

"Daddy isn't going to like it," she said. "Not that I care what he thinks. Not at this moment, anyway."

"That old buzzard is in for a shock," Silver said. He chuckled. "I got enough to send him up for life, so I think he'll cooperate all the way. It may kill him—which isn't a bad idea now I think on it—but he can't do a thing except say yes. Yes, yes, yes. I got him where it hurts. It may not be honest, but I'm going to blackmail him. Not for money, you understand. I just want him to give me my rightful job back. First mate on a

Zeppelin. With back pay, of course, for all the time I was off.

"And then . . ."

Jill sighed and said, "I hope so. But Daddy's such a rotten person, and he has such power. What can one man do against him?"

Silver squeezed Jill's hand. "Against one man and one woman, you mean? And that woman is his daughter."

WILL SILVER AND JILL GET MARRIED? WILL MICAWBER FORGIVE SILVER? OR WILL HE RESORT TO HIS USUAL DIRTY TRICKS? WILL SILVER WALK THE BRIDGE OF HIS BELOVED ZEPPELIN AGAIN? WATCH FOR THE NEXT THRILLING ADVENTURE, THE THIRD SUPERSAGA OF GREATHEART SILVER!

A WEIRD HEROES GRAPHIC STORY SPECIAL

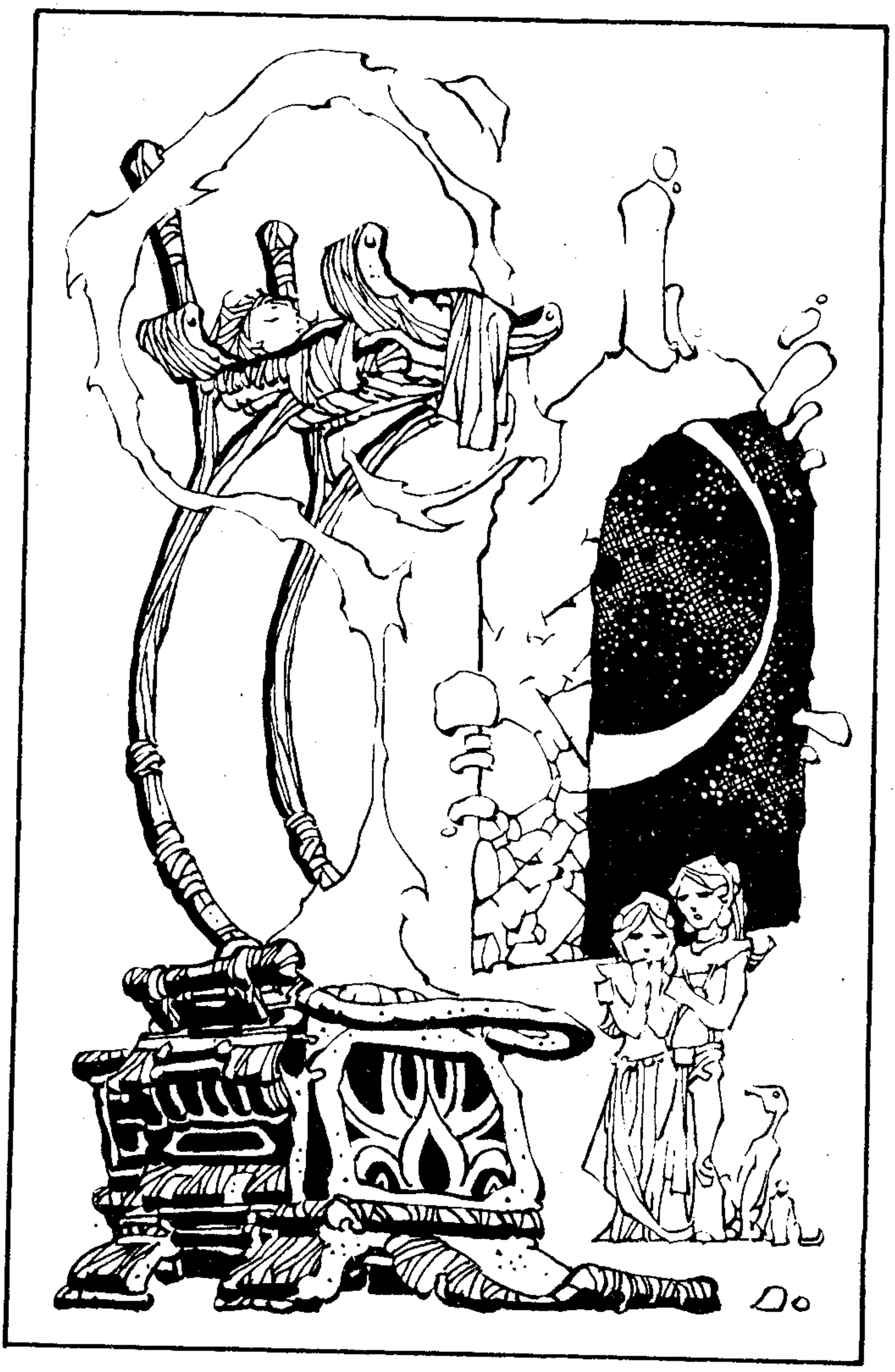
NA and the DREDSPORE of GRUAGA

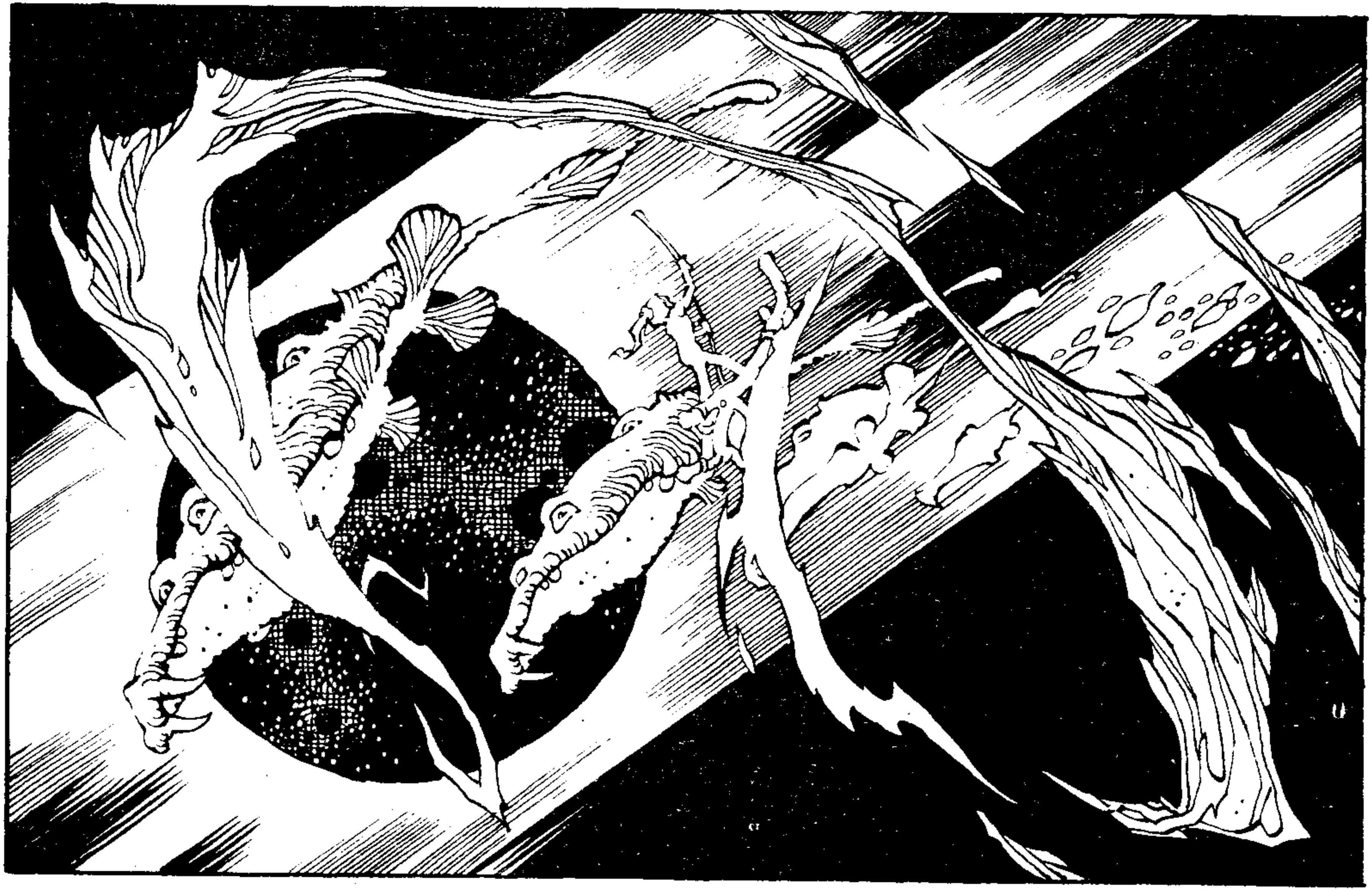
A dreaded disease has brought evacuation and death to the tiny island of Pe. The family of Na remains, but Na's child Se has encountered the illness. To save Se, Na must enter the unknown world of the Black Universe and cross into the enchanted land of Gruaga. Within Gruaga lies the fruit of Ig which can effect a cure for Se.

