

PYRAMID

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WEIRD HEROES 3: QUEST OF THE GYPSY

The year is 2033.

Cyborgs roam the streets of a plague-struck London. Robots move insanely amid the ruins of a plastic Louvre. Beneath Gibraltar, a mile-deep complex of secret data sits silently waiting.

Enter Gypsy...

A strange and haunted wanderer with surprising teleportative abilities. Taunted by stark recurring images of a long-abandoned past, he struggles to find the keys to a 55-year-old puzzle!

...and the Vulture.

The weird winged nemesis who is but the first creature to yield clues to Gypsy's true identity. Who is Gypsy? Join in an exciting adventure where you have a chance to out-guess the hero.





WEIRD HEROES™

VOLUME 3 QUEST OF THE GYPSY

A NOVEL BY RON GOULART

GRAPHICS BY ALEX NINO

EDITED AND DEVELOPED
BY BYRON PREISS

PYRAMID BOOKS



NEW YORK



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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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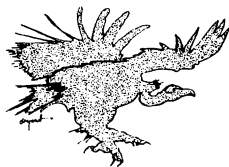
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All art produced especially for WEIRD HEROES. This is the first publication of a novel based on the character from WEIRD HEROES VOLUME 1.



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 new and exciting directions."

That's what I wrote those many months ago when the **Weird Heroes** series was introduced. The many generous letters that followed proved that we had found a home. So now we're back with the first **Weird Heroes** novel, the opening gambit in an epic adventure called **Quest of the Gypsy**. Those of you who read the first volume of **Weird Heroes** are no doubt familiar with this amiable yet perplexing character who made his debut in a short story called "There's Coming a Time." Now award-winning novelist Ron Goulart has revised the original short story and here, for the first time, is the complete edition of what we hope will be a six-book epic of Gypsy's search for the answers to the questions seeded fifty-five years in his past.

All through the book, in a variety of sizes, you will find illustrations by Alex Nino. Those of you unfamiliar with the graphic story form are probably unaware of the remarkable talents of this Philipino artist. Alex, like another American Alex [Toth], is renowned for his ability to simplify visual elements and produce a graphic effect with one line where most artists would use three, or four, or **forty**.

Combined with one of Goulart's most adventurous, fast-paced novels, Nino's art captures both the humor and tension of Gypsy's initial odyssey.

We're quite excited about this Gypsy series. It offers the reader the special sort of thrill that comes from "playing detective" with the plot. Together with the speculative fiction elements within the story, Ron and I feel that **Quest of the Gypsy** is contagious, entertaining SF. Pyramid agrees and we hope you will, too. Next year will bring two more **Gypsy** novels, Books 2 and 3 in the prospective double-trilogy.

Don't worry. Each book is a self-contained entity, complete with climax and satisfactory resolution of some mystery elements within the plot. The whole, epic puzzle of Gypsy's origins will unfold slowly along with the fates of his companions in adventure: the Vulture, Walpole and the persistant Annabelle.

Join us, if you will.

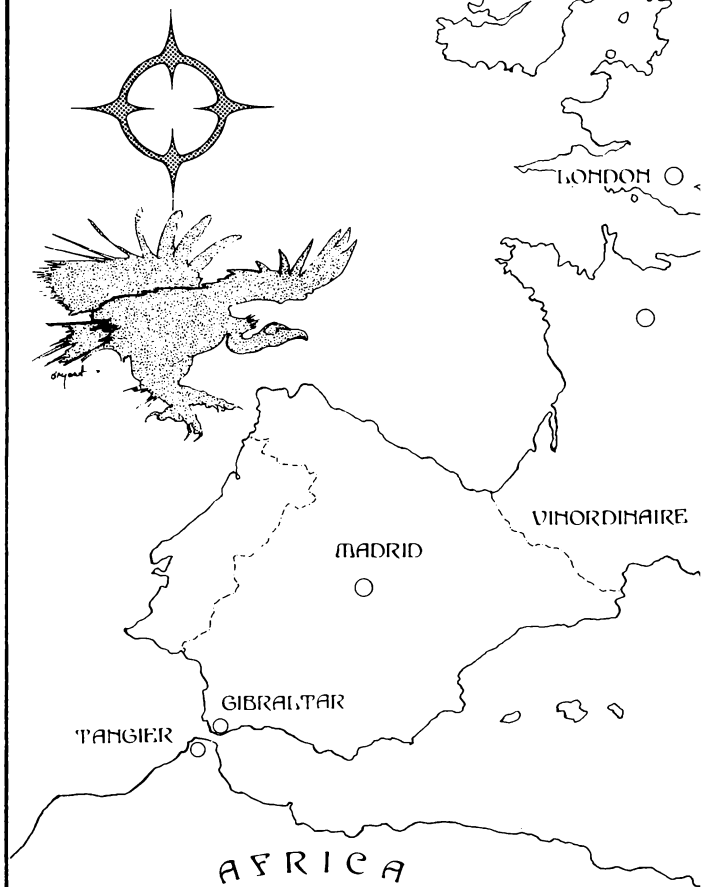
—Byron Preiss
New York

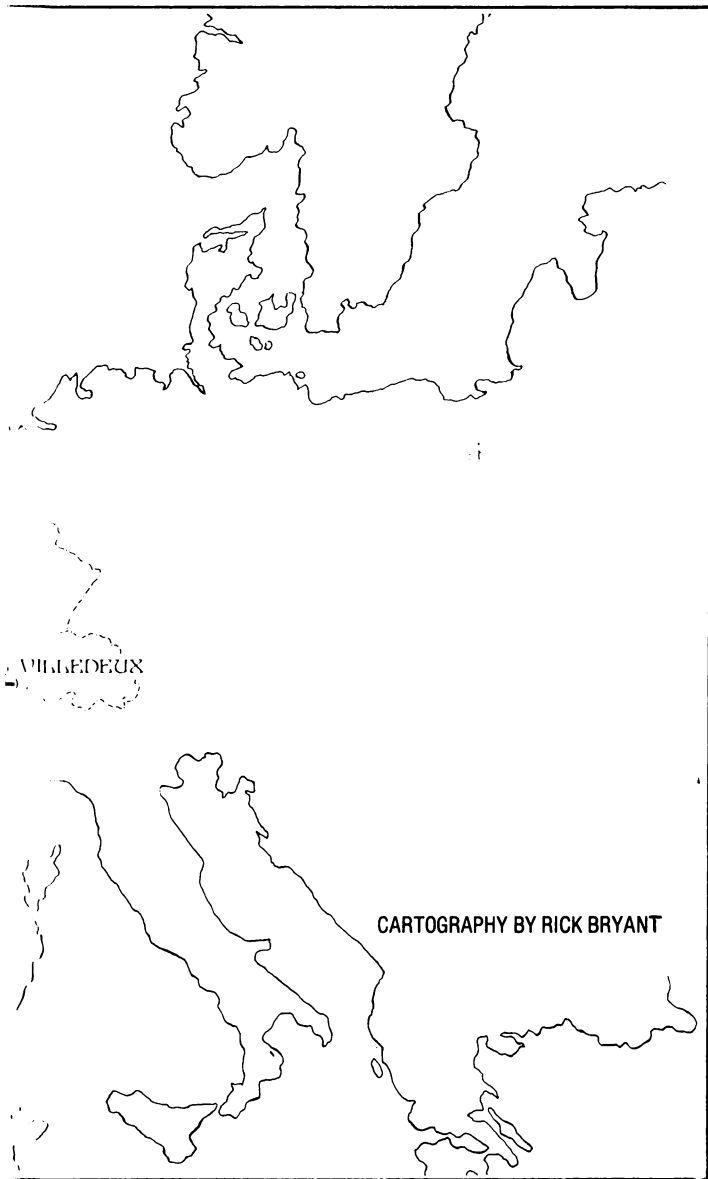


BOOK ONE

THE AWAKENING

2033 QUEST'S WORLD BOOK 1





The Awakening

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The Bastille fell.

The clatter and tumble of that made him sit up on the bench he'd apparently been resting on. A tall broad-shouldered young man, seemingly.

"Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!" they were shouting across the dirt road.

Gypsy, which was probably the young man's name, blinked. He rubbed at his eyes, as though he'd been sleeping. It was not morning, dusk was already closing in on him.

"Fraternity! Equality! Liberty!" They were jumping up and down on the remains of the Bastille now, stomping on the boards, smashing the neon tubing, flinging the ancient stones.

Standing, Gypsy shook his head.

"It's only a revolution," said a raspy voice behind him.

Perched on a stone gargoyle some ten feet above the dirt road was a medium-sized vulture. Its hunch echoed that of the gargoyle. Directly below the vulture's clawed foot a neon tube flashed *Notre Dame Cathedral* into the waning day.

"Down with all monarchs!" shouted the little aluminum men, each about four feet high, as they jiggled on the remains of the Bastille. "Down with all presidents! Down with all prime ministers! Down with all prefects, procurators, mayors, governors and first selectmen!"

"Feisty little bastards, aren't they?" remarked the vulture.

"What are they?"

"The working class."

"They look like . . . robots."

"Very perceptive, Gyp."

Turning his back on the robot revolution, Gypsy strode over to stare up at the vulture. "And where are we?"

The gnarled bird chuckled. "You're doing very well, Gyp, functioning fairly smoothly all things considered. You've adjusted to this situation with a minimum of dislocation. It doesn't seem to bother you that you're standing in the middle of Paris having a chat with a bird. Very good, admirable."

"If they've got robots, politically oriented robots at that, then a talking vulture isn't that unusual," replied the young man. "But this isn't really Paris, is it?"

"Ah, Gyp, but it is. Look over there. You can see the Louvre, the Arch of Triumph, the—"

"That's the Louvre? Made out of plywood and vinyl, and it's lopsided."

"Time's change. A couple wars, a plague, a few dozen revolutions, two or three famines and so on and so forth.

They all take their toll.”

“Okay, so this is Paris. What year is it?”

“Excellent question. Around here, in New Paris time, they call this year 26. However, by the reckoning you’re used to, it’s 2033. Welcome to the future, Gyp.”

“2033?” Frowning, mouth slightly open, he stared around him.

The robots were slowing down as twilight thickened in the dirt streets of New Paris. They were trampling with much less enthusiasm, sloganeering hardly at all.

Gyp put his hands on his hips, watched the vulture through narrowed eyes. “The last year I remember is . . . 1978.”

“Some nap you’ve had, huh?”

“I can’t have been asleep all this—”

“But you were, Gyp, old pal,” the hunched bird assured him. “Actually, see, a few things went wrong. You know how it is, with every technological breakthrough there are bound to be kinks to work out.”

“What do you mean? What happened to me? How did I get—”

“You’ll have to work most of it out for yourself. Such is the nature of the situation, Gyp.”

“Well, who are you then? How do you know who I am?”

The vulture arched on its perch, extending its wide wings and flapping them twice. “No reason, far as I can see, not to resume the game.”

“The game?”

“See you in London, Gyp.” The bird rose up into the descending darkness.



A few memories of a white room.
All the light, glaring circles of light, high above him.
A circle of men around him. Pale blue robes, faces
hidden.

Whirring, pumping, rattling. Sounds not connected
with any actions he could see.

“Nearly completed.”

“Excellent work, but—”

“He’ll be directed exactly as I said. We’re not going to
argue about—”

“Wait a few weeks. He ought to have a—”

“He has no say at all. If it weren’t for me, he’d be dead
and gone after. . . .”

Nothing else.





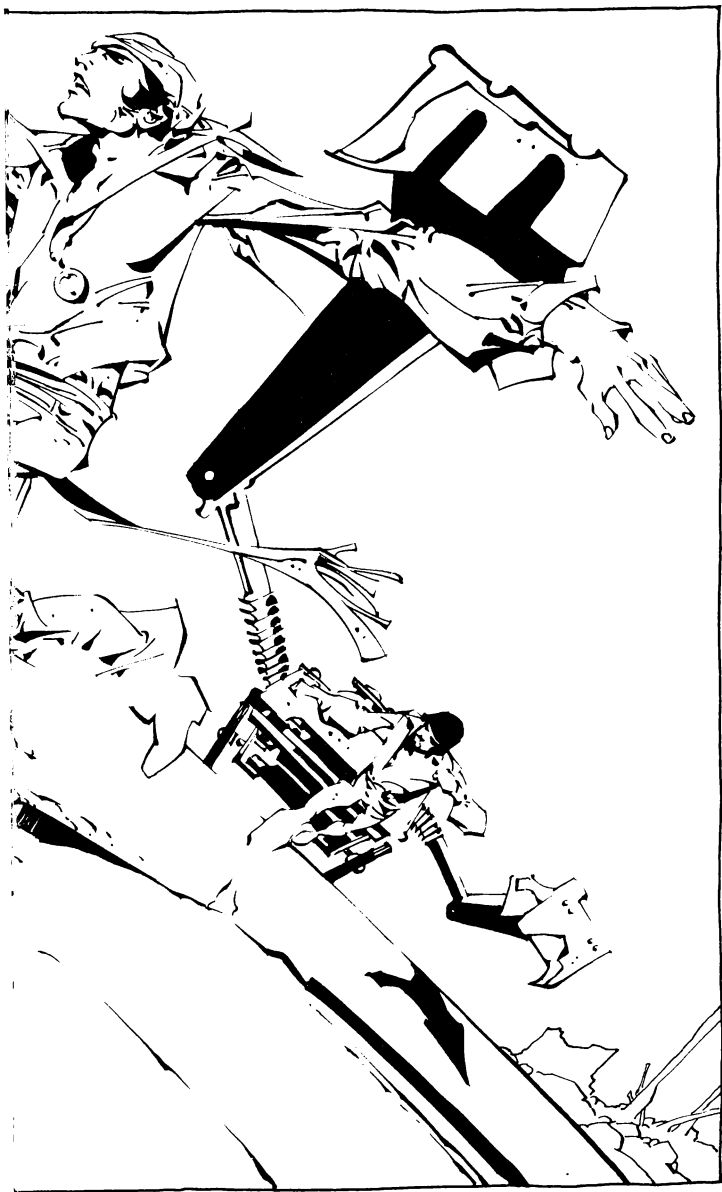
The lanky young man would have outdistanced the pursuing black landvan if it hadn't been for the corpse.

In the thick fog of the twisting London street he didn't notice the dead man sprawled at the intersection. He tripped, went slamming smack into a brick wall.

"Citizen Walpole," said a mechanical voice through the speakers mounted on the roof of the black van, "we ask you to surrender peaceably. I am one of His Majesty's duly authorized Newgatewagons and I have a warrant for your arrest and detention within as a suspected dealer in contraband. You are charged with skulking about the streets and byways of London 3 and environs—"

"Not so perishing loud, old bean," cautioned the lanky Walpole as he eased to his feet. "Don't want the whole





bloody neighborhood to know what a bad 'un I am, do we?"

"Don't say bloody, it's not nice," admonished the voice of the Newgatewagon." A door in its side popped open to let a long, jointed metal arm come snaking out. "Come alone quietly, m'lad."

"Watch out you don't touch this dead bloke and pick up a good dose of Plague for yourself, old—"

A different took hold of Walpole, grabbing his shoulder. He was yanked into a narrow alley.

"Run," suggested Gypsy. "That truck can't follow us through here."

"Right you are, gov."

After the two of them had covered a jogging mile through the mist-thick alleys and lanes, Gypsy halted and put out an arm to stop his companion. "Safe now," he said.

Walpole took several shallow breaths, panting. "You're in flaming excellent shape, old man," he said finally. "I often regret that a life of crime which began when I was but a babe in arms has played havoc with—"

"You know London," cut in Gypsy.

"That I do."

"I've been looking for someone to guide me around the place," Gypsy said. "You came along at the right time. When I heard that truck outlining your accomplishments I decided—"

"Lies, bloody lies most of those charges," insisted Walpole. "Which isn't to say I ain't the best ruddy guide you could have put a hand on." He took a step back, surveying Gypsy. "This ain't the height of the perishing tourist season, I might as well tell you. What with the Plague and the Ripper Convention and—"

"Ripper convention?"

“Bunch of blokes fancy they’re Jack the Ripper. Meet here in London 3 once a year and prowls around, must be a hundred of ’em,” explained Walpole. “Would you mind my asking, gov, where you acquired your togs?”

“A long time ago.”

“Not that it matters. In London 3 life is what you might call eclectic, as you have probably noticed.”

“Only arrived this morning.”

“From where?”

“New Paris.”

“Ah, those frogs. You can’t run any kind of stable society with a bunch of little tin blokes doing all the bloody work,” Walpole said. “Still I would like to pop over there sometime and take a look at the Louvre. Hear they’ve got some smashing pictures there.”

“Too late, the robots burned it down right before I left.”

“Shame.” Walpole shook his head, then grinned. “Well now, how can I best help you?”

Gypsy told him.

The innkeeper’s hand fell off into the punch bowl. “Blimey,” he exclaimed, “but life is damn hard for a cyborg.” Using the ladle, he fished out the mechanical hand. “Wager it’ll be on the damn fritz again for sure. Last time I got it all soaked it couldn’t do nothing but flash the blooming finger at the clergy.”

Walpole led his new friend into a back dining room of the inn. “Give us a look at that wad of money again,” he said as he sat at a neowood table.

Gypsy, once he’d seated himself opposite the lank

young man, took a folding of bills out of the inside pocket of his black leather vest. "It's good enough currency I've discovered. Bought my airbus passage from France with it. And there's enough to live on comfortably for several months or more."

"Marialice, love, fetch us a couple pints of ale," Walpole called to the cherub-cheeked barmaid. "Yep, it's Amex scrip, good almost anywhere. Thing is, gov, you couldn't have had that money on you when you started your snooze back in 1978. Somebody planted it at a much more recent date."

"Most likely the bird."

"Ah, yes, that bird." Walpole poked out his cheek with his tongue. "I tell you, mate, it's a good thing you've such a perishing believable face on you. Otherwise I'd have bought little of what you've told me so far."

Marialice placed two pseudopewter mugs on the table and proceeded to fill them from her right forefinger. "How've you been, Walpole? I heard tell the bobbies was hunting you."

"I remain at large, love." He leaned toward Gypsy. "You wouldn't have, on first sight, guessed her for an android, would you?"

"Nope, but the ale spouting from her finger gives it away." When the android girl was gone, Gypsy said, "I've been remembering a few things, a little more about this game the vulture talked about."

Walpole sampled some of the foamy ale. "Must be some game, old top. Since it seems to have been going on for fifty to sixty years."

"The game isn't between me and the vulture." A frown touched Gypsy's face. "No, there's a . . . I can't quite get it, can't quite remember . . . but I know there are others, other people, involved."

“Something happened to you, gov. Well, I guess that’s more than obvious. A chap usually doesn’t snooze through one century and into the next.”

Gypsy smiled slowly. “Yeah, I’d have to agree with you,” he said. “Now about this other thing I remembered, the reason I need you. When the vulture told me he’d meet me in London, I remembered a name. The name of the place where I’m supposed to go . . . to go and find out something.”

“Give me the name once again, gov.”

“It’s a place called Thorne Hill Hospital.”

Walpole finished his ale, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “That’s not much to go on.”

“Why not? There has to be a Thorne Hill Hospital somewhere in or around London.”

“Could have been such a spot sixty years ago, mate. You weren’t able to locate it on your own, was you? No address in any of the directories.”

“You know more than any directory, Walpole. Okay, so maybe the place has changed its name. We still should be able to find it.”

“Well, like I told you, I never heard of Thorne Hill Hospital or even just plain Thorne Hill. Most likely the place is nothing but a heap of dust by now,” said Walpole. “London ain’t had it as bad as Paris, but still a lot of it simply isn’t here no more.”