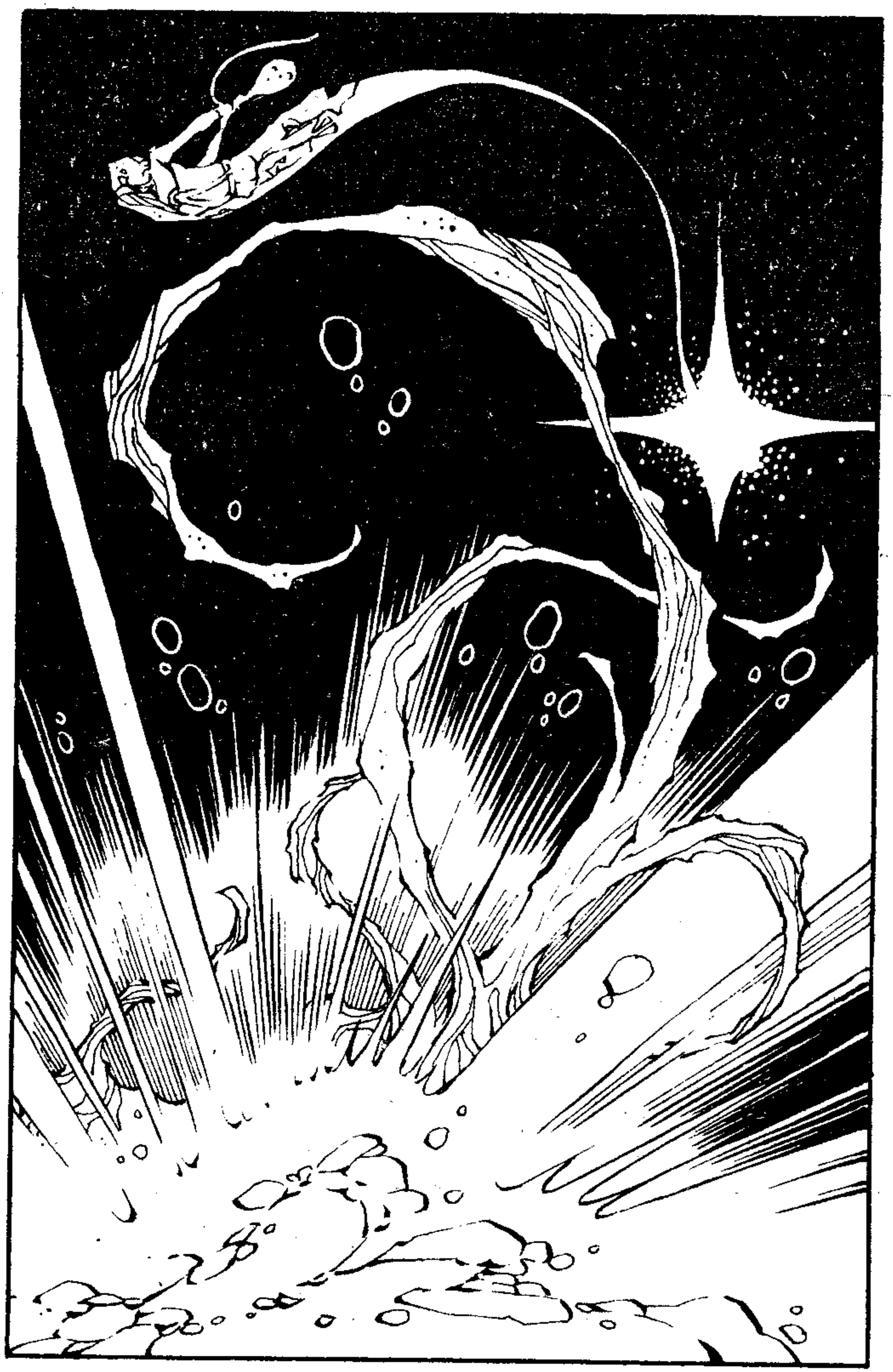
Na begins the perilous journey, his wife Lari keeping vigil over the child.