“I want to look. I’ll pay you to help.”

“Oh, we’ll hunt for the ruddy place. I don’t want you to be disappointed, though, if we find nothing.”

“We’ll find something,” said Gypsy.



The next day Gypsy remembered something else.

It was a hazy brown day, and he and Walpole were trudging along a road which had taken them beyond the jagged outskirts of London 3.

A large black shape hummed over them, floating some thirty feet up.

“Must be getting worse, the Plague,” observed Walpole. “That’s the fifth deathwagon since we started off this morning.”

“Can’t anybody do anything about the Plague?”

“Well, as you’ve no doubt been noticing, mate, society ain’t what she was back in your day. We do have some pretty heads-up scientific blokes, but one of ’em’s been able to come up with a cure so far. Some sort of new strain they say. Kills you within twenty-four flaming

hours, bam. Very selective, too, only knocks off men.”

Lines on Gypsy’s forehead. “What?” He slowed.

“The ruddy Plague hasn’t killed one blooming female since it first visited our tight little island two months ago.”

Gypsy stopped. “That sounds like it must be . . . no, damn, can’t get it.”

“Remembering?”

“Trying to.” He shook his head, commenced walking again.

“Mayhaps things’ll come flooding back when we get us a look at this here Thorne Hill Hospital.”

“If this Fairlegh Academy we’re heading for really is the old hospital.”

“When Walpole asks around, he usually gets the truth,” Walpole assured him. “Your perishing hospital went under sometime in 1999, two years later the academy blokes took over the estate. They folded in 2024 and the buildings and grounds’ve been rustivating ever since.” He tapped Gypsy’s arm, pointed at the crossroads they were approaching. “Here’s the road we want, to the right, mate.”

The fog was growing thicker, filling in the spaces between the trees, spilling out on the climbing road.

“Maybe we won’t find anything after all,” said Gypsy.

“You’ve got to stay optimistic,” Walpole told him. “Here I am, hunted by the law, a potential Plague victim and the only lass I’ve so much as touched in a week is that andy at the inn, and yet you don’t see me—”

“Quiet for a second.”

“Hear some . . . Ah, I hear it, too. Horses.”

Gypsy nodded up at the fog on their right. “Coming down across the hill over there, least a half dozen of them.”

"Might be a wild herd, though it's a bit too civilized hereabouts for that."

The sound of galloping hooves grew louder. Then the first horseman showed. The mount was a silky black stallion, the rider was dressed in an old-fashion fox hunting outfit, scarlet coat and white breeches. He carried a stungun in his gloved right hand, and on his face he wore a grinning death's head mask.

"Don't like that mask touch, gov," said Walpole. He pivoted, ran across the road and away from the sound of the approaching horsemen.

It was evident the first man meant to attack. Gypsy ran, too. He leaped over a collapsing rail fence, began to jog uphill across a misty field.

Looking back over his shoulder he saw there were at least five of them in pursuit. Each dressed in a fox hunting costume, each masked with a skull.

Walpole went scurrying away to the left. The fog shut in around him.

The lead huntsman was narrowing the distance between himself and Gypsy. "Keep running, lad," he urged, voice muffled by the death's head mask, "it adds to the sport."

Gypsy increased his pace, the fog rasping into his lungs. The thud of hooves of the pursuing horses was the only sound he was aware of as he ran.

Then he stumbled, his foot caught by a twisting tree root. He fell, hit against the tree trunk.

The black horse snorted, reared up. "We may as well end this," said the hunter as he aimed his stungun.

Then Gypsy remembered.

The gun went spinning out of the rider's grasp, rose up, was swallowed by the mist.

Getting to his feet, back pressed against the tree, Gyp-

sy concentrated now on the man in the saddle.

The huntsman jerked the reins, kicked at the horse's flanks. He wanted to get away.

Gypsy made use again of the ability he'd remembered.

His pursuer was lifted clean out of the saddle, thrown to the ground. "Get away!" he shouted back at the others as he hit, shoulder against turf. "He's got some kind of power!" He scrambled upright, went chasing after his retreating horse.

The fog dropped in close.

Gypsy waited. No one else tried to come near him. The sound of the horses faded away.

"Walpole?" he shouted after a moment. "Walpole?"

No answer.



A woman's voice, talking back there in time.

". . . because it amuses me."

"You must have some reason beyond that."

"Perhaps."

"But putting these abilities into him. Don't you—"

"What if there is no other purpose? Perhaps he's planned solely to play the game."

Then the past was gone.

Grey stone walls sticking up through swirls of grey fog. A gabled roof beaded with mist, its copper trim stained an underwater blue.

Halting on the flagstone path, Gypsy studied the building. Several dark birds huddled on the roof, none of them the vulture. "I was supposed to come here," he said

to himself. "I'm sure of that. Has something to do with the game."

The windows of the big grey building had once been shuttered. A good many of the shutters stood open, some hanging by one hinge.

"But what the hell is the game? And who am I playing against?" He walked to the wooden door. "They must all be dead anyway, the ones who started the whole business. If not dead, damn old."

He pushed at the front door, it swung slowly inward.

Something in the long musty hallway went skittering away into the shadows at its far end. Gypsy stepped across the threshold of the building which had once housed the Thorne Hill Hospital.

"None of this looks very familiar. I don't think I've been here before."

There was a faint noise to his right. In the room which had once been an office. Its door was a few inches open.

Moving silently, Gypsy went to the door and booted it open.

"Hey, that's some entrance."

"And who might you be?" he asked the slim girl who was crouched beside a venerable chesterfield.

She was dark-haired, about twenty-five, dressed in grey trousers and a plain grey shirt. "I'm a tenant, more or less," she said as she stood up. "As such, I'm not too happy about the way you kicked in my parlor door. Who are you, if it comes to that?"

"My name is Gypsy, I—"

"Not much of a name. Who stuck that on you?"

I . . . don't really know."

The girl shrugged her slim shoulders. "I'm Annabelle," she said. "Why are you here?"

"Could be I'm looking for a place to live," he

answered. "How many others are staying here?"

"None but me. This is not a highly popular neighborhood."

"Nor a friendly one. Who are those guys in the red coats!"

"Oh, the Hunt Club." Annabelle sat on the chesterfield. "They're basically highwaymen, with a flair for dressing up. Never much bothers me, since money is the main object of their little jaunts."

"I've been traveling with a friend of mine," Gypsy told her. "Could the Hunt Club have grabbed him?"

"Don't you know? I'm glad you're not my friend if you're that careless."

"We got separated in the fog, when your Hunt Club friends attacked."

"You can't find him now?"

"Not a trace. I thought he might have come on here."

Annabelle twisted her hair around a finger. "Doesn't seem like something they'd do, kidnapping, unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Well, once in awhile the Hunt Club lads hire out, do a job for somebody else," the girl said. "Might be somebody paid them to carry off your friend."

"Where would they take him?"

"To whoever hired him naturally. No way of telling."

"Do they have a hideaway, a meeting place?"

Annabelle jumped up. "They do, Mr. Gypsy. I could take you there."

"I'd appreciate that."

"Okay then." She crossed to a dusty desk. "Wait till I get my knapsack strapped on." She picked up a tan backpack from the desk top, reached into a flap pocket. She took out a stungun and shot Gypsy.



Walpole was saying, “It says something for my basic character, I think, that I can make friends no matter where I—”

“They got you, too?” Gypsy asked, sitting up and rubbing his stiff arm.

“Several hours back, gov. You been out a few hours yourself,” said the lank young man. “But listen, I want—”

“Any idea what it’s all about?”

They were in an underground room, the only illumination coming from a cross of light strips on the low ceiling. Storage bins, crates, discarded office equipment and rows of old filing cabinets covered most of the floor space.

Walpole said, “They felt we was getting too close.”

“Too close to what? Information about me, about the—”

“They don’t know nothing about you, mate. What aggravated them is our trying to nose around in the academy here.”

Massaging his neck, trying to shake off the last effects of the stungun, Gypsy said, “Is that where we are, under the Thorne Hill building?”

“Right, and a good thing we are, because—”

“If this doesn’t have anything to do with me, what is going on?”

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you,” said Walpole. “This here is where they’re turning out the Plague, gov. It’s the headquarters for the group.”

Frowning, Gypsy said, “The Plague . . . something about it is familiar. I remember something from back then.”

“You’re thinking maybe of Dr. Laurel Stayne. She developed this particular male-attacking virus back in 1977, while before you began your nap.”

“Where’d you get that information, Walpole?”

“If you’d let me get a bloody word in edgewise, I’ll explain.” He grinned, reached out to pat a three-foot high aluminum cabinet: “I made friends with Faxy here.”

“Pleased to meet you,” said the cabinet out of its top-side speaker grid. “Or possibly *boa tarde, god etter-midag, dobro pop*—”

“English will do, Faxy,” Walpole told him. “He’s been down here five years.”

“Put out to pasture, tossed on the scrap heap, given the gate,” said the file mechanism. “Been vegetating ever since, but keeping up with events as best I could.”

Walpole explained, “He’s chock full of facts, knows the history of the academy, the hospital, not to—”



"I'm also good on nineteenth-century British novelists," added Faxo. "Not much call for that sort of info anymore, but if—"

"Does he know anything about me?"

"Some, not much. Tell him, Faxo."

"You were supposed to report here at Christmas, 1978," said the machine. "Would you like to hear a little something about Dickens' Christmas books? I've—"

"Report to who?"

"To whom," corrected Faxo, before continuing. "To a Dr. F. E. Anmar. He was from America, a colleague of Dr. Stayne. He's the chap, working with her, who made up the first useable batches of Plague virus."

"See, the hospital wasn't really a hospital," said Walpole. "It was a cover for an Anglo-American research project."

"Clandestine it was," Faxo said. "Working on possible weapons for an impending war with Brazil and other Latin American countries. That particular war, as you may know, got—"

"What do you know about the game?" Gypsy asked.

"You mean cricket?"

"The game I'm supposed to be playing."

"No facts on that, except that Dr. Anmar was to give you the next clue," answered the machine. "Apparently you were to have become involved in some sort of elaborate paper chase."

"Why?"

"Don't know that, to test you perhaps."

"What about the clue this Dr. Anmar was supposed to give me. Do you know what it was?"

"Madrid."

"Madrid?"

"Name of a city in Spain, or was. That may not be the

entire clue, but it's all I know about it. You see, when Dr. Anmar was accidentally killed by the Plague it put a damper on a good many activities of the organization. Then, too, the surprise attack on the United States by Argentine missiles disrupted Dr. Stayne's end of things."

"Do you know why I've been asleep all this time? Does it have anything to do with the missile attack, the war with Latin America?"

"Might. No info on that, though. Sorry."

Walpole patted the machine's top. "You've been a big help, old boy."

Gypsy paced what little clear floor space there was. "This group who's got us," he said. "They found out the secret of the Plague and are using it, huh?"

"Exactly," said Walpole. "A couple of 'em have enough scientific knowledge to utilize all the notes left behind here."

"Daniel Defore," began Faxo, "had some interesting things to say about an earlier plague which—"

"Stow it for a moment, mate," cautioned Walpole.

"Who are these people?" Gypsy asked. "Is it the Hunt Club?"

"Nope, they only do the dirty work," said Walpole. "There is a group of militant ladies running this thing. I gather they have a strong anti-male bias and are planning to eliminate a good chunk of the male population of the isles. After which the old kingdom will have a sort of Amazon management."

Faxo said, "We have had instances of similar stands and attitudes throughout the history of—"

"Where's their supply of the virus?" asked Gypsy.

Faxo said, "Stored in the old lab wing on the second floor."

Gypsy ran his hand across his chin, left eye narrowing.

“They don’t know who I am,” he said. “And they don’t know what I’ve been remembering, the things that have been coming back to me.”

“What sort of things, gov?”

“Like this.” Gypsy pointed his right hand at the heavy metal door of their prison room.

Five seconds passed. Then the door exploded out of its frame, went clanging against the wall of the corridor outside.



“Pity he doesn’t have legs,” said Walpole in a low voice.

“Who?”

“Faxy, I rather took a liking to him. Hate to leave him behind, but he’s much too stout to wheel around.”

Gypsy motioned for silence.

The second floor corridor was dim. Its only window had been boarded up. You could see the faded laboratory sign until you were quite close to the double doors.

Gypsy said, “Five of them in there, including the girl who flummoxed me.”

“How do you know that?”

“I . . . just know.” The lab door was partially open. Flattening against the wall, Gypsy inched up nearer the opening.

“... that my method would be more efficient,” one of the women was saying above the continual hum and whir of laboratory equipment. “By encapsulating—”

“Our present methods are amply efficient,” cut in a harsher-voiced woman. “Delivering the pneumonic mutant virus by the aerosol method outlined in Dr. Stayne’s original plan is satisfactory.”

“Satisfactory, but slow. I see no need to keep using all of the outdated material of hers.” Papers rattled. “Look at these Health Office figures, Bess. We haven’t even killed off 10% of the male population yet, though—”

“My time table and yours don’t agree, Carla. But since I’m in charge of the operation, we’ll follow mine.”

“That third refrigerator is making a funny noise again,” said a new voice.

Gypsy recognized it as that of Annabelle.

“You know these refrigerators aren’t sufficiently efficient, Bess,” said Carla. “If our virus supply isn’t properly refrigerated we’re—”

“We’ll keep on doing what we’ve been doing. And within a year England will again be ruled by a queen.”

“Good Queen Bess I’ve no doubt,” whispered Walpole.

“I hate to be so dependent on the dead past,” said Carla, “on the records of dead people.”

“If we hadn’t stumbled on Dr. Stayne’s biological weapon notebooks, we wouldn’t be where we are today,” said Bess. “We wouldn’t be moving closer to the throne.”

Annabelle said, “Now the smoke is green.”

“Stop heckling,” ordered Bess, “forget about that bloody fridge.”

“Okay, let’s talk then about my prisoner?”

“The big hulking lout, do you mean?”

“He’s no lout, but yes, him.”



"He and the boney one will get a virus later on tonight," said Bess. "First I want to question them, to see who else might be in mind to come sticking a nose into our affairs."

"I really think," said Annabelle, "the chap I captured doesn't know anything about us."

"Makes little difference. We may as well kill the both of them now as later. They certainly don't look to be the types we can expect to cooperate with us once we've assumed control."

Gypsy moved away from the door, beckoned Walpole to follow him into a dusty alcove. "We don't want to have anything to do with the law right now."

"Indeed not, gov."

"I'm going to destroy the lab, burn everything in there."

Walpole swallowed. "You can do that, like you handled the door?"

Gypsy nodded.

"What about the ladies? They mean us no good, but I wouldn't like to see them killed."

"Nobody gets killed."

"It ain't that I'm a flaming sentimentalist or—Look out!"

There was a girl in the corridor, ten feet away. Dressed in grey trousers and tunic, she held a blaster rifle aimed at them. "How'd you two—"

All at once the rifle wasn't there. It was hovering up near the shadowy ceiling.

The girl opened her mouth to cry out.

Then she was gone, not in the corridor at all.

"Where'd she get to, gov?"

"I moved her."

"Moved her now, did you? Where to?"

“Outside in the woods, a good distance from here.”

“That’s a very handy thing to be able to do. How’d you happen to acquire the knack of—”

The lab door swung wide. Two women, each armed with a blaster pistol, dived out. One of them was Annabelle.

“It’s Gypsy,” she said, letting her gun barrel swing down to point at the floor.

Gypsy looked at them for an instant, eyes half closed.

Then they were no longer in the hallway. The surrounding air made an odd sound when it filled the space where they’d been.

“Makes a sort of a pop, don’t it?” observed Walpole.

Gypsy went running for the open doorway. He headed, without hesitating, into the laboratory.

A blaster crackled.

Sprinting across the corridor, Walpole took a careful look into the long white room.

There was only one woman left. Nearly forty, blonde hair close cropped. She was facing Gypsy, a pistol in each hand. “You’re not going to—”

The guns vanished, followed by Bess herself.

“Over the hills and far away,” murmured Walpole as he glanced around.

Gypsy told him, “Get outside now.”

“What about my chum Faxy? I wouldn’t like to see him burn down.”

“The fire will only touch this room.”

Walpole saw it first.

Perched on a dry branch above the twilight country

roadway. "You're doing very well so far, Gyp," the vulture said.

Gypsy scowled up at it. "I want you to tell me what—"

"Nope, that's not in the rules," said the large, hunched bird. "See you in Madrid."

"I know some of what I can do now. And I can stop you from—"

"That's not in the rules either, Gyp. Me you can't harm." The vulture made a dry croaking sound before flapping off into the dusk.

Gypsy discovered the bird was right, he had no power over it. After it was gone, he said, "I'll be moving on, Walpole."

"Ah, but it ain't time for any perishing good-byes yet, gov. London'll be a lot safer now the Plague's no more," said Walpole. "The Newgatewagons, however, will still be on the look out for me, and I fancy I'll be much safer across the water. Perhaps in some such place as Spain, say."

"Okay, come on then." Gypsy started down the darkening road.



“Please, sweet Jesus, take away this accursed rain.” The black-shawled woman stood hunched beneath her huge black umbrella, fingering her rosary beads. The black beads were strung on a silver chain, as fat and glistening as purple grapes. “Please, dear Savior, I have journeyed all the way from Cadiz to witness this.”

There were dozens of similar old women cluttering the slanting rainswept Madrid street down which Gypsy and Walpole were hurrying. Old women huddled beneath dark umbrellas, muttering over their beads and breviaries, gnarled hands clutching golden crosses. Much of this part of the city looked as it must have looked centuries before, towers and spires, tiled roofs, ornate porticos, columned arches, mosaic tiles. At the foot of the hill was a great square, thick with people. Men in dark

suits, women in shawls, domed over with hundreds of black umbrellas. The square was dominated by a cathedral, a cathedral which was part ancient stones and wrought iron, part neon tubing and plastic gingerbread. *Church of the Blessed Disaster* flashed a large lightstrip sign affixed to the bell tower.

"Looks, gov, like we arrived just in time for some festivities," observed Walpole, who was attempting to ignore the rain which slammed down on his bare head.

Gypsy was rubbing at his left upper arm, frowning. "Something's going to happen," he said. "Something unpleasant."

"Don't concern us one perishing bit. All we do is locate that comfortable, yet inexpensive, hotel the bloke on the plane told us about and—"

"Want to find out about this." Gypsy halted near a bearded man who was selling smoked sausage and black bread out of a glass-walled cart.

"Me for a nice dry room, feet up on the grate." Walpole stopped, too, but kept shuffling his feet hopefully.

The hard rain slashed through the rents in the old man's umbrella, plastered his thin white hair to his skull. "How many, senor?"

"What is this crowd here for?" Gypsy asked him in Spanish.

"You are a stranger to Madrid?"

"Yes, arrived a couple hours ago."

The old man set aside the fork he'd been using to toast a chunk of sausage over the gas jet. He made a sign of the cross. "Be very careful while you are in our city, senor, these are difficult times in Madrid."

Walpole bent toward the cart, sniffing. "Didn't know you could speak this bloody lingo, gov."

Gypsy's frown grew deeper. "Neither did I," he said. "Now tell me what all these people are waiting for."

The old man gave a cautious nod. "Do you not see the pyre and the stake?"

Down in the center of the rainswept square great bundles of firewood circled an eight-foot high wooden pole. More and more people were crowding the flagstones around the pyre.

"Someone's to be burned at the stake?"

"You have said it."

"Why? For what reason?"

"The usual reason, it is the will of the Inquisitors."

Gypsy rubbed harder at his upper arm. "A girl, are they planning to kill a girl?"

The vendor bobbed his rain-splattered head. "Yes, and, though none will admit it, the crowd is exceptionally large today because they know for certain it is a *real* witch." His voice went lower. "Between you and me, senor, there have been some very uninteresting burnings in the Square of the Blessed Disaster. Men and women burned for political reasons, or by mistake. The people are aware of that, though they say nothing. Today, however, if the rain does not spoil it, we will have the opportunity of seeing an authentic witch subjected to the *auto de fe*."

"Those snug lodgings are beckoning, gov." Walpole was straddling the gutter, watching the rain water course down between his feet.

"How do they know," Gypsy asked the old vendor, "she is a witch?"

He made another sign of the cross. "You must understand, senor, I did not witness this myself. But many people did. Two days ago it was this young witch materialized in the Plaza de Espana. Yes, they say one moment she

was not there and the next she was, appearing out of the thin air. Who but a witch could accomplish that?"

"Who indeed. You say she's young, this witch?"

"She has, they say, the *appearance* of youth, although it is a well-known fact a witch can take on the aspects of youth though she is really an ancient crone."

"Thanks for explaining things to me." Gypsy signaled Walpole and they continued on downhill.

The old vendor called, "Be very careful, senor."

"So?" asked Walpole. "I caught a little of the exchange . . . burning some lass, are they?"

"Yeah, apparently Madrid, all of Spain maybe, is having another Inquisition."

"Very fond of that sort of thing they are in these Latin countries. Still, as I remarked, gov, it's none of our affair."

"We'll stay here for awhile." Gypsy stopped at the edge of the square.

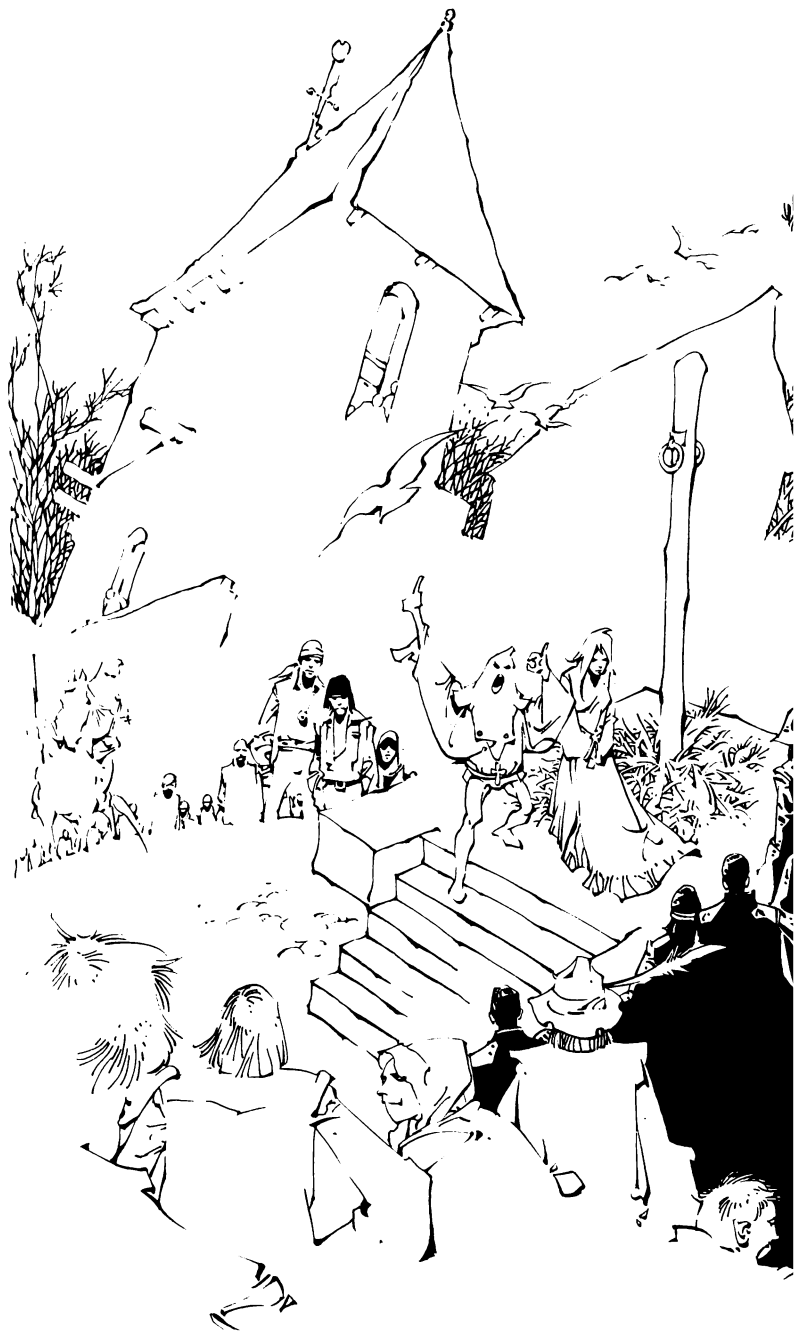
"Couldn't we watch from a drier spot. If this is such a perishing important affair it'll probably be on the telly. We can repair to our hotel—"

"You can go on ahead. I'll—"

"Nope, gov, nope. I don't fancy you and me getting separated again. Last time that happened those rum blokes on horseback . . . oops!"

An iron gate at the side of the cathedral had grated open. Six men in black cloaks and hoods rode out on horseback. When they were stationed in a circle around the unlit bonfire, six more riders emerged to take up positions at the edges of the crowd. Each dark figure held an old-style rifle across his saddle. A gold cross hung around each man's neck.

"If these are the ushers," said Walpole, "I don't think I'm keen to see the show."



"The rifles look like stuff from the last century," said Gypsy.

"They're going to have the burning after all," sighed a fat man nearby. "At last to see a true witch."

Walpole inquired, "What's he so bloody jolly about?"

"He's always wanted to see a witch."

"Is that our motive for sticking around, gov?"

"No, I—"

"Hosanna!"

"Hosanna!"

"Praise the name of Jesus!"

The people were shouting, chanting, new additions to the crowd pressing in from the side streets and alleys.

The huge gold-encrusted doors of the Cathedral of the Blessed Disaster had swung open. A small man in a scarlet robe and hood appeared on the wide marble steps. He had his right hand held high, thumb and forefinger forming a circle. "Bless you," his voice boomed, "bless you one and all!"

"Wired for sound, is he?" said Walpole.

"May our Blessed Savior look with favor on the good work we are about to perform."

"Blessed be the Grand Inquisitor!"

"Hallowed be the name of the Grand Inquisitor!"

"Holy! Holy! Holy!"

Walpole was watching Gypsy's face. "You're not entertaining the notion of interfering with this blessed event, gov?"

"Let's get around to that alley over there."

"We won't be able to see the witch burning half as well from there."

"They won't be able to see us at all." Taking his friend's arm, he dragged him until Walpole decided to walk on his own.

The rain got at them, pounding through the gaps in the tight-together field of umbrellas. The crowd continued to grow.

“Oh, Jesus, we have rid the land of many heretics,” the Grand Inquisitor was saying. “We have sent back to Satan the souls of many witches, warlocks and sorcerers. Today, if your blessed rain interrupt it not, we destroy a most prodigious witch. A girl, seemingly young, who is stepped in the lore of evil and ancient sorceries.”

“Ah, there she is!”

“Move, I can’t see!”

“Brazen-looking, isn’t she!”

“Harlot, slut!”

“Let me have a look!”

From the side door in the cathedral a girl was being led. Her hands were tied behind her back, her grey shirt and trousers tattered and bloody.

“Hey, gov,” exclaimed Walpole, up on tiptoe, “that lass looks a good bit like that Annabelle who was running with Queen Bess.”

“It is Annabelle.”

“It is? How’d she get to Madrid?”

“I sent her here,” said Gypsy.



“I thought at first you had some daft notion of trying to rescue Annabelle,” said Walpole as they ran along the rainy alley.

“I do, I will.” Gypsy stopped beneath a wrought-iron balcony.

“She’s back there being tied to the ruddy pole, gov.”

They were about a quarter mile from the square, the shouts of the crowd and the amplified words of the Grand Inquisitor still audible though muffled and distorted by the heavy rain.

Gypsy locked his hands together, closing his eyes. “I’m going,” he said, “to bring her to us.”

“Ah, to be sure,” said Walpole, “I keep forgetting these marvelous knacks of yours. I don’t mind a rescue oper—”

"You again, Mr. Gypsy, and cutting it pretty damn close." Annabelle stood there on the cobblestones, shaking off the shreds of ropes which still clung to her. "I told you once that being a friend of yours was—"

"Blood of the Martyrs! Bones of the Saints!"

A book fell from the balcony above, plopped on Walpole's head.

An old woman was up there, crossing herself, hopping, gasping. "Witchcraft! Sorcery! The Devil!"

"We'd better move on." Gypsy began leading the girl further away from the square. "Can you run?"

"Some," answered the dark-haired girl.

"Witches! Heretics!" A first floor window shot open, an old man with a fistful of rosary beads commenced shouting at them. "I saw it all!"

"This is the same damn thing that happened when you first dumped me here in Madrid." Lines of pain formed at Annabelle's eyes and at the corners of her mouth, but she kept running.

"Demons! Imps!" Another window.

"We're not highly thought of in these parts, gov."

They ran on. Soon more voices were raised against them.

"Why'd you do what you did?" asked the girl.

Gypsy answered, "I'm not sure."

"None of the rest of the gang showed up in Spain, Queen Bess or any of them, far as I know. I think I'd have heard of any further witches."

"No, they were scattered around the vicinity of Thorne Hill. I must have been thinking of Madrid, of my coming here when—"

"Why me, though?" asked Annabelle, breathing through her mouth. "Why was I picked for—"

"Horses!" warned Walpole. "I hear the sound of

bloody horses.” He glanced back over his shoulder, saw three of the black robed horsemen come galloping into view several hundred yards behind.

Gypsy pulled Annabelle with him into a narrow lane off the alley. “Horses won’t be able to squeeze in here.”

The girl was having increasing trouble breathing. “Where . . . by the way . . . Mr. Gypsy . . . are we going?”

“Not sure. Just away from the square.”

“Well . . . anything’s better . . . than premature cremation.”

“Try the Academia,” suggested a rasping voice from above.

“It’s him, gov,” said Walpole, pointing with a thumb.

Gypsy looked up to see the vulture. It was perched, hunched and rain-beaten, on the gutter of a tile roof. “I don’t need you,” he told the creature.

“So you say, Gyp. But if you keep teleporting people all over Spain you’re never going to get any further with the game.”

“The Academia? Will I learn—”

“The full name is Academia Mentecata. You’ll find it at the end of the Calle de Zurriago.” With a derisive awking, the vulture flapped, damply, up into the rainy day.

“Maybe I’d be better off with the Inquisition.” The girl watched the huge dark bird fly away.

“Speaking of which,” put in Walpole, “I hear their perishing horses drawing up in the alley. We had—

“You and Annabelle go on to the academy,” ordered Gypsy. “I’ll meet you there.”

“A sound plan, gov, cepting I’ve not one single idea as to where it might be.”

“It’s . . .” Gypsy had, all at once, remembered the

Accademia Mentecata and exactly where it was. "Hold on to her. Go ahead, grab her hand." His eyes half-shut, he interlocked his fingers.

The rain came falling down through the space occupied by Walpole and Annabelle seconds before.

Gypsy turned to face the soldiers of the Inquisition.

"What do you think of that?"

"Is nice."

"Nice? You humpty dumpty pile of scrap metal, it's brilliant! Brilliant as all the other inventions of Lorenzo Reno!"

"Is nice, I like."

Lorenzo Reno was a thickset man of forty, red-haired and freckled, dressed in a faded twentieth-century bathrobe and fleece-lined slippers. "Look at this, Sancho, I push the button, the picture fades away! I push again, the picture returns! See the people, they move, they speak!"

"Is cute." Sancho was a shade over five feet high. Built in the image of a pudgy young man, he was constructed of copper, aluminum and stainless steel. His hair was kinky wire, his eyes modified Christmas tree bulbs. "But . . ."

"But what?" roared Reno.

"Dumb picture, no fun to watch."

"What do you expect? The only actors I can get for my shows are that fugitive Italian muralist, Dante Alighieri Bonfigli, and Ramona, the neighborhood prostitute!" He jammed his hands into the pockets of his robe. "And yet, Sancho, you are seeing television! Yes, Lorenzo Reno

has, with very little help from the so-called outside world, re-invented television for his beloved Spain!"

"They no want."

"The Grand Inquisitor doesn't want it, that venal fool who claims to be the head of the Spanish church, Pope Corvo II, doesn't want it, that congenital idiot, King Roberto, doesn't want it! The people, however, the people, Sancho, cry for television!"

"Set you on fire." Sancho's mouth flapped and clanged when he spoke.

"No, they don't dare! Even the Grand Inquisitor is afraid to touch Lorenzo Reno, author of over one hundred seventy-five scholarly books, not to mention sixty-five novels and nineteen collections of short stories and essays."

"Nobody read 'em."

"That's chiefly because they haven't been published," said Reno. "Once I am dead and gone, once my body rots and my bones decay in some lonely unmarked grave . . . then the world will recognize me for the gifted writer and inventor I was!"

"Too late make money then."

"Money! I don't invent for money, I don't write for money!"

"Why do?"

"Because I must!"

"Burn you at stake."

The red-haired inventor shook his head. "As long as I stay close to home, remain here in the Academia Mentecata, they won't harm me. You know why."

"Think you goofy?"

"Exactly, Sancho! They believe I'm insane! So even though they may suspect I think up my inventions while communicating with Lucifer Satan (as though Lorenzo

Reno would need help), they're afraid to harm me! I am the sacred idiot of Madrid! Then, too, the academy has always had a bad reputation." He paced off several circles on the gadget-strewn floor of his crowded study. "I'll leave the television for you to enjoy while I work up some sketches for my latest invention! Do you know what I'm bringing forth next?"

"Something to eat?"

"Lorenzo Reno doesn't need food! I thrive on the vegetables I grow, plus an occasional pigeon! No, Sancho, I am going to invent the electric typewriter."

"Sound good."

"That way I'll be able to churn out my copy even faster."

The robot's bulb eyes were aimed at the small television screen. "People jump up and down."

"Simple to remedy, Sancho! Here, one simply twists this knob!"

"Picture go away."

"I turned it too far—there, your picture has returned with nary a jump."

"Is nice."

"Very well . . . Eh?"

"Pardon the intrusion," said Walpole, uneasy. He and the girl had suddenly materialized on a small clear patch of hardwood floor. "Someone suggested this might be a grand place to avoid some Inquisition chaps."

Annabelle took her hand out of Walpole's and started to explore the large study. "Why do you have all these second-hand appliances lying around?"

"They're not 'second hand'! They're all inventions of Lorenzo Reno!"

"And you're Reno?" asked the girl.

"Who *else* would I be? Who else would I *want* to be? I

am Lorenzo Reno, the man who will eventually bring enlightenment to Spain, make it as technologically advanced as the rest of Europe—or perhaps a shade more! Yes, I am Lorenzo Reno, the one-man Renaissance.”

“You re-invented this?” Annabelle held up an appliance. “The electric mixer?”

“The only one in all of Iberia, young woman! You don’t realize how backward my country is.”

“I do, Mr. Reno,” she told him. “They were just about to burn me at the stake for being a witch.”

“Are you one?”

“No, not at all.”

“Then how did you and your friend manage to appear in my midst so abruptly?”

“It has something to do,” explained Walpole, “with a process they call teleportation.”

The redhaired inventor clapped his hands together. “This promises to be fascinating! You must consider yourself my guests, and accept my offer of sanctuary!”

“We’ll do that,” Annabelle said.

“Is going to be trouble,” said the robot.



The first two were not cautious. They came charging into the narrow passway, pistols drawn, black robes flapping. Old-fashion pistols, the kind which fired bullets. Each of the soldiers of the Inquisition shot at Gypsy, both missed.

Hands on hips, he stood on the rain-pelted cobblestones, facing them. "I want you," he said in Spanish, voice cutting through the downpour, "to leave us alone from now on." He pointed his right hand at them.

Before either, both surprised by his actions, could fire again, the guns had jumped from their hands to go pinwheeling straight up through the rain.

"Blood of the Martyrs!" muttered one of the hooded men.

“Blood of Our Savior!” muttered the other.

A third soldier, more careful, had taken to the housetops and was now bellying down across the slippery slanting tiles. When he was directly above the broad-shouldered Gypsy he aimed his pistol, gripping it in both hands.

“You, too,” said Gypsy, not looking at him at all.

The third soldier’s gun was wrenched out of his grasp. A second later the man himself, wet robe ballooning, was sailing across the lane. He landed in a heap on a small wrought-iron balcony, upsetting a potted dwarf lemon tree. “Holy Relics of the Apostles!” he gasped.

From the alley came the clatter and snorting of more horses arriving.

Gypsy said, “Remember my warning.” He snapped his fingers. Before the sound died he was gone, simply not there in the lane anymore.

The two soldiers stood gazing at the spot where he’d stood.

“Well, what about this then?” demanded Lorenzo Reno as he held up a square metal object. “One of Lorenzo Reno’s better accomplishments.”

“Electric toaster, ain’t it, gov?” inquired Walpole.

“Exactly, Senor Walpole, and the only one in all Madrid!”

“Appliances hard to get in these parts?”

The red-haired inventor laughed. “There is no electricity anymore,” he said. “The Grand Inquisitor and the pope and their puppet, King Roberto, will not allow it to be reintroduced! They say it is the Devil’s power source!”

“You’ve got it, though?”

“Supplied by my own generators, generators invented and built by Lorenzo Reno!” He set the toaster on a work table. “There has been no electricity, no electrical plants in operation in Spain since the Great Disaster of over twenty years ago!”

“I saw mention of that event flashing on the front of the ruddy cathedral. What was it?”

“Don’t they teach world history in your English schools?”

“Well, they might, gov. I’ve been too restless to attend regular.”

“The Great Disaster was not, as you might expect, a war. Rather it was a natural calamity,” explained Reno. “It came in the waning months of this country’s imbecile war with Portugal! An unprecedented earthquake, worse by far than the celebrated Lisbon quake the witty Voltaire wrote of . . . you probably didn’t learn about Voltaire either.”

“I may have been off poaching during that semester.”

“The quake shook all of Spain, not with merely one tremor! No, there were dozens of them, severe tremors stretching across a two-day period. When the last quake had subsided a good part of the country was in ruins. Famine and disease followed, leaving the country vulnerable to the likes of the Grand Inquisitor!”

“Lots of your buildings in Madrid seem pretty ancient.”

“Some of them, such as this one, withstood the quakes. Others have been very patiently restored.”

A door at the other end of the room opened. Annabelle returned, wearing a pale blue blouse and a short tan skirt. “Best I could come up with in the wardrobe trunks,” she said.

The pudgy robot followed her, lurching now and then. "Look nice," he said.

"I haven't devoted much time to manufacturing clothing," said red-haired Reno. "Looms and weaving equipment I've yet to build, and Sancho hasn't quite mastered my foolproof sewing machine."

Walpole noticed the cuts and bruises on the girl's bare arms and legs. "We ought to have a doctor chap give you the once over."

"Lorenzo Reno can attend to most ills, major or minor," their host said. "You couldn't have read my book, *Medicine Self-Taught*, since it's been kept—"

"Gypsy," said the girl.

He had suddenly materialized in the room, a few feet from the nearest work table. "I'm called Gypsy," he said.