BY THE REVOLUTIONARY ALEX NINO

"Always remember, my son Na, that the Dredspores lie in Gruaga."







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KEY TO GRUAGA

Wondering whether you deciphered Alex Nino's fantasy as he intended you to do? Here's the key: *In crossing the Black Universe into Gruaga, Na actually entered his son's body. The fruit of Ig lay in his son's lung. When Na plucked the fruit and triggered the explosion, Gruaga was shattered by the energy released. The fruit of Ig was actually the virus causing Se's illness. Gruaga, then was the infection that grew from the virus. In plucking the fruit, Na stopped the virus and countered the infection. Now, trapped in his son's body, Na begins a journey back across the unknown in search of the Black Universe and an exit to Pe.* Na's escape and further adventures await your request.

AFTERWORD

That's Volume II. If you were entertained, we'd be delighted to have you back for **WEIRD HEROES** first novel length book, **QUEST OF THE GYPSY**—the opening segment of Ron Goulart and Byron Preiss' epic saga of paradox and adventure. Full color cover by Alex Nino. We're also delighted to tell you that the option for **WH** has been picked up through Volume 6. If you enjoyed Guts and Stalker from Volume I and Doc Phoenix from this book, then '76 may be a year of exciting reading for you. You can look for Volume 4, Doc Phoenix, **Nobody Knows the Monkeys I've Seen**, before Labor Day breezes this way again. Should be out by then. In the meantime, we'd appreciate your comments and will be glad to answer questions. Comments can be sent to: WEIRD HEROES CRITICISM c/o Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc. 680 Fifth Avenue, New York City 10019.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Byron Preiss is a native of Brooklyn, New York. He holds a BA in liberal arts from the University of Pennsylvania and an MA in communications from Stanford University.

He has produced educational and leisure material for the Children's Television Workshop, Sesame Street and The Electric Company, The Model Cities Program, National Periodical Publications, Marvel Comics, The National Lampoon, and ABC Television, San Francisco.

Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc. specializes in the production of illustrated educational and fantasy material. They are currently producing America's first full-color adult graphic novel revue, the first volume of which is scheduled for release in early '76.

Weird Heroes Volume 2 is the editor's fourth book.

WEIRD HEROES, VOLUME 2
IS DEDICATED
WITH
APPRECIATION
TO NEAL ADAMS
DICK GIORDANO
JOE KUBERT
JIM STERANKO
WHO HAVE SHOWN
ME WHAT IT MEANS
TO RESPECT AND
CARE ABOUT
THE WORK OF OTHERS.

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Edited and Developed by Byron Preiss

A PYRAMID BOOK

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