"I am none other than Lorenzo Reno, unknown and unheralded in this benighted period of Iberian history, yet destined to be recognized by more enlightened generations to come." He took his hand out of his bathrobe pocket, offered it to Gypsy. "You are most welcome here, senor. I understand you have had an encounter with the minions of the Grand Inquisitor."

Shaking hands, Gypsy replied, "We met a few of them."

"All ended well, gov?"

"I warned them not to interfere with us," he said. "I have the impression I may have scared them sufficiently."

"Don't underestimate the Grand Inquisitor, senor," cautioned Reno. "He won't abandon you quite so easily, especially since you have taken a witch from his clutches. However, since you are the guests of Lorenzo Reno you may escape harm."

Gypsy frowned. "You're friends with this Inquisitor

and his people?"

"On the contrary they hate me and I loathe them. But, as I was explaining to your friends, they are very superstitious about me and this academy."

Gypsy looked around at the cluttered room. "What was this place before you moved in?"

"I have been the sole tenant for more than a decade. This was supposed to have been a college for the especially gifted students in science."

"Supposed?"

"Actually, as I have since learned, the academia was a front," said Reno. "The Spanish government allowed the United States, in return for various concessions, to use these premises to train some of their more unorthodox European-based secret agents."

Gypsy moved closer to the inventor. "How did you find all this out? Are there records, files?"

"Yes, an entire room piled high and left behind when Madrid came tumbling down." Reno studied Gypsy's face for a moment. "You'd like to examine these archives?"

"I would."



“... no repetition of what happened before,” the woman’s voice had said back there so long ago. “In order to avoid that, I must insist on these procedures being followed.” A harsh voice, bitter, very familiar.

“You can discuss it so it sounds very official,” one of the men in the bright white room had said. “Yet you can also call it a game.”

“I call a good many things games, Dr. Larcher. All you have to concern yourself with is setting up things in Madrid. The other testing sites will—”



“This wouldn’t be anything, would it, gov?”

Gypsy looked up. It took him several seconds to travel

back from the past to now, where he was hunched over the open middle drawer of a dusty file cabinet. "What?"

Walpole hopped and skipped over the knee-high piles of bundled manila folders between them. "Says Thorne Hill Report #27J on its perishing cover," he explained as he handed over a folder. "Don't seem to be much inside."

Scanning the few flimsy blue sheets inside the folder, Gypsy said, "No, this seems to be about some sort of experimental robots they were supposed to supply the Madrid operation with." He set it atop the cabinet.

Annabelle sneezed. "I can't imagine why neither of you are snuffling by now," she said from the corner where she was slowly sifting through a stack of memo slips. "Somebody ought to suggest to Lorenzo he invent a vacuum cleaner, or at least a feather duster."

"Want to go back upstairs?"

"No, Gypsy. I won't let a simple little seizure stop me from helping out. After all, I owe you my life."

"You really do, lass," said Walpole as he hopped back to the file cabinet he was exploring. "No need to be so bloody flippant about—"

"I do appreciate it," Annabelle said. "Though you have to admit, really, I wouldn't have been in trouble at all, not a bit, if Gypsy hadn't teleported me here in the first place."

"Even so," Walpole said, "we could have let them go ahead with their pyrotechnics."

"You still haven't quite explained, Gypsy, why you sent me to Madrid. The rest of the—"

"Not exactly certain why," said Gypsy. "I was thinking of Madrid when—"

"Yes, yes, I've heard that. Can it be you didn't want me to get in any further trouble with Queen Bess?"

"Queen Bess won't produce much more trouble."

"Then it might be," suggested the girl, "you've taken a liking to me."

"Not bloody possible," muttered Walpole.

Gypsy's eyebrows pointed downward. "I really am not sure, Annabelle," he said. "Maybe the best thing to do is send you back to England."

"Not exactly yet, thanks." She returned to going through the stacked old memos. "I'm fond of mysteries and puzzles, Gypsy. And you're both. For instance, do you really believe you slept for a half a . . . hum . . ."

"What is it?"

Annabelle brought one of the memos closer to her face. "This one's got different words pencilled under the typed ones. There's a mention of Thorne Hill, and someone named Dr. Larcher. Name sound familiar?"

Gypsy went over to her. "Yes, I think so," he said as he took the memo from her. "Sent from Thorne Hill on Oct 2, 1978, alerting them to the fact Larcher is going to arrive in Madrid on Oct 5 . . . something to do with work on Project #72G. Let me see the next memo on the stack."

"Just checked it out, but the date's April 4, 1977 and the number up in the corner is 209A."

"Mine's 1006B. So we're missing a chunk of these maybe."

On her knees, flipping through the stacks, Annabelle said, "All of these are 1977, that seems to be the only 1978."

Walpole, shedding dust, joined them. "You do recall this Larcher bloke?"

Gypsy nodded. "I'm . . . fairly certain I've heard his name before . . . back then."

"Well, gov, let's find the rest of the perishing memos in this sequence."

"There's a bit of cork in this wine, Sancho." Lorenzo Reno was at the head of the dinner table, holding his wine glass toward the window and the fading day.

The robot said, "Sorry, not nice," and poked a steel finger into the wine.

"No, no, you miserable animated scrapheap. Fetch a fresh glass and, if need be, uncork a new bottle of beaujolais."

"Do that," flapped Sancho, rolling away.

"About the rest of the records and papers," said Gypsy, who sat at his host's left.

"Perhaps if I built the corkscrew right into a finger, he'd become more deft with it," murmured Reno. "What was that, Gypsy?"

"We've gone through everything in the archives room, without finding a particular sequence of memos. I think we were thorough—"

"Bloody thorough, gov."

"—but I'm willing to go through all the stuff again. First I want to know if it's possible some of the papers might be stored in another room."

Reno poked his own finger into his wine. "Yes, unfortunately."

Gypsy pushed back in his chair. "Where? I'd like to see the—"

"Not here, alas," said the inventor, trying a sip of the beaujolais. "You'd best forget it, young fellow, because—"

Crash! Tinkle!

Reno popped up. "What's that, Sancho?"

"New bottle of wine," the robot called from out in the corridor.

"Mop it up, you loon, and get yet another." He sat down, slowly. "Before I took possession of this house a



slight bit of looting went on. A considerable amount of equipment and quite a few pounds of papers were taken. Most of the loot ended up with a dealer in dubious goods named Joao Fremente, a Portuguese of negligible char—”

“Where can we find him?”

Reno gestured at the darkening night. “Floating on the wind perhaps,” he said. “Fremente was burned at the stake some years ago, his property confiscated.”

“What about the papers, were they burned or taken?”

“They were, I believe, put into one of the warehouses of the Grand Inquisitor, which are located in the depths of his palace. Most of the rooms used for such storage were once the dungeons, in the days when the palace was in other hands.”

“New bottle wine.” The robot lurched into the room, the beaujolais and four glasses on a copper tray. “Serve now.” He was nearly to the table when he suddenly let go the tray.

Bam! Tinkle! Clang!

“Now what, you mooncalf?”

“Spy.” Sancho clattered to the window. “Eavesdropper.”

A flapping sound started, a huge bird flew up and away across the window.

Gypsy sprinted across to the window, stared out.

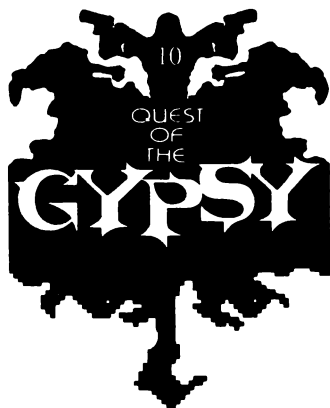
“Only a roosting bird,” suggested Reno.

“The ruddy vulture again, weren’t it, gov?”

Nodding, Gypsy said, “I’m still not certain about whose side he’s on.”

“Wager it ain’t ours.”

“Spy,” the robot said again.



“What do you mean ‘gaudy?’” asked the pope.

“Gaudy,” repeated the Grand Inquisitor.

Pope Corvo II made another, slower, pirouette. His jeweled robes rattled and clicked. “Which touch do you feel to be gaudy?”

The Grand Inquisitor, a small ill-shaved man, was lounging in a brocade chair reading heresy reports. He gave a noncommittal grunt.

The pope stamped his scarlet-booted foot on the thick carpet of the vast office. “The Grand Ball for the Friends of the Inquisition is but once a year, you know. I want to look my best, I must look my best.” He was a tall, red-cheeked man of fifty. “Is it the cherubs embroidered on the skirt? Are they too gaudy?”

“Perhaps their ruby eyes.”

"Well, what would you make cherub eyes out of then?" demanded the angry pope. "They tell me that imposter in Rome, Pope Verdadero I, has twenty-four archangels on his bathrobe, each with diamonds for eyes. *Diamonds*, mind you. On his *bathrobe*."

"He, however, is not the real and true pope." The Grand Inquisitor set aside the fat stack of reports. "A pretender such as Verdadero can afford to look cheap and gaudy, since he is not actually the true representative of St. Peter on this—"

"Suppose we remove the rubies? Gold buttons might do."

"My dear Corvo, you must tell your dress maker to begin anew, to design you robes of simplicity and dignity."

"One can't argue with him. He's been joyful as a babe about this new—"

"He designed all my attire." The Grand Inquisitor indicated the simple dark robe he was wearing.

"I look positively cadaverous in black."

"They needn't be black, only less gaudy."

"All right, very well. Suppose we get rid of the cherubs altogether and, possibly, the pearl trim. I think I could keep the Last Supper across the back. It's done in only semi-precious stones so—"

"Dignity is what—"

"The people like to see me all dressed up. You should see the letters I get."

"Your eminences, a word with you."

"Blood of the Saints!" Pope Corvo II thunked to his knees, making a hasty sign of the cross.

"What sort of trick is this?" The Grand Inquisitor was out of his chair, watching the open window.

Sitting on the sill was the vulture. "No trickery in-

volved,” he assured them. Nor is it the work of the Devil, G.I.”

“He says it, but, Blessed Virgin Mary, I doubt it,” murmured the pope.

“Think of me,” continued the vulture, “as simply another public-minded citizen who has come to warn you.”

The Grand Inquisitor inched closer to the window. “I am, I warn you, armed. Beneath these simple robes I carry—”

“Yes, yes,” said the vulture impatiently. “Let me get to the point, G. I. A very powerful warlock is loose in your fair Iberian city. Perhaps you know of whom I speak.”

“The fiend who snatched the young witch?”

“That is he.”

“Do you know where the fiend can be found?”

“I know where he’ll be,” replied the vulture.

Gypsy hadn’t expected it.

And yet, in a way, he had. Something, something he only partially remembered from back then, told him that at times he wouldn’t be able to teleport himself. It was as though the ability . . . the power to do it had to be built up.

So he’d had to revise his plan for the assault on the dungeons beneath the palace of the Grand Inquisitor. Lorenzo Reno had been able to help him, by digging out charts and street plans of the city.

Now, wearing a rainproof black cloak, an invention of Reno, Gypsy was making his way through the rainy night

streets of Madrid. The rain, heavy and wind-tossed, had begun a few minutes before Gypsy slipped out of Reno's stronghold.

He was trying, as he strode through the stormy darkness, to remember more about himself, about the time before he'd slept. To have these powers and yet not completely underst—

"In the Name of the Carpentry Bench of the Blessed Saint Joseph, aid an old, crippled woman to purchase a crust of bread for her supper."

Absently Gypsy reached under his cloak for a coin, handed it to the bent figure who'd emerged from the shadows of an arched doorway.

"May the Sweet Virgin Mother of . . . what's this? An English coin! You're an outlander, a heretic no doubt!" The twisted woman's voice grew louder and louder.

Gypsy, unthinking, had given her one of the coins he'd picked up in London 3. "Wait now."

"Help! A warlock! A—"

Gypsy tapped the old woman's neck and she lost consciousness.

As she toppled down toward the wet, puddled paving stones, her shawl and wig fell off.

"A guy," realized Gypsy. "Meaning he could be an agent of the Inquisition." Leaving the man where he fell, Gypsy sprinted away.

He was near the place Lorenzo Reno had marked on one of the maps with a large, flamboyant X. He didn't want to be stopped or delayed.

Around a corner and down a terraced street and Gypsy was at the X-spot. It was a narrow stone building, looming cold and hollow in the heavy rain. He approached it, cautiously.

The rain hammered on the remains of the tile roof. A

good deal of the rain got inside, the halls were slick with water. Gypsy moved along a hallway, after pushing through the widely-askew wooden door. He located the stairway which led to the basement. Halfway down, he halted.

There was someone huddled in the dark.

Gypsy became aware of the snoring, the smell of wine. He continued downward. When he reached the basement of the abandoned building he got out the flashlight Reno had given him and clicked it on.

"There it is." The beam of light was pointing at a wooden trapdoor. Gypsy, after turning off his light, lifted the door with ease and dropped down into the damp blackness below.

He landed, feet wide, on the stone flooring of the long unused sewer tunnel.

Gypsy stood there listening before he turned the flash back on. According to the maps Reno had shown him, he had to travel roughly two miles to his left.

The first mile was uneventful. Then, as Gypsy was passing the entrance to a branch of his tunnel, a voice called out, "A light!"

Gypsy killed the flash.

"What did you see?"

"A light, Off there in Tunnel 6."

"I don't see anything."

"Trust me, there was something."

"Then we should investigate!"

Gypsy all this while was hurrying, silently, away from the juncture of tunnels. Reno had mentioned the possibility of patrols in the tunnels closer to the Grand Inquisitor's palace. He was correct.

"Turn on your higher beam."

"Wait. We don't know what we may be stalking."

Behind him two blurred circles of light were floating, bouncing, in the thick darkness. This was going to mean a delay unless—

Gypsy fell down. There was a rattling, cracking sound. He tripped over something in the dark tunnel. Trying to get up, he fell again, tangled with what felt like old bones. Old bones, brittle. His groping fingers closed on a human skull, then another.

Sometime, long ago, bodies had been dumped here. After one of the plagues or maybe as cargo from the dungeons themselves. Gypsy worked his way clear of the intricacy of bones and skulls.

By this time the two men behind him were running, boots clacking and echoing.

“Someone among the dead.”

“Holy Hammer of St. Joseph, what if it is the dead who are moving?”

“The dead don’t carry lanterns.”

The lantern beams of the two pursuers grew, reaching as far as the first sprawled skeleton. Gypsy was flat against the mossy stone wall, the glow not yet touching him.

He didn’t feel he could teleport himself out of there, he wasn’t ready. But maybe he had enough power to do something else.

“Blessed Wood of the True Cross!” exclaimed one of the men.

“What are you—”

“Look! There in my lantern beam! I told you the dead—”

“Impossible!”

One of the skeletons, topped by one of the yellowed skulls, seemed to be walking down the stone corridor toward them. As they, stopped still, watched a second

skeleton assembled itself and began, clattering, to approach them.

"This must be reported to the Grand Inquisitor."

"You're absolutely right. And the sooner we get there the better!"

The pair commenced running in the opposite direction, lanterns swinging wildly.

Gypsy allowed the telekinetically-raised bones to drop. Murmuring, "Excuse me for disturbing your long rest," he hurried on.

Silence met him.

Gypsy inched the trapdoor further open, pushing with the heel of his hand. Still only silence and darkness up above in the dungeon rooms.

He boosted himself upward, sat on the trap edge, swung into the stone room and allowed the heavy plank door to drop quietly shut. He knelt there and listened to the darkness.

Then, rising, he turned on his flashlight. He was in a cavernous room which was piled high with a jumble of loot—caskets of gems, ropes of pearls, strings of jewels, silver plate, gold candlesticks, all glimmering in the pale yellow glow of his exploring light. Remnants of chains and fetters dangled from the stone walls.

Head slightly lowered, Gypsy wended through the piles and tumbles of valuables. He knew, sensed, the papers he was after were somewhere nearby. Behind a man-high stack of gold platters and silver dishes was a doorway. Easing around the stack, Gypsy shined his light into the room beyond. It was smaller, ringed with large packing

cases. And there on a dented metal desk rested several bundles of memos.

Gypsy crossed the threshold.

Pam!

He had hit the rough stone floor an instant before the shot, was rolling toward one of the packing cases.

Pam! Pam!

The slugs came howling close to his whirling body.

Gypsy leaped, got himself behind a high and heavy case.

"Surrender, infidel," a voice called out, "in the name of the Grand Inquisitor and his Holy Work!"

Pam! Pam! Pam!

The pistol shots thudded into the crate which shielded him.

They were apparently using old-style bullet-firing weapons, the kind Gypsy remembered from . . . back then. Six men, cloaked in black, waiting behind the crates.

Gypsy couldn't see them, but he knew they were there. Knew how many, the sort of guns they held, what they wore. But he hadn't sensed they were there until he'd walked into the room.

He knew also the papers on the old desk were the ones he'd come for. Maybe he could . . . eyes nearly closing, he concentrated on the memos.

The lanterns of the armed men illuminated the room.

"Holy Loot of the Blessed Crusaders!" exclaimed one of the soldiers of the Inquisition.

"Magic! The old documents vanish!"

"Magic wrought by the devil!"

"Excitable fools, huh?" asked the vulture.

Gypsy saw the large bird huddled in the shadows behind the neighboring crate, its claws rasping on the



rocky floor. "Your idea? This little ambush?"

"Yes, you've been having it too easy, Gyp," replied the vulture, "specially since you've discovered some of your talents."

"Some?"

After a cackling laugh the vulture said, "I thought a bit of shooting would be fun. You did very well, reflexes test out excellently. I was hoping the first couple of shots might do you some damage."

"You know more about these talents of mine than I do. Why is it I can teleport sometimes and not at—"

"We give you one more chance to surrender!"

"Thereafter we destroy you!"

"I can't tell you that, Gypo me boy," said the vulture. "Wouldn't be playing the game. You've got to discover for yourself exactly how you function."

"You could at least tell me—"

"Nope, we got to stick to the rules."

Eyes on the hunched bird, Gypsy said, "The stuff I just teleported away from here will give me something, some more information about myself."

The vulture shrugged, wings flapping slightly. "It'll tell you where to go next, about all."

A soldier interrupted. "You do not surrender?" There is silence. "Then we have no choice!"

Pam! Pam! Pam!

Gypsy was trapped. The cackling vulture would provide no assistance. Nor did it look concerned, as, oddly, it sometimes did. Perhaps it was a cue. If the bird wasn't upset, neither should Gypsy be. Now was the time to find out. Gypsy pulled his chin down, moving the frontal lobes into an outward position.

When the hooded soldiers charged the area behind the crates, they found it empty. Gypsy's teleportative capaci-

ty had returned.

The pope shrieked.

Gypsy didn't materialize where he'd intended. Instead of teleporting himself back to Lorenzo Reno's, he'd popped up three stories above the dungeon and still in the palace.

The Grand Inquisitor threw aside the *auto de fe* cost breakdown charts he'd been frowning over. "Devilish imps! What is this?"

"Another surprise," mumbled the pope, making a clutch at his gold and pearl rosary. "Two of them in one night makes for such—"

"If you'll excuse me," said Gypsy, "I'll—"

"The warlock!" The inquisitor, black robe flapping, ran to the door. "It's the warlock of whom that dread bird warned us."

The pope was shaking, causing his ornamentation to rattle.

Gypsy glanced around the chamber. The rain was hitting hard at the shuttered windows.

"Guards! A warlock!" The Grand Inquisitor yanked the door open to shout out into the corridor.

"How's that again?" inquired a distant voice.

"A warlock, a warlock, idiot! Here! Come and destroy him!"

Swiftly Gypsy crossed to a window. He hit the shutters with a fist and they snapped open, the harsh, wet wind catching at them. Not looking back, Gypsy went through the window. There was, as one of Reno's plans had indicated, a ledge running along beneath the windows. Not

quite a foot wide.

The rain slapped at Gypsy as he stood there. The wind shoved and nudged, trying to topple him down to the glistening street.

Ping!

A shutter up ahead of him had come snapping open. A hand gripping a pistol poked out and fired at him. Once, then twice more.

Ping! Ping!

The bullets nipped at the stones of the palace.

“Maybe this time,” Gypsy said. Teeth clenched, he locked his fingers together.

A minute and nothing. Then Gypsy was gone from the ledge, the night rain blackening the clear spot where he’d stood.

“Crown of Thorns,” exclaimed Pope Corvo II, who’d risked a peek out the window.





Annabelle circled, slowly, around Walpole. “Oh, am I?”

The lanky young man grinned directly at her, head bobbing up and down. “’Fraid so, mum,” he said. “You’re wrong. Appears as how your eyes are deceiving you for fair.”

She rested, buttocks thrust back, against one of the cluttered work tables. “I wonder what the situation would have been if I’d been here alone in Reno’s study when these stacks of memos materialized.”

Walpole, grinning still, spread his hands wide. “Same as it is, lass,” he told her. “You come in seconds after the stuff popped up. And you’re absolutely wrong about what you think you saw as you come in. I give you my perishing word of honor on that.”

Left eye nearly closed, she watched him. "You weren't in the act of destroying one of those new memos when I walked in on you?"

"Lord bless us. Why'd I do a bamy thing like that? We all knows these here papers may contain vital info about our mutual friend, Gypsy."

Annabelle said, "You are his friend, but—"

"Blimey, I'm his best friend," insisted Walpole. "I wouldn't do nothing to hurt him." He held his arms out. "Feel free to search me."

The girl shook her head. "No, never mind," she said. "I'll have to trust you. Although I . . . well, let's get busy on this new stuff." She glanced, abruptly, around the room. "Gypsy should be returning himself, don't you think?"

"No need to fret. Gypsy can . . . here he is."

Gypsy, face grim, had materialized inside the door. Without a word he crossed to the window, pushed aside the heavy drapes to stare out into the night.

"Expecting some of them hooded blokes, gov?"

"Other way around," Gypsy said, "they were expecting me."

Annabelle asked, "What do you mean? How could they have known you—"

"The vulture," he said. "His idea of a joke, I guess. There was a flock of soldiers, all armed, waiting for me down in the dungeon storerooms."

"That bloody bird seems determined to make our path a bumpy one," complained Walpole.

"He tells me it's part of the game."

"I suppose he ain't told you what the game is, though?"

"No, not yet," said Gypsy. "Maybe these papers will. This is all the Grand Inquisitor had stored."

"I took the liberty, gov, of starting to peruse them. You might care to cast an eye on this chunk here."

There were nine of them, thin blue sheets of paper from fifty years ago. Gypsy read the top one aloud, " 'Should the subject of Project #72G survive the Madrid tests and interpret the clues correctly, Dr. Hawksworth herself plans to fly to Gibraltar to supervise the next phase of testing. You are to begin making the required arrangements.' " His arm dropped to his side, the memos crackled. "I know that name. Dr. Hawksworth. Yes, I know how she is. She's . . . she was . . . Damn it! It's inside my head someplace, but I can't quite grab it. Hawksworth . . . Hawksworth . . . Hawksworth . . . who is she? Who was she?"

"Could be them other messages will provide illumination, gov."

"Hawksworth . . . Dr. Hawksworth . . . She helped me to . . . to what?" Shaking his head, Gypsy returned his attention to the memos. He skimmed swiftly through the rest of them, saying at last, "More about her visit to Gibraltar. Looks like they had an Anglo-American research center there. Nothing else about me."

"That's a bloody pity."

"What is Gibraltar?" asked Annabelle. "Isn't it an island or something?"

Gypsy said, "Actually it's a peninsula, hooked on to Spain. Almost an island, though."

"Then we ain't that far from it, gov?"

"A few hundred miles south of us, right smack between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean."

"You've got a lot of facts put away," said the girl. "A regular information center you are—"

"What say we move onto something else?" interjected Walpole, but his overbearing nonchalance provoked a

darting glance from Annabelle. "What say we stick to Gibraltar, Walpole. Or is there *something* bothering you that you might like to share with us?"

"If it's any of your blooming business," Walpole said, "I miss me old pal, Faxy. He was a walking computer of sorts, and we had to leave him behind at the Thorne Hill setup."

"I didn't know there was anything like that there."

"Oh, so? I'd of thought your perishing curiosity would have rooted out every single secret the place held. You seem to be on top of everything *else*!"

Making a moderately nasty face, Annabelle attacked a bundle of memos. "Who do you suppose controls Gibraltar nowadays? Is it part of Spain, did you say?"

"England controls . . . controlled it," said Gypsy. "We'll have to find out what the situation is now."

"Be a bit difficult for us," said the girl, "to show up on Gibraltar if the Grand Inquisitor has some of his troops there."

"What's all this ruddy 'us' business?" Walpole scowled, nodded at Gypsy. "We've saved this wench more than enough times already, ain't we? Don't tell me you're fixing to drag her along to Gibraltar with us?"

Gypsy said, "What do you think, Annabelle?"

"I assumed it was all settled. I'm part of the team, till we get to the end of this quest of yours."

Walpole slapped down the pages he'd been checking through. "You're worse than that blinking vulture. This ain't no bloody picnic excursion, lass. Why don't you let Gypsy pop you back to Mother England."

"No," said Annabelle, eyes on Gypsy.

Gypsy returned the look. "Things may get tougher, Annabelle."

"Yes, I imagine they will."

"All right . . ." Gypsy looked at her more intensely, "if you want to come along, you can."

"Lunacy," murmured Walpole. "Might as well simply hand ourselves over to the Grand Inquisitor straight off."

"I'd better tell you," Gypsy said to them, "that even if Annabelle wanted to go home, I don't think I could do it."

"What's up, gov?"

"My ability to teleport is turning out to be a lot more erratic than I figured," explained Gypsy. "It doesn't always work." He told them some of what had happened to him at the palace.

"Coo," observed Walpole, "that ain't so very good. What's causing it, do you think?"

"I don't know, but maybe we can find out when—"

Crash! Bam! Rattle!

The door swung open and Sancho the robot came lurching in. "Nightcap," he said. "Master invite."

"When we finish up here," Gypsy told him. "If that's not too late for Mr. Reno. Meantime I'd like to talk to him about what he knows about Gibraltar."

Sancho's mouth flapped. "Bad place."

"You have some information about it?"

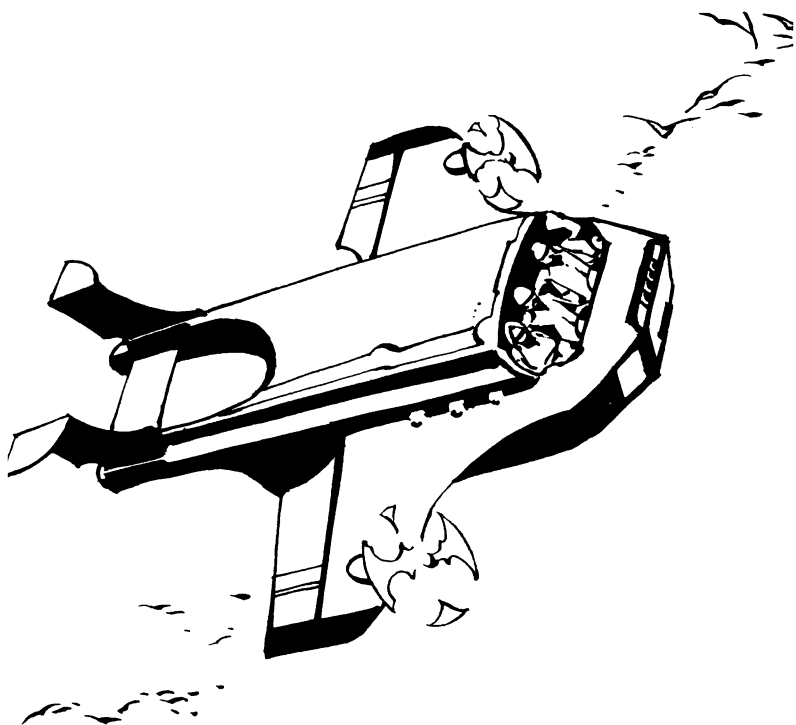
The robot clanged as he tapped his chest. "No information, only gut feeling. Bad place."

"It's the miracle of the age," Lorenzo Reno shouted above the roar.

"That it is for fair," responded Walpole.

Hugging herself against the dawn chill, Annabelle said, "All the work you put into this . . . you can't give it





away.”

“Lorenzo Reno is not giving away the Reno’s Dynamic Airship,” the inventor said, putting an arm around her, “he is but loaning it to you.”

“We ain’t likely to be returning this way in a while, gov.”

Reno’s red head hunched between his shoulders as he shrugged. “The important thing is for you to continue your mission,” he said. “And it won’t hurt to have the rest of the benighted world get a look at the Dynamic Airship as it, gracefully, courses through the air.”

Gypsy was inside the cabin of Reno’s airplane, checking out the controls with the help of Sancho. The ship was a small one, with a propeller mounted on each wing. It was of several colors, the wings a bright orange, body a brilliant yellow, tail a sea-green. *Reno’s Dynamic Airship* was lettered in ambitious script on each side of the fuselage. Reno kept the experimental aircraft on the flat roof of his stronghold, covered with camouflaging canvas. When Gypsy’d asked for suggestions on how they might safely travel to Gibraltar, the inventor offered the plane.

Keeping clear of the spinning propellers, Reno strolled closer to the cockpit and cupped his hands. “How’s she feel?”

“I understand how everything is supposed to work,” Gypsy called out. “You’re sure this thing will fly?”

“My maiden voyages had to be, due to the nature of the situation here, somewhat covert. She handled beautiful on all my shortrun predawn flights.” He stood back, raising both hands towards the lightening sky. “You will soar like a bird, Lorenzo Reno guarantees it.”

“What about the fuel situation, is there enough?”

“More than plenty,” answered Reno. “By utilizing an

excellent Reno design there's considerable space for the storage of extra fuel." He looked up at the sky again. "You'd best, if you feel confident, prepare to leave. You are certain you've piloted an aircraft before?"

"Yes I've . . . I know how."

"Then I have but to wish you s safe trip," said Reno. "Sancho, you clattering dolt, get out of there now and allow the other young people to board the Dynamic Airship."

"Aye aye." The robot backed out of the quivering plane.

After a few seconds of hesitation Walpole aided Anabelle in and followed her.

"Don't forget about the takeoff booster," Reno reminded Gypsy. "Bon voyage." He pulled Sancho clear of the takeoff area.

The sun was starting to show over the building tops.

"Everybody strapped in?"

"Right you are, gov. Do you really think this contrivance will work?"

"Probably a lot better than my teleportation powers at the moment." He depressed the red assist button.

The plane commenced rattling, then, with a great wooshing, rose straight up off the inventor's roof.

"Off we go to Gibraltar," said Walpole.

Nothing went wrong until they were over the ruins of Seville that afternoon.

Sput! Sput! Wang!

Walpole sat up in his narrow seat. "Do I detect something ominous in that blinking noise, gov?"

"Fuel suddenly reads empty," replied Gypsy. "We'll switch to the emergency supply."

Wang! Sput!

"Don't seem to make a very large difference."

Annabelle was studying the charts. "We're over something called Dregs of Seville."

"Not likely, anyhow, to be a spot where the Grand Inquisitor has a branch office."

Gypsy repeated the emergency switchover process. The fuel gauge maintained its empty reading. "Let's get ready," he suggested, "for a landing."

"Should have known this bloody thing wouldn't work any better than that perishing Sancho."

Annabelle was watching the ruins below, which they were now skimming at a height of about five hundred feet. "What exactly happened to this city, do you suppose?"

"A territorial war," said Walpole, "between Seville and Cadiz. Both the contenders got aid from larger powers, which resulted, after a bit of scuffling, in there being no more Seville or Cadiz. Happened something like thirty years back."

"You're considerably better informed than I thought."

"Did some reading whilst I was at Reno's."

"Clear area up ahead," announced Gypsy. "I'll set the plane down."

A half-mile wide stretch of clear ground had been cut out of the ruins, it wasn't clear whether by accident or design.

Gypsy landed the Dynamic Airship with no trouble. The air was clear, the afternoon hot. Weedy grass covered the area.

"Think we can repair this blooming contrivance?"

"We'll give it a try." Gypsy unbuckled his seatbelt.

"Would you mind," asked Annabelle, "if I took a look at the fuel system?"

"What for, love?" inquired Walpole while swinging from the cockpit to the ground.

"I know a little bit about things mechanical," the girl answered. "That was one of my specialties when I ran with the Queen Bess concern."

"That's a bit of perishing news to me." The lanky young man stretched, squinting toward the sun.

"Gypsy?"

"Go ahead, Annabelle. If you can't find the trouble, I'll lend a hand."

"You've had a lot of experience with machines, too, haven't you? You know quite a bit about how to fly old-fashioned clunks like this."

"I guess," he said, before joining Walpole outside, "I do."

At the edge of the landing strip rubble and ruins rose up.

"Piece of cathedral yonder." Walpole pointed. "High class hotel opposite. Must have been pretty grand hereabouts at—"

Thunk!

An arrow had come whistling out of the nearest mound of rubble and struck the side of Reno's Dynamic Airship.

"Nine of them," said Gypsy, shoving Walpole nearer to the plane.

"Ah, yes, I recall reading about them. The Dregs of Seville are inhabited by a pretty primitive bunch of—"

Thunk! Thunk!

With a boost from Gypsy, Walpole got back into the cockpit.

When they were inside, Gypsy said, "They're going to foul up our plane if this keeps up."

“That’s the trouble with primitives, no respect for property,” observed Walpole.

“Ha!” Annabelle had crawled deep into the tail of the ship. “Here’s the trouble, a clogged line from the emergency tanks. Have that fixed quick enough.”

“Quick enough to save us from these perishing savages?”

“What savages?

Thunk! Thunk!

Nose flattening against the neoglass, Walpole said, “There’s one of the blokes hopping out into the open.”

The bowman who was venturing closer was sun-blackened, sinewy thin, wearing a ragged tunic. He hunched slightly as he drew another arrow from his cloth quiver.

“Try it now.” Annabelle sat up.

Gypsy turned his attention to the control panel. For a few seconds the plane was silent, then the propellers began to spin.

“Looks like we can bid farewell to the fun-loving natives of Seville.”

Moments later they were in the air.

The plane stayed up as far as a fishing village on the coast of the Mediterranean. There was no repairing it this time and the three abandoned Reno’s Dynamic Airship to continue on foot.



“Believe I see lights over there, gov.”

Gypsy turned. “Where?”

“Bloody things just went out.”

“Guess it’s time we started to walk,” said Annabelle and the trio put her suggestion into action.

A salty wind was blowing across the rocky field where they had left the machine. Silence and darkness pervaded the area. Gypsy smiled. “I had a feeling,” he said.

“A feeling about what?”

“About this place. About making contact here.”

“Maybe we will,” said the girl, “over in that place where the lights were showing.”

Gypsy nodded. “Okay, we’ll try that.”

“Shall I use the blooming flashlight Reno gifted us with?”

"No," said Gypsy.

"Why so perishing cautious? According to Reno, Gibraltar is inhabited by nothing but amiable farmers."

"Even so, no light." Gypsy started walking across the dark field.

"Slow it up, gov. I don't have your knack for finding me way around in total blackness."

"It's not that bad," said Annabelle. "There are a few stars out tonight, Walpole."

"Way up there they are. While down here it's as black and furry as the inside of a . . . oops!"

Gypsy spun around. "What is it?"

"Not sure, gov. I believe I've bumped into a large hairy chap. Good evening, sir. You're certainly a huge bloke, ain't . . . oof!"

A dark shaggy shape skittered away from Walpole, making a chittering sound.

"A monkey," gasped Walpole. "Or one of them gorillas. Give me a hefty punch in the knackers . . . excuse me, mum."

The chittering grew more distant.

Annabelle sniffed the air. "That's an odd smell."

"Gorilla's ain't noted for their floral fragrance."

"No, what I smell is machine oil."

"Did Lorenzo Reno mention as how these farmers kept mechanical gorillas as pets, gov?"

"Let's continue." Gypsy said.

"Ain't my bloody fault a clockwork ape looms up directly in me path."

The three of them made their way across the night field for several silent minutes.

Gypsy halted first, saying, "Some sort of cottage up ahead."

There were suddenly lights again. In the stone cottage,

and floating in the darkness much nearer. A dozen powerful beams crisscrossing on the trio.

"You raiders are getting more audacious," said a voice from the dark behind the lights.

"No need for words, Hand Sanchez. Let's do them in."

"A moment, Hand Peralta. We should give them a chance to say a little something in their behalf before we kill them."

Gypsy tried to see the men who held the lights. "We're not raiders, whatever they are," he announced. "We're not here to raid or steal, not here to hurt anyone."

"Foolishness, Hand Sanchez. We've lost enough produce to these Tangier bastards. Kill them."

"We sure ain't Tangier bastards," said Walpole. "You ought to be able to tell that by looking at us."

"I'd like to talk to someone and explain why we're here," said Gypsy. "One of you maybe. Can we go inside and—"

"Kill them kill them, Hand Sanchez. They're trying to gab their way out of the trap."

"Damn right we are," said Walpole. "I can guarantee you I've never swiped produce in me life. Wouldn't know how to fence it if I did."

"Perhaps," said Hand Sanchez, "we—"

"No perhaps. We caught them fair, we kill them. Let's be doing it."

"The Tangier raiders haven't used women before," said Sanchez. "I'm wondering—"

"Another trick," said Hand Peralta.

"Peralta, you seem the one most anxious to see us dead." Gypsy probed and felt a restored inner strength.

"That I am."

"Okay, I'm going to send you away for a short while."

"You're going to—"

"Hand Peralta?"

The beams swung around, sweeping at the darkness, touching at several pairs of booted feet. Gypsy's telepor-tive ability had returned.

"He's not here now," Gypsy explained. "He's safe, not hurt, but not here. What I did to him, I can do to all of you. I'd rather talk."

"Very well," said Sanchez. "we'll let you talk to someone. You'd better come with us to Farmer Grooner."

"Is he in the cottage?"

"No, he's underground," replied Hand Sanchez.

The big white-haired man cut another thick slice of dark bread. "All our own grain, ground here within Gibraltar," he said, passing the slice across the round checker-top table to Walpole and then pushing a pot of jam toward him. "All our own berries, grown here."

Walpole spread jam. "Fancy that now."

Farmer Grooner watched the three of them. "Eat your snacks, my friends, and then we can talk."

Gypsy ignored the bread he'd been given. "Mr. Grooner," he said, "we've come to this—"

"No misters here," the old man cut in. "Ours is a simple society, dedicated to growing good food. We have Farmers, Hands, Maids and Wives. No misters."

"How about doctors? Any of those?" asked Walpole as he chewed.

"We have a few professional men, but when you eat only what you've grown yourself there is little need for

doctors, dentists and the rest.” He put his elbows on the table, turned his attention to Gypsy. “I’m sure you’ve seen a good deal of the world, young man, seen what dreadful shape it’s in. How do you think our planet got that way? They’ll tell you war, disease and natural disasters are to blame. Not so. They are only the symptoms. The real cause of the collapse of most of the so-called world was diet.”

“Or,” said Walpole, “lack of it.”

Farmer Grooner said, “No one need have starved. Stupidity, emphasis on the wrong sort of protein caused the famines. Nature will provide everything but intelligence. That you’ve got to have yourself.”

Gypsy shifted in his chair. The three of them had been brought down to this white-walled, parlor-like room over a half hour ago and so far they’d been given bread and jam and agricultural propaganda. “All your farms are underground?” he asked.

Farmer Grooner said, “We’ve found indoor farming is more efficient. We can control all the factors involved in producing abundant crops.”

“Then you used the underground rooms and tunnels already here?”

“Most of our growing program utilizes the rooms we found when we settled on Gibraltar twenty some years ago,” replied the farmer. “We come from all over the world, all sharing a belief in sounder nutrition and hard—”

“Before you came here, a half century ago, Gibraltar was used by the governments of England and America as a research facility,” Gypsy said. “Did you find any of—”

“You’re a very impatient young man. I’ll bet your diet is high in—”

“I’m trying to find out something about myself. The

answer may be here."

"Obviously you're an exceptional fellow. What exactly did you do to Hand Peralta?"

"Moved him."

"Moved him? How exactly did you 'move' him?"

"It's a knack of his, gov," Walpole said while reaching for the large loaf of bread. "What you call teleportation."

Gypsy said, "Peralta's back now, I only sent him a few miles away. He was much too eager about killing us as raiders."

Farmer Grooner hunched further, elbows digging into the table cover. "How is it, young man, you are able to do such things?"

"I'm not exactly sure. Which is why I want to get a look at whatever files and documents may have been left behind."

"You know nothing of how you come to have such powers?"

"Very little," answered Gypsy.

Licking jam off his thumb, Walpole said, "Amnesia is what the lad's got."

Farmer Grooner leaned back in his chair. "There is one entire wing of underground rooms which we don't use," he told them. "When we first arrived and explored the rock . . . accidents happened."

Annabelle asked, "What sort of accidents?"

"Your American and British researchers departed in a great hurry I believe. Much of their belongings and equipment was left behind," said the farmer. "Not merely papers but various weapons. In our early days on Gibraltar five of our people were killed while attempting to move or deactivate these things. It was decided thereafter to seal up that wing, leave everything entirely

alone there.”

Gypsy said, “You won’t object to my looking through what’s left?”

“Not if you’re willing to take the risk,” said Farmer Grooner.



“I ain’t in the mood for a perishing sightseeing tour,” complained Walpole. “We ought to be helping Gypsy.”

“You should have taken that up with him,” said Annabelle.

The high wide underground corridor was a pale yellow, the pumped in air mildly warm and slightly humid. On each side of them were plastiglass walls which shielded row on row of growing-troughs.

“I did, as you know, lass. He said as how he wanted to tackle that sealed off wing on his own.”

“He’s concerned about us, about our getting hurt.”

The two of them were roaming alone, having been guided to this level of the indoor farms by Hand Sanchez.

“About you maybe,” said Walpole. “He knows I can handle myself.”

Annabelle slowed, idly watching a roomful of newly sprouting corn. "Well, perhaps in your case it's that Gypsy doesn't quite trust you."

Walpole stalked back to her side. "What's that supposed to mean? It isn't me who was running around being a bloody disciple of Queen Bess and trying to get me and Gypsy done in."

"That's over, Gypsy understands that," the girl said. "But you ought to worry about whether Gypsy suspects you destroyed some of those memos back at Lorenzo Reno's."

"It was only one . . ." Walpole stopped talking, turned away from her.

"So I was right. You did tear one up," Annabelle said. "I think Gypsy ought to know about—"

"Wait now." Walpole took hold of her arm. "I don't want you to do that. I don't want Gypsy to know . . . to know . . ."

"To know what?" The girl put her hand over his. "You are on his side, aren't you?"

Nodding vigorously, Walpole said, "There's a lot of things he still don't remember. And I figure it's better for . . . certain facts to . . . to come back to him gradually. The only trouble is . . . he may find out down in the bowels of this bloody place."

"Find out what?"

"Too much about himself." Walpole avoided looking at the girl.

"Something about these abilities of his?"

Walpole said, "In a way I guess. Look, lass, I got to admit I never quite came up against anything exactly like this here situation before. Maybe later I'll let you in on . . . the problem. That is it—I can't see exactly how to handle it on my own."

"Is there something wrong with Gypsy? Some illness?"

"Ain't an illness." Walpole began glancing around. "Hand bloke mentioned we could get above ground if we so desired. I think I'll locate me a ramp up. I'd like to muse in solitude a bit."

"Why don't you tell me now? Maybe I can think of something that'll help Gypsy."

Walpole said, "I got to ponder a bit more, lass," and moved hurriedly away.

The air processing system in these grey metal tunnels operated for the first time in twenty years. A dusty, chill smell still in the passway. Gypsy walked along a tunnel, slowly, alert and listening. He'd already passed one room which had been nearly destroyed by an explosion long ago. Each doorway he went by had to be investigated.

"More weapons it seems," he said after nudging a metal door partially open. He eased in, looked into an open crate. "Some sort of blaster rifles."

There were five other crates in the small room, all sealed shut. Probably contained similar weapons. He'd check each one out if he didn't find anything in the other rooms.

Several of the cross-hatched lightstrips in the tunnel ceiling were flickering, as though it were taking them a little while to get used to providing illumination after all those years of darkness. When he reached the next fork of the tunnel Gypsy hesitated for a few seconds.

"Left," he told himself and went that way.

This place was unlike any of the other where he'd been searching for clues about himself, about who he was and about the game he seemed to be playing. Gypsy got the

impression things were pretty much as they had been a half century ago. Time and people hadn't done much harm. These chill metallic corridors had probably been very much like this when the English and American researchers had moved through them. Probably like this the day Dr. Hawksworth had arrived.

"She never arrived," Gypsy reminded himself.

No, because something had happened right about then.

By the time the world recovered, the game involving Gypsy, the game he was now playing, had been forgotten.

"Fifty years," Gypsy said aloud.

He was here on Gibraltar fifty years too late. Possibly too late to find out a damn thing about himself.

A moment later there was a ratcheting, clanking sound behind him.

Gypsy swung around, to discover a metal door had fallen into place behind him. It shut off the tunnel.

More ratcheting and clanking.

A second door had fallen a few dozen feet ahead of him. He was boxed in in a chunk of corridor some hundred feet long and ten feet high.

A subtler sound next. A section of the tunnel wall was whirring open.



A half dozen of them were eying Walpole, hunkered and sprawled in the rocky sunlight.

“Blimey, a whole flock of the perishing beasts.” He had halted on the cliffside path shortly after sighting the apes.

They remained on the ledge a few hundred feet away, chittering, scratching, watching him.

“Okay, chaps,” Walpole suggested, “be off. Shoo, away with you.”

The apes, each the size of a fairly well-grown child, remained where they were.

Walpole waited for a half minute more. “I can’t stand a blooming impasse,” he said. “With your kind permission, I’ll climb back to the top of—”

Pung! Bam! Wham!





"Zounds!" exclaimed Walpole.

One of the apes had exploded, swatches of fur were flapping down through the midday air.

The survivors began to hop up and down, yowling.

"I hadn't a blinking thing to do with it," Walpole called to them. "Unless I've developed some exceptional psi powers within the last few minutes."

"Oh, did another one blow up?" A voice of the female persuasion had traveled up behind him.

"Wasn't my doing." Walpole turned and discovered a pretty red-haired girl in a two-piece farmsuit coming down the cliff by way of the path he'd used moments earlier. "Good day, mum. Do your apes explode with some regularity?"

"This is the third one in the past two months." The girl halted near him. "You must be one of the visitors I heard—"

"That's not a common ape failing, is it? Exploding?"

"It happens quite a lot with certain of our robots."

"Robots, are they?" Walpole crouched slightly, studying the remaining apes. "Jove, they are. How blooming perceptive I was, I was."

"For quite a few centuries Gibraltar was noted for its Barbary apes," the girl explained. "According to one legend, all will go well so long as there are apes here. When the last of our real ones was in his dotage the Council of Farmers decided to replace the real ones with mechanical substitutes."

"They're very believable, except for the blowing skyhigh business. One of them gave me a bit of a start last night."

"They can be prankish. Which one are you? Gypsy or Walpole?"

Walpole grinned at her. "Walpole is who I am. Heard

of us already, have you?"

"A visitor who can send Hand Peralta miles away in an instant isn't a regular thing here." She held out her hand. "I'm Maid Jessica."

Shaking her hand, he said, "Pleased to meet you. I've been roaming. Being underground is too much like being in a bloody gaol."

"I don't much like it either, which is why I work atop. Have you seen our inn?"

"Not yet."

"It's the Plow & Stars, down near the highwater line. I'm on my way there, come along if you like."

" 'Twould be a pleasure, Jessica." Keeping as far from the mechanical apes as possible, he accompanied the girl down the cliff.

He said nothing. He was mansize, broad-shouldered. His features were humanoid, but he had a glistening chrome face and body. His clothes consisted of a one-piece worksuit and several belts and straps. Each belt held the holsters of several weapons.

"You some kind of guard?" Gypsy asked the robot who'd stepped out of the wall.

The wall whirred shut again. The two of them shared the shut-in section of metal-walled tunnel.

The robot said nothing. It's right hand unsnapped a holster, plucked a throwing knife from it. The knife came spinning at Gypsy.

He dodged it and the blade clanked against a metal wall. "Hey, I've got permission to be down here."

Another holster, another knife came flying at him.

This robot wasn't working for the farmers, Gypsy realized. Yet it *was* a guard mechanism, probably waiting here for the last fifty years. *Who had sent it?*

Before he could answer, Gypsy spied the swift movement of a gleaming silver hand. The robot reached for a holster weapon.

"Better take care of this quickly." Gypsy circled in an effort to keep clear of the rising barrel. Concentrating on teleporting the guardian robot back into the wall, he ducked swiftly as a blaster shot sizzled three inches above his head.

The robot was still with him.

Gypsy tried again. Nothing happened.

Then he attempted to teleport himself away from this metal box, into one of the other tunnels.

The robot holstered the one pistol, drew another, larger, one.

Gypsy could not get his telekinetic powers to work for him.

As in Madrid, the telekinetic ability had disappeared. The vulture was nowhere to be found. Certainly not in this metallic death trap. If the bird wasn't responsible, who was?

Gypsy made a dark smile. *It had been planned.* The guard was here as a test. *Part of the fifty-year old game.* Challenge Gypsy, see if he could match up to a machine without the use of his newly-found abilities. Another link in the quest.

Gypsy was ready. He lunged at the robot's chromium pistol. It did not yield. A beam shot out and nearly sliced Gypsy's arm.

Quickly, Gypsy ducked low and hurled himself at its waist. Impact came at the knees. The big machine toppled.



The clang of the fall reverberated in the chamber as Gypsy struggled with the robot's pistol hand. His fingers approached the breaking point as the machine forced its way back from the room. Gypsy's grasp was unrelenting. Pressure intensified, but Gypsy met the challenge. The chromium hand dropped the weapon.

The robot's other hand swung, chopped Gypsy across the temple.

He went blind for almost ten seconds, lost his hold on the machine. A fist slammed into his chin, the force of it tossed him into a wall.

Gypsy rolled away swiftly from the spot at which he'd landed. Something hit the wall, another knife.

He could see again. The robot guard was rumbling toward him.

Gypsy dived to the right, hit a wall and rebounded into the robot. He hit him hard enough to lift his metal feet off the floor. Swinging his shoulder he gave the guardian a tremendous nudge in the chest.

It lifted the robot higher, allowing Gypsy to flip him over face down on the floor.

"The emergency control box," thought Gypsy, not exactly sure what that meant. He plunged to the floor, grabbed up one of the recently flung knives.

Before the robot could turn over, Gypsy thrust the tip of the blade into a thin slit at the back of the robot's shining neck. There was a sputtering sound, crackling. The mechanism's arms and legs flapped out at once.

Gypsy, throwing the knife aside, stepped back and away.

A tiny thread of blackish smoke came unraveling up out of the slit. The robot guardian did not rise, did not even move.

Gypsy frowned.

"It wasn't a guess. I *knew* how to disable this machine. How?"

Gypsy crouched down to look at the inert nemesis. A circle of white flashed. He strained for the memory. A circle of white-clad people . . . a white room . . . a gloved hand with . . . No, it faded and was lost. For now.

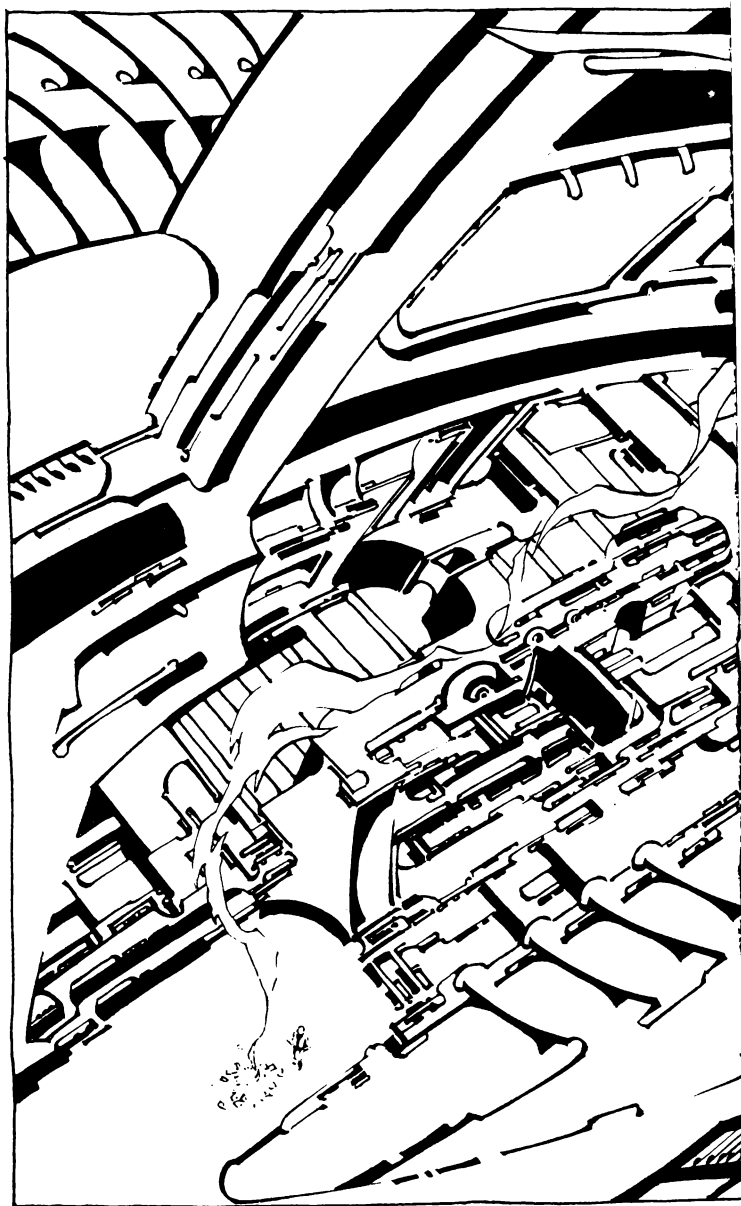


Gypsy went around the next bend and the corridor ended. An apparently blank wall confronted him. "That's not it," he said, "there's more beyond here." Hand on hip, he surveyed the wall, running his free fingers up and down the seam. It could move.

"The robot." He remembered something more, pivoted and went running back the way he'd come.

The crippled robot was sprawled exactly where he left it. Crouching, Gypsy used one of the discarded knives and began to probe the chromium corpse. He checked the circuitry, surveying the alien-looking patterns for some uncommon factor—a factor that would act as his key to the chamber beyond the wall.

In a few minutes he had his answer. A separate energy cable ran from the robot's chest to its right hand. In a few





minutes he had the guardian's metal and plastic right hand disconnected.

Gypsy returned to the blank wall holding the guardian's disconnected limb. He ran the robot hand over the wall, slowly, and when the stiff fingers hit a spot about chest-high, the wall began to hum.

Then it slid open.

Everything seemed to drop away before Gypsy. The complex stretched for a mile up and down and ahead. He felt as though he was spying on some immense cathedral from inside one of its towers. Tiers and catwalks crisscrossed, ladders climbed and twisted, there was a vast intricacy of wires, tubing, aluminum sheets, steel beams, vinyl panels, noryl flooring, lucite blocks. Offices, filing rooms, computers, machinery, all spread out before him. All of it still and silent.

Except for a lazy spiral of smoke. Blue-tinged grey smoke weaving up through the layers of glass and metal.

Without hesitating, Gypsy ran forward, began working his way down toward the source of the smoke. He went clattering down metal steps, swinging on railings, climbing down poles. Finally, after a swift descent, he reached the level where the smoke was originating.

"Nothing like a cozy fire to warm the old bones, eh, Gyp?"

The vulture was hunched on a metal desk, watching a pile of papers and file cards on the floor burn away to ashes. It dipped its beak in the direction of a final pile on the desk top.

Darting ahead, Gypsy caught the pile in time to save it from burning. "Part of the game, your doing this?"

"A little variation of my own, Gypo," replied the large dark bird. "After fifty long years you can't expect everything to function as originally intended."

"That guy in the corridor, the robot who tried to kill me. He was part of the original test, wasn't he?"

"Yes, indeedy. Worked pretty neatly, too, considering all the time he's been waiting around for you."

The fire was dying, the smoke diminishing. Gypsy kicked at the ashes. "I could have learned something from all this stuff," he said. "So you burned it."

"Can't have you getting too many jumps ahead. Peeking at the last chapter isn't exactly cricket, Gyp."

"You knew all this was here. You could have destroyed it days ago."

"Years ago, if it comes to that," replied the vulture. "Wouldn't have been any fun, though. The anguished and forlorn expression on your puss when you stumbled in . . . Ah, Gypo, that's what adds spice to life." The bird gave a cackling laugh.

"Back there in the corridor, when the walls closed down. I couldn't use any of my telekinetic abilities at all. I've been having trouble figuring out—"

"Losing them all at once was part of the test as originally planned."

"Yeah, I assumed as much, but how was it done? I'm trying to understand how—"

"See you in Switzerland, Gyp. Though it isn't anymore." The bird vanished.

Gypsy watched the place where the vulture had been perched for several seconds before turning his attention to the stack of papers which remained.

Walpole was carrying an electric lantern at chest level. Its glow helped him find his way across the surface of the

rock and so far had also served to keep the prankish apes at bay.

"A real dilemma," he was saying to himself as he moved through the night. "I feel exactly like the bloke in the melodrama who knows too much for his own good. Maybe I'm wrong keeping back what I know, and yet . . . Enough of this blooming soul-searching, me lad. Think instead about your forthcoming rendezvous with the stunning Jessica."

He'd slipped away from the others immediately after dinner, borrowed a lantern and climbed the ramps to the surface of Gibraltar. He was due to meet the red-haired Jessica at the Low & Stars Inn a few minutes later.

"I could save Gypsy a whole lot of trouble and effort if I was to confide what I read off that perishing memo. Still, I can't quite . . . oops!"

One of the robot apes had snuck up behind him to poke him in the small of the back with one furry finger.

"Begone, you spurious chimps!" He swung his light to and fro. "Buzz off or I'll . . . damn!"

Another ape had taken a slap at the lantern, a slap sufficient to send it spinning from his grasp.

"Here now, I'll have that back if you don't mind." Dropping to hands and knees, Walpole went after the light.

An ape booted him in the backside.

Walpole shot forward, his head bonging into the lantern for which he was reaching. The collisions smashed the lantern, its light fading down to a tiny orange triangle which vanished completely.

"That's torn it," shouted Walpole. "That's taken this blinking melee beyond the realm of good clean fun." He commenced kicking out and punching at the darkness.

The apes, sounded like at least five or six, chittered and

prodded him for awhile. Then, the whole lot at once, they went padding away into the night.

"Down but not out," Walpole told the surrounding dark. "I'll find me way to the bloody inn without a lantern. See if I don't."

With considerable stubbing and stumbling, Walpole managed to find his way to a patch which led down the cliffside. He descended a few steps, halted to squint. "Ought to be some lights on at the perishing inn," he remarked after spying nothing but black below him.

"This better, effendi?"

A few inches from Walpole's eyes a circle of light blossomed and then went out. He got the impression of a bearded man holding the light. "Was that a knife I seen clasped in your teeth, mate?"

"It was, effendi."

"No need to use it. Ask Farmer Grooner about me, he'll tell you Walpole ain't a bloody Tangier raider."

"But, effendi," said the man with the knife, "I am."



Hand Sanchez spread the old map out on the checkered table next to the more recent one. “Ah, yes, here it is,” he said as he tapped at the last century map. “Geneva, Switzerland.”

“Nothing there but ruins,” said Farmer Grooner. “I remember traveling through that area in my youth.”

“According to your new map,” said Annabelle, “there is some kind of settlement there now, named Villedeux.” She leaned closer over the map. “What’s this heavy line around it mean?”

Gypsy said, “Legend says a heavy black line indicates a ‘fortified wall.’ ”

“There seem to be several of them in what was once Switzerland,” observed Hand Sanchez. “Villeceinq here, Villesept over here.”

"A fortified wall around each one." Gypsy turned to the old farmer. "Is there anyone here who's been in that part of Europe in the past few years?"

Farmer Grooner shook his head. "Not to my knowledge, young fellow," he answered. "In the morning we can ask around, although I don't anticipate finding any of our people who can tell you much."

"One thing I'd expect of residents of such places," said Hand Sanchez. "They won't welcome strangers."

"Probably not," agreed Gypsy.

"Why continue on this odyssey?" asked Grooner. "You are all welcome to settle here in Gibraltar. You, the young lady and your restless friend."

"Where is Walpole, by the way?" Gypsy asked the girl.

"I'm not sure. I think he went somewhere to meet a girl."

Gypsy crossed to parlor desk where he'd dropped the memos salvaged from the sealed wing. "I appreciate your invitation, but I have to keep on," he said. "I think, though, Annabelle and Walpole ought to stay here while I check out Villedeux."

"No," said Annabelle, "we agreed—"

"I have a feeling," Gypsy told her, "this is going to be the most dangerous part so far, my journey to Villedeux."

"That doesn't mean I—"

"Come along, Hand Sanchez," said Farmer Grooner. "Let's leave these young people to settle the matter." He and Sanchez went to the doorway. "My advice, my friends, still favors your continued presence here."

With a smile Farmer Grooner was gone.

As the door clicked shut, Annabelle turned to Gypsy. "I thought we were a team. You and I and Walpole."

"A team, yes. I have to make decisions for us all."



“What can Villedeux offer that’s bigger danger than Madrid? I made it through that with—”

“Annabelle, you’ll have to do what I ask. Sometimes . . . I get very strong hunches about things. My hunch about this is you’ll be safer staying in Gibraltar. Soon as I find the Geneva research facility or what’s left of it, I’ll gather what information I need and come back here before heading anywhere else.”

“If Villedeux is going to be so damn dangerous how do you know you’ll be in any shape to come back?”

Gypsy laughed. “I have a few things in my favor. Like the telekinesis. The popping in and out.”

“It’s too bad your vulture friend got to those files ahead of you.”

“Might have saved me the jaunt to Villedeux if he hadn’t. All I got from the dregs is the fact the next phase of the game was to take me to Geneva. There isn’t a Geneva anymore, so it could be the trail will die out. Still, I doubt my winged friend would let that happen.”

The girl turned her slender back to him. “I shouldn’t tell you this,” she said slowly, voice low. “It might save you some trouble.”

“You know something?”

“I don’t, but Walpole does.”

“Walpole?” Gypsy circled the table and came around to face the girl again. “He knows something about me?”

Annabelle nodded.

“How could he find out anything about me—about my *background*?”

“Those memos you teleported from the Grand Inquisitor’s digs to Reno’s lab,” she said. “The stuff arrived several minutes ahead of you. Walpole was in the room when it materialized. As I came in he was tearing something up.”

“He wouldn’t do—”

“He did. I asked him about it just today and he admitted to destroying a memo.”

Frowning, Gypsy asked, “Why? Why would Walpole hide something from me?”

“That’s what I don’t quite understand, Gypsy. He claims to have discovered some information—something he doesn’t think you should know. Not yet.”

“About the quest? About me?”

“I’m not certain, but I think it’s about you.”

Gypsy went around the table again. “Where did he go tonight?”

“He’s really your friend, he believes he’s helping you.”

“Yes, I know. I have to talk to him.”

“He met a girl today, while he was up on the surface. I didn’t want to mention all the specifics in front of Farmer Grooner. She lives up there, works at an inn called the Plow & Stars. Intelligent and very pretty, according to Walpole. A redhead.”

Gypsy was at the door. “I’ll go find him.”

But he didn’t.

When Gypsy pushed into the dining room of the Plow & Stars a half hour later, Maid Jessica looked up from a fire. There were only a few customers at the inn’s wooden tables and the red-haired girl was standing beside a deep stone fireplace. “May I help you, sir?”

“Is Walpole here?”

Jessica said, “You must be his friend Gypsy.”

“I am, and I have to talk to him.”

She smiled sadly. “Unfortunately he has not yet arrived.”

“He left hours ago to meet you.”

The girl drew in a breath, sighed it out. “Then something’s happened to him between there and here,”

she said. "We'd better go search—"

"You stay here, in case he does arrive. I'll search the rock."

It was dawn, grey and misty, when Gypsy stopped looking for his friend. He'd found Walpole's broken lantern. That was all.



Gypsy paced the plank floor of the inn. "You think they are responsible?"

"I'm afraid so." Jessica, face pale and eyes underscored with shadows, sat in a wooden chair beside the cold fireplace.

Annabelle had joined them. "If these Tangier raiders grabbed Walpole, where would they take him?"

"Perhaps nowhere," said the red-haired girl. "They may have mistaken him for one of our guards and . . . simply killed him and . . . and tossed him into the sea."

"Walpole's still alive," Gypsy said.

Jessica flushed. "Then he's likely to be in Tangier by now. Most of the raiders hang out there, deep inside the Thieves' Quarter in a disreputable place known as the Sheraton-Kasbah."

Gypsy smiled back at the hopeful girl.

"I'll have to look for him there."

"What about your quest?" said Annabelle."

Gypsy paced a moment more. "I'm a half century late already," he said. "A day or more for a friend is no retrogression."

"Then I want to come along and help rescue Walpole."

Gypsy disapproved with a shake of his head. "By myself. I'll find him by myself. The trouble stems from the quest."

"I'm getting excluded on every—"

"Ah, there you are, young fellow." Farmer Grooner had come in out of the morning, blinking. "Don't know why anyone would prefer this inn to air farms, but there's no accounting for taste. Have you found your friend?"

"Afraid not. I'm just about to leave."

"We've located one of our people who has friends in Vinordinaire, France," the old farmer said. "Now Vinordinaire is only about thirty kilometers from Villedeux and Hand Millman paid a visit to his friends not more than a year ago."

"Then Hand Millman is somebody I'll talk to when I get back," said Gypsy.

"Come along now then, he's awaiting your visit."

"Not yet. I've got to find Walpole first."

"But it will only . . ." Farmer Grooner stopped talking. Gypsy was no longer in the room.



“Here’s an incident which will assuredly interest you,” said the tall grey man as he rolled up his left trouser leg. “Emlyn Blanc being sent down from Oxford2.”

“Looks more like they’re flinging you out on your bum, gov.”

Blanc bent to achieve a closer view of the tattoo on his leg. “Artistic license. Chap who rendered this scene, and the one of my first marriage up here on my thigh, believe that action is what makes pictures.”

“That your first wife, there on your knee?”

“It is indeed, Emlyn Blanc’s first wife and the great love of his checkered and adventurous life,” replied Blanc. “A strikingly beautiful girl, from a prominent Barchester family. Don’t allow this particular tattoo to mislead you, it’s a recent knee wound which gives her the

squint.”

Walpole stretched his manacled arms as best he could, yawning. “This is certainly entertaining, gov. However, I’d like—”

“Here we have Emlyn Blanc’s second wife, a stunning girl in her own right.” Blanc had rolled up his tunic to display a green and red tattoo near his navel. “Again a slight injury to my surface, a bullet wound in this case, has marred the picture some. We are consummating our marriage, the perspective is a shade off.”

“Due to the bullet hole no doubt.”

“The perspective was off even before I took a slug while fleeing from a group of outraged goatherds in Fez.”

Morning was hitting the Thieves’ Quarter of Tangier. Hot yellow light was already forcing itself through the louvered shutters of the hotel room in which Walpole and his guard sat.

The lank young man was in a left-tilting armchair, his chained hands in his lap. “Don’t think I’m not finding your autobiography fascinating. I’m curious, though, about what you blokes have in mind for me. Been sitting in this perishing suite for hours now.”

“Sark went to fetch Hanash.”

“I comprehend part of that. Sark is the affable bearded chap who kidnapped me, is he not?”

“Let us not think of it as a kidnapping,” said Blanc, allowing his tunic to recover his skin, “but rather a recruitment.”

“I ain’t much the joining type,” Walpole told him. “Even if I was I don’t like being invited to join a group by way of getting tossed in a sack and hauled across the water to lord knows where.”

“This is Tangier, across the pond from the rock,” explained his guard. “Right outside yon windows teems the

Thieves' Quarter, wherein is to be found an exotic blend of Eastern, African, Fren—"

"Who would Hanash be?"

"The absolutely ruthless chap who runs the whole show."

"You lads can't possibly exist by swiping vegetables from the Gibraltar storehouses?"

"Only one of our sidelines, the produce grabbing. We raid throughout the vicinity, getting nostalgia items from Algeria, weapons and landcars from Tunisia, relics from Rome . . . and so it goes." Blanc pointed to his right elbow. "Here's a scene of Emlyn Blanc leading a daring daylight raid on an appliance bazaar in Casablanca, by the bye."

"I had other plans afoot when Sark got his dibs on me. So, gov, I believe I'll pass up the opportunity to—"

Buzz! Buzz! Ratch!

"That will be our breakfast." Blanc trotted to a small metal door midway up the far wall of the hotel room. "The Sheraton-Kasbah is 100% robot staffed. Not that they work as well as they once . . . ow!"

The door had flapped open, a pitcher of sloshing yellow liquid had come flying out at Blanc. He managed to catch it, but in backing with the impact he got too far from the food slot to catch the four toasted muffins when they came sailing into the room.

He did better with the marmalade, matching one of the two flung jars. "You bloody perishing gadget!" Blanc yelled at the open door. "You're supposed to 'and the chow out." Composing himself, wiping splashes of marmalade and yellow liquid off his tunic, he placed the pitcher and the jar on a floating neoprene table near Walpole. "I'm sure a brief sojourn on the floor hasn't done any serious harm to these muffins of ours." He

picked them up, flicked off the dust balls and red ants. "There were also supposed to be scrambled . . . Yike!"

An egg, unscrambled and still in its shell, shot out of the slot and into his forehead.

"We can skip the eggs," said Walpole obligingly.

"You ruddy damn piggish mechanism!" Blanc hammered on the closing door with a fist. "When I order scrambled I don't expect raw!"

Walpole meantime had discovered he could reach over and grip one of the muffins even though his wrists were chained together. Though spreading the marmalade was a bit more difficult, he managed it. "Unusual flavor this jam has," he said after a few crunching bites. "What is it exactly?"

Blanc was still punching the metal door. "Eh, what's that?"

"What sort of jam?"

"Orange marmalade." Blanc wiped his face on one of the fringed lycra scarves which decorated the airfloat piano.

"Has a very spicy taste, for orange marmalade."

"Spicy and a bit burny?"

"Yes, now you mention it."

"You ate one of the ants."

"Ah," said Walpole.

Blanc was crouched next to the pitcher now. "What's that floating in there?" He poked a finger into the yellow liquid. "There are times when existing in this den of thieves gets to be more than a chap can bear. Did I show you the tatoo of my boyhood home? A Georgian manor in wild Wales. Well, no use dropping my britches now, we'll have a looksee after breakfast. Blast . . . it sank clear to the bottom."

"Would that be orange juice?"

“Orange juice is what I ordered certainly.” Blanc licked a finger. “Gad, it’s not orange juice at all. It’s either wall cleaning fluid or camel urine. Which has the most ammonia, do you know?”

“I’d vote for camel urine, gov.”

“At least we have the muffins.”

Walpole chewed for a moment. “Seems to me a bloke like yourself could find a more civilized corner of the world to settle in, Emlyn.”

“Emlyn Blanc was meant for better things, yes,” agreed the guard. “A few more years of playing the raider and I’ll have enough to retire. I imagine there are still some lovely stretches of English countryside?”

“A few, but going fast. I’d cut and run right off were I you. I’d be happy to travel as far as Gibraltar with you.”

Scowling, Blanc said, “Impossible. I’ve got nowhere near enough—”

Buzz! Buzz! Ratch!

“Go away,” Blanc called in the direction of the food door. “No more of your bloody tricks.”

Buzz! Buzz!

Slowly, cautiously, carefully, Blanc approached the metal door. “I warn you I’m alert, ready for anything this time.”

The door gently opened. A metal arm offered a lucite tray on which rested two plates of steaming scrambled eggs.

“Why, that’s very nice of you.” Blanc took the tray. “Almost makes up for the egg and the camel urine.”

When he commenced on his scrambled eggs Walpole said, “What’s going to occur when this Hanash bloke finally arrives in our midst?”

“He’ll give you a chance to join us. We’re always on the lookout for stalwart young chaps.”

“What happens when I politely decline to enlist?”

“Well,” said Blanc after a forkful of eggs, “there are two or three possibilities.”

“Which are?”

“One—he’ll kill you right off. Two—he’ll torture you to find out what you may know about things on Gibraltar and then kill you. Come to think of it, that’s only two possibilities.”

“Two or three,” said Walpole. “It doesn’t much matter.”



Back then.

Dr. Hawksworth, a gaunt, sensitive woman of fifty, sitting in a silver and white chair, watching him.

Watching him there, fifty years ago, in that white room.

He was . . . this wasn't quite clear. He was facing the gaunt woman, his arms strapped to the arms of the chair he was in. Yeah, that was it. Arms strapped, another strap around his chest cutting into him every time he inhaled.



"Do you know who I am?" she asked.

"Dr. Hawksworth," he answered.

"Do you know who you are?"

"I'm . . . Gypsy."

"Where were you born?"

"I was . . ." He shook his head. "I can't seem to remember. Have I been in some kind of accident?"

"Eventually you'll know all about your origins." Her bony hands clutched each other. "Right now I want to explain what will be happening over the coming months, Gypsy. I'd like you to think of it as a quest."

"A quest?"

"Help a poor rusty unfortunate, sir."

The past went away, lost again, and Gypsy was in the hot late morning street of the Thieves' Quarter of Tangier. He tried to catch again the memory of that long ago interview with Dr. Hawksworth, but it eluded him.

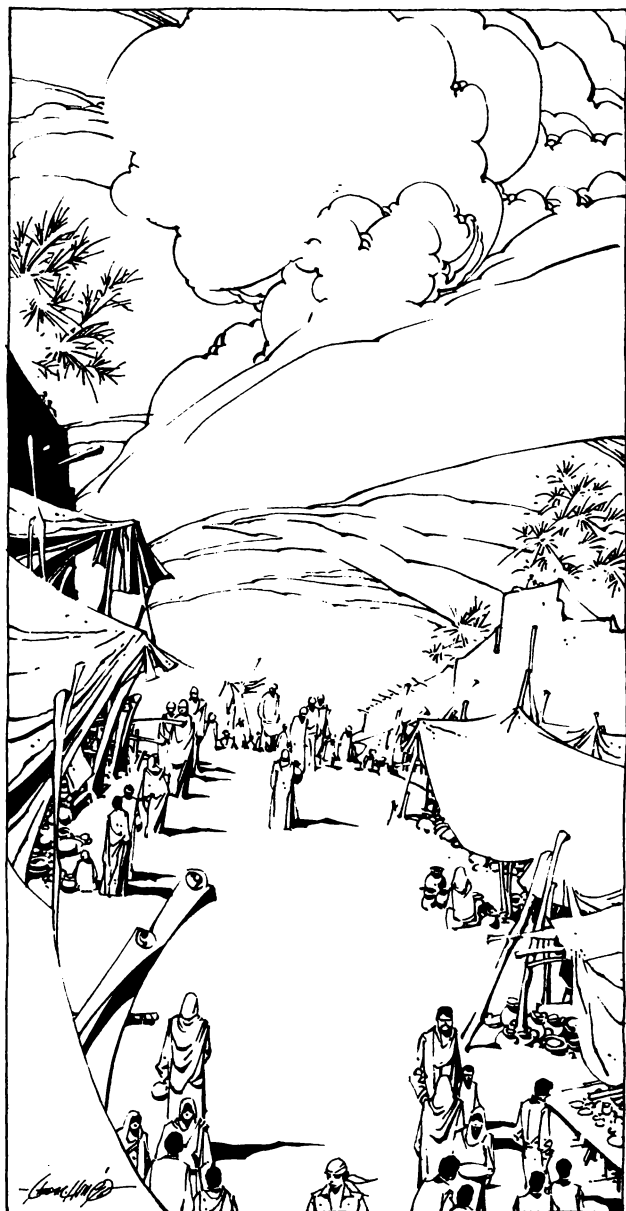
"Rust on this arm, sir, dents and scrapes on this." The beggar wore a tattered caftan. "I need a mere \$1000-American to have the local cyborg garage patch me up good as new. Thereafter I will be able to resume my career as a lyric poet and—"

"Sorry." Gypsy passed him by, continued on his way to the Sheraton-Kasbah. The uphill street was rich with small shops—*Burglar Equipment For Every Budget! Latest Torture Devices! Escapes Arranged! Discount Weaponry!* Thieves and rogues of all sorts roamed the quarter, beggars and madmen pleaded and cavorted.

Gypsy paid them little attention. He was repeating again inside his head the question Dr. Hawksworth had asked him back then. *When were you born?* He couldn't answer it, couldn't make his mind go deeper into the past than those times in the white rooms. What had happened before that? What had he done during all the other years of his life?

Where were you born?

"Why bless you, sahib, I were born right here in this



wretched sector.”

Gypsy slowed, realizing he’d spoken the last question aloud.

A fat olive-toned man draped with rugs and shawls was standing in front of a dingy shop which dealt in, according to its sign, *First Class Contraband*. The display window was piled with old eavesdropping equipment and vidiscs of Swedish movies. “A rug for the lady in your life, effendi?”

“She’s already got a rug.” Gypsy moved on. The hotel he was seeking, the place where he sensed Walpole was being held, loomed up at the peak of the slanting street he was climbing.

Clatter! Blatter! Blam!

Copper pots and pressure cookers came flying out of a shop entrance, followed by a black man and then additional pots. The second batch connected with the running man’s head and shoulders.

“Don’t try that in here again, me lad!” warned the wide, bearded proprietor.

As he climbed Gypsy wondered what the man had tried.

The Negro, dodging a final barrage of pots, bumped hard into Gypsy’s back. “Excuse it, sire.”

Gypsy, in turn, nudged into a large man in a two-piece piratesuit.

“Gar! What an outrage! What an offense!”

“Excuse it.” Gypsy moved around the man.

“Gar! Excuse it! Does Jean LeEclair forgive a vile insult? Does Jean LeEclair allow himself to be insulted on a public thoroughfare?”

“Would you be Jean LeEclair?”

“What business is it of yours, you gob of scum!”

“Well, nice to have met you, Mr. LeEclair.”

“Gar! You don’t grossly offend Jean LeEclair, sometimes known as the Bloody Scourge of the Sea, on a public thoroughfare and thereafter merely doff your beanie and move on, lad.”

“You’re suggesting,” said Gypsy, “you have some sort of physical tussle in mind?”

“I’ll show you what I have in mind, you runny-nosed whelp!”

Gypsy sidestepped, avoided the big pirate’s charge and, as the man sailed by, bonked him on the head with his fist.

LeEclair sighed out his wind, slammed to the street, rolled over into the cobbled gutter and sprawled out on a just-discarded black cigar.

“I wish I hadn’t seen that.”

“So do I.”

Two young men in piratesuits were lounging on the steps of the Sheraton-Kasbah hotel. Instead of swords at their belts they wore what looked to be old landcar antennas. The tips had been filed needle-sharp.

Gypsy started up the steps.

“No admittance, friend,” announced the nearest of the two.

“Didn’t realize this hotel was that exclusive.” Gypsy stopped when he was on the step immediately below the one the two young pirates occupied.

“Hotel’s open only to thieves, pirates, rogues, rascals, blacksheep and the like, friend,” the other one explained.

“You’ll forgive our commenting on this, friend, but you don’t appear to be none of the above.”

“Indeed, friend, you give off a distinct law-abiding aura.”

Gypsy might have teleported inside, but he was not as certain of his powers as he had been. He thought it best,

at this point, to conserve. "Nevertheless," he informed them, "I'm coming in."

Clack! Click!

The makeshift rapiers had left their sheaths.

"We're obliged to prevent your entry."

"Seeing how you teakettled LeEclair . . ."

"He's still reclining in the gutter, poor sod."

". . . we'd just as like not tangle with you, friend."

"However, our duty's clear."

"You wouldn't care to turn around and forget it."

"Or at least come back this evening after, say, 7. Our shift is over at 6."

"Nope, afraid not."

"Then, friend, there's nothing for it, but to . . . yeow!"

One of the young pirates had lunged at Gypsy. But Gypsy was not where he had been an instant before, he was instead far enough to the left to avoid the antenna-foil. He caught the pirate's wrist, twisted.

Clank!

The weapon hit the steps. Gypsy, shoved the disarmed guard away, snatched up the foil to face the other guard.

The second young man was no longer there, but was running in an opposite direction.

Clank!

Gypsy tossed the foil aside and went into the hotel. Travelling quickly through the lobby, he discovered an abandoned elevator shaft. The pulley wires hung loose inside and Gypsy, wishing to save his teleportive strength for the confrontation to come, reached inside and began to pull upward.

"Didn't I tell you to put fresh batteries in this thing?"



"You may rest assured I did so, sahib," the bearded Sark told the huge pink man who loomed beside Walpole.

"Well, it is not working," fat Hanash said. "What's the use of having an electric torture rod if it doesn't work?"

"No need to get upset," put in Walpole. "Makes no difference to me if—"

Smack!

Hanash slapped him with his free hand. "You have nothing to say about how we torture you."

"Sorry, gov."

Hanash twisted the handle of the pointed silver rod he'd been attempting to torture Walpole with. "I'm positive the batteries are at fault."

"They're from the lot we stole at Casablanca last week, effendi."

"Allow me a glance at the instrument," said Blanc, holding out his hand. "I'm good at getting gadgets to . . . yow!" He let go the rod.

"You see, sahib, it is functioning now."

With considerable puffing and whistling Hanash bent to retrieve the torture rod. "You had best . . . tell us . . . everything you know . . . about agricultural procedures on Gibraltar, my friend. Otherwise, painful things . . . will visit themselves upon you."

"Really, gov, you've got to believe me when I state I know hardly a bloody thing about Gibraltar. My friends and I were merely paying a brief visit. Friend Sark here swiped me while I was enroute to—"

"Enough attempted diversion." Hanash poked the tip of the rod into Walpole's neck. "Now you'll explain . . . ouch!" He jiggled backwards, the rod dropping to the floor of the hotel room. "Blanc, you didn't mend it at all,

you simply made it less useful.”

Blanc was still rubbing his injured hand against his side. “The damn thing did permanent damage to the color rendering of Emlyn Blanc’s birth and you accuse—”

“Never mind. We’ll use physical force on this young fellow.”

“Wait till my hand feels a bit better.”

Sark stroked his beard, smiling. “Allow me to throttle him some, sahib.”

“Wouldn’t take long to send the rod out for repairs,” suggested Walpole. “I’m in no perishing hurry.”

“Commence throttling,” ordered the fat man.

“This would be a good time to talk,” Sark said as he fitted his rough hands to Walpole’s throat. “Before the pain starts, effendi.”

“Why won’t you blokes realize I’ve been absolutely honest and truthful with you?”

The hands tightened, forcing him to gag and gasp.

This only happened for a few seconds.

“Now what’s going wrong?” demanded Hanash.

Sark was no longer there.

Rubbing at his throat, Walpole said, “Gypsy.”

Hanash made a pouting, perplexed face. “Are you attempting to insult me by calling me a gypsy?”

“Nope, gov, I was announcing the arrival of my chum. That’s his name. Gypsy.”

“Saints preserve us!” exclaimed Blanc as Gypsy materialized just inside the door of the room.

Hanash was the third to be aware of his advent. “Where’s my trusted underling? What’s become of Sark?”

Gypsy said, “He’s several miles from here.”

“Come now, I can hardly believe—” Then Hanash

vanished from there.

Blanc cleared his throat. "If it's all the same with you, Gypsy, I'd rather leave under my own power."

"Go ahead." Gypsy nodded at the door and it swung open.

"I'll show you the rest of my colorful life at a later date, Walpole." Blanc left.

"I appreciate your popping in, gov."

Gypsy folded his arms. "We haven't known each other long, but I had the feeling I could trust you."

"That you can. I didn't, you know, volunteer to get hauled over to this den of thieves in the wee hours of . . . Oh, I tumble. Annabelle told you?"

Gypsy asked, "What did you learn from the memo you destroyed?"

"First," said Walpole, "tell me what you found out from rummaging in the Gibraltar archives."

"Very little, since the vulture was there ahead of me. Most of what had been left by the research people was destroyed."

"You must have found *something*."

"I know the next stop in the quest is Geneva, Switzerland."

"You'll surely learn more there."

"Geneva hasn't existed for years. A walled-in city called Villedoux is on the site." Gypsy lowered his brows, "There may be no trace of anything left, nothing about me at all."

Raising his hands, rattling his chains, Walpole said, "Could you give me a bit of help removing these?"

The chains and manacles snapped, freeing Walpole.

"Appreciate that, gov."

Moving closer to Walpole, Gypsy said, "Okay, Walpole, what do you know about me?"

"You've got to keep trusting me. What I'd like you to do is wait a bit longer, gov. I ain't . . . ain't quite sure what to do with the information I came upon."

"Tell me and let—"

"Not yet . . . not yet. Listen . . . I . . . suppose we do it this way? If you don't learn anything more in Geneva or Villedoux or whatever it is now . . . then I'll tell you what I have."

"Walpole, there's no reason you can't tell me here and now."

"There is, though. Trust me, Gypsy. I'm wrestling with . . . never mind. Please, trust me until the next step is completed."

Gypsy watched his friend. At last he said, "Yes, all right—after Villedoux."

Walpole let out the breath he'd been holding. "You planning to take us along with you to Villedoux?"

"No, I'm going alone. You and Annabelle will wait on Gibraltar for me."

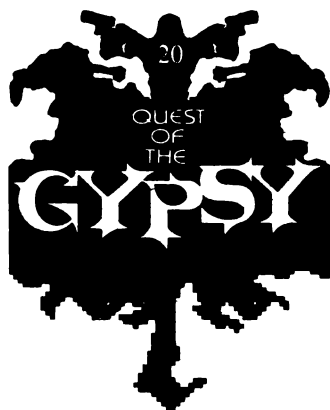
"Maybe that's the best way." Walpole stood. "We going back to Gibraltar right now?"

"We're going to try."

"Meaning what, gov?"

"I still don't completely understand my ability to teleport," answered Gypsy. "But it seems to be functioning again."

"Let's hope it continues to," said Walpole as Gypsy took hold of his arm.



Even above ground the husky smell of fermentation was strong. The narrow, twisting streets of the town of Vinordinaire were thick with it. Gypsy had materialized in the woods above the town a few moments earlier, teleporting himself there from Gibraltar with no trouble. The sun in the clear sky above the tile rooftops was declining from its midday position.

The place he sought was an outdoor cafe. Quite a few people, all of them dressed in multicolor one-piece worksuits, still sat at the red lucite tables.

“Good afternoon, stranger,” greeted an old man at the table nearest the walkway. “Care to have a glass of wine ‘with us?’”

“No thanks. I’m looking for—”

“Our Vinordinaire vinordinaire is famed throughout

the world." The other two old men at his table nodded agreement as they sipped at their own glasses of red wine.

"Is Paul Brouillés here?"

The old man nodded, "Why wouldn't the owner of Le Concombre Masqué be in evidence in his own establishment? That is he yonder, the handsome young fellow with not a hair on his head."

Gypsy made his way around the tables, declining two more offers of wine. "Paul Brouillés?"

The absolutely bald man scratched his chin with the handle of the corkscrew he was holding. "I am," he admitted finally. "You are?"

"My name is Gypsy. A friend of yours, Hand Millman, gave me your name."

A smile touched Brouillés' face. "He well?"

"He was a few minutes ago."

"A few minutes ago? Is he here in—"

"No, but do not let that concern you. Hand Millman thought I might be able to seek your help."

"Perhaps, I can, for a friend of Ivor Millman. What is it you want to do?"

"Explore Villedeux."

Even the top of Brouillés' head paled as he backed away. "Come inside," he said in a low voice. "This isn't something I wish to speak about out in the open."

Bald Brouillés was leading Gypsy along the walkways which wound through the underground vats, saying, "... better than actual grapes. Therefore we ceased using the actual product of the vines some years ago. Of course the artificial grape compound didn't quite have the aroma of real grapes, which led us to add special smell ingredients to our Vinordinaire wine. Those who visit our town from elsewhere say you can even notice the scent above ground."

"You can," said Gypsy. "Now about Villedeux."

"A moment more," cautioned his guide, "until we reach my private office."

Off beyond the huge vat glowed several rectangles of light. It was Brouillés' underground winery office. Two other men were already in the metal-walled room, sitting in shape-fitting chairs. Each held a sonic across his knees.

Brouillés shut the door. "Before we talk, Gypsy, tell us a little more about my friend Millman."

Gypsy walked by the other men and leaned against the desk. "He's a medium sized man of about forty, has blond hair, a slight gap between these two teeth. He told me to ask you about your soccer team."

Brouillés nodded, the other two men set their sonics aside.

"Why do you want to visit Villedeux?" Brouillés asked.

"When it was still known as Geneva, there was an office of the European Security Office there. ESO, far as I can tell, was run chiefly by the United States and England," said Gypsy. "I'm hoping the papers and documents which were stored in the ESO complex still exist somewhere in Villedeux."

"They are important to you or to someone you work for?"

"I work for myself," Gypsy told him. "They're important to me."

"Getting into Villedeux," said one of the seated men, "is no problem. Getting out again is where the difficulty lies."

"Villedeux is a city devoted to making people happy and secure," said Brouillés.

"Then why the walls?"

"To see no one escapes." Brouillés rubbed at his bare

scalp. "Those who run Villedeux have found people to be extremely difficult. People simply will not accept all the things the rulers of Villedeux know are good for them. It is very unfortunate." There was pain in Brouillés' words.

"These rulers, who are they?"

"Machines," replied Brouillés. "Robots, androids, computers . . . all considerably more sophisticated than what most of the world had before the assorted collapses of a half century ago. They are convinced they know what is good for us all. They mean to enforce happiness and a good life."

"You have some contacts inside the city?"

"There is an opposition movement, and we have means of communicating with them." Brouillés crossed the room to sit behind his desk. "We might be able to smuggle you into Villedeux, but—"

"Is it worth the risk?" asked the other of the two men. "Our friends over there could suffer in helping this man. I would not like to see anyone killed because he wants to browse through some old files."

"No one will get killed," Gypsy assured them. "If I could get the stuff out of there without going into Villedeux at all I'd do that. So far I have to be fairly near something before I can move . . ." He got up. "If I can learn a little more about the layout of the city, I won't have to contact anyone."

Brouillés rubbed more vigorously at his head. "What do these ancient papers have to do with you, my friend? Why are they important?"

Gypsy said, "They may tell me who I am."

"You do not know?"

"Not completely." Beginning to pace the office, he gave them an account of himself, of what he knew about who he was and what he'd found out since awakening

that recent day in Paris.

“A quest.”

“Tis most incredible. Most incredible.” Brouillés stroked his cheek.

“I don’t believe any man can lift . . .” One of the other two men had started to voice his doubts about Gypsy’s abilities. Before he was able to finish he and his chair rose up toward the metal ceiling. They circled the room, the man and the chair, coming to rest exactly where they’d been.

Gypsy folded his arms. “What I’ve told you is true.”

“I think,” said Brouillés, “you had better contact a friend of ours in Villedeux. It may well be you can help each other.”



The voice in the street suggested, “Turn on your lights, night is upon us. Don’t strain your eyes. Turn on your lights, citizens of Villedeux.” The lightvan drove on, the metallic voice gradually fading away. “Turn on your lights, night is . . .”

Hildy Bennin got up out of the comfortable chair, walked across the thick thermal carpet to the light control panel. She switched on the minimum nightly requirement of interior and exterior illumination. When she walked back to the comfortable chair she avoided the blood stains on the buff-color carpet.

“Have to take care of that before AM inspection,” she told herself in a faint, weary voice.

“Last call for dinner,” said a voice from the kitchen.

“I don’t really feel up to—”

“Are you sick? Are you ill? Shall a medix be summoned?”

Sighing the girl, she was seventeen, left the comfortable chair and walked into the bright-lit blue kitchen. “What’s the chef’s special tonight?”

“Gluten goulash in a savory nonethnic sauce, served piping hot over delicious soynoodles,” announced the small speaker in the big squat, square food outlet box over the table.

“That was the special last night.”

“It’s good for you, not to mention tasty.”

“All right, all right. I’ll have that.”

“Wash up and take your place at the table.”

Hildy walked to the sanitation alcove, thrust her hands into the cleansing holes.

“Two piping hot orders of gluten goulash coming up.”

“A single order.” The girl sat at the attractively set dining table.

“Is your father sick? Is he ill? Shall a medix be summoned?”

“He won’t be here. I don’t know where he is.”

“This is the last call for dinner. Doesn’t he—”

“Ask them. They dragged him away three hours ago.”

The food box hummed, murmured. “Yes, that’s right. One piping hot order of gluten goulash coming up.” Its front door snapped open, and a plate of food was placed before the girl by an extendable silver arm.

“You’re tuned in to the central computers, aren’t you? You know where he is.”

“Start on your dinner, please,” urged the box. “You have twenty minutes. Eat it all or no dessert.”

“Yes, I should have known you wouldn’t tell me anything. That’s what all of them keep saying, all afternoon, ever since—”

"Mustn't let your food get cold. Eat."

Hildy, hunched slightly, began to eat.

A door in the kitchen wall swung silently open. "Would you like to talk to a therapist, a counselor or a nondenominational priest? Sometimes in moments of—"

"No. No, I'm fine. Keep them in their closet."

"Very well. We exist but to serve." The door swung silently shut.

Hildy resumed eating.

The chairs across the floor from her creaked. "I've turned off most of the things that might interrupt us," said Gypsy. "For a few minutes we can talk."

The girl blinked at this person who'd appeared in the chair opposite her. "Are you some new something they think we need?"

He shook his head. "My name is Gypsy. Brouillés in Vinordinaire told me to get in touch with your father, Joel Bennin."

"You're a few hours late," the girl said. "Is it telepor-tation you use?"

"Yes."

"I suppose I should be amazed or stunned by that, but by this time . . ."

"Where is your father?"

"There's a question I've been asking all afternoon. They won't tell me," she said. "Three hours ago they marched in here, nine or ten of them. They took my father with them. He didn't . . . didn't want to go. So they . . . hit him. Those metal hands can . . . I don't know where they took him."

"You mean the robots took him?"

"Who else? Our benevolent servants, the robots."

"Nothing was said about why they were taking him?"

"No, nothing. They don't have to give reasons for what

they do, beyond saying it's for your own good. I can imagine why they took my father, though." She studied his face. "Are you really from Mr. Brouillés? Or are you some new kind of sophisticated gadget they've sent to interrogate me?"

"I'm not on the robot side," Gypsy assured her. He gave her one of the identifying phrases Brouillés had told him to use on Joel Bennin.

"Yes, that sounds about right. I don't know . . . everything has gotten much too confused."

Gypsy said, "I should be able to find out where your father is. But I want to talk to someone else first, to get an idea of where he is and where what I'm looking for might be."

"Yes, I can arrange for you to see someone else," said Hildy. "I hate the robots so, but we don't seem able to . . ." She pushed, suddenly, back from the table. "Something wrong."

Gypsy jumped to his feet. "Yeah, I hear it."

A rhythmic thudding sound growing outside, metallic feet on the street ramps and marching closer.

"They sounded just that way this afternoon." Hildy pressed one hand, fingers spread, against her breasts. "Can't be bringing him home, must be coming for me."

"Please admit us, Citizen Bennin." A metallic voice boomed through the house. "It's for your own good."

"Any safe place nearby?" Gypsy asked.

"No place in Villedeux is safe," said the girl. "Wait, though . . . the ruins. They don't usually go in there much."

"I know where the ruined part of Geneva is," said Gypsy. "Here, take my hand."

"The ruined part of what?"

"Take my hand."

The rumbling roar grew louder and louder.

"It has nothing to do with us," said Hildy softly.

Two floors of this particular building were still standing. Gypsy and the girl were in the ground floor, near a window opening.

Gypsy watched the night outside. A quarter mile away, beyond the piles of rubble and the fragments of buildings, an enormous mechanism was rolling by. It was big, a hundred feet long and a hundred feet high, with lights flashing on its dark surface, red, yellow, green. There were a dozen heavy jointed arms swinging from various parts of it, each tipped with a beam of light. The lights swept the ruins, illuminating the piles of brick and twisted metal, the fragments of glass and splintered wood.

"What is it?" he asked the girl.

"The machine that repairs the wall around Villedoux. It's always at work."

The huge machine, splashing light and noise, went roaring away into the blackness. Silence came back.

Hildy sat down on the gritty bare hardwood floor, her back pressed against the wall. Shreds of ancient wallpaper dangled down all around her. "The way you brought us here," she said. "You could take me out of Villedoux the same way, out to the other side of the wall."

"Yeah," he answered.

"I've never been. This was always my home here. My father has told me about outside things, other ways of living. At first of course they thought the robots would really make this a very special and wonderful place to live."

"Where do the robots comes from?"

"There was a very large factory near here. What did you say the name of this city once was?"

“Geneva.”

“Yes, my father’s called it that, years ago, when I was small. On the outskirts of Geneva there was a factory which manufactured a very efficient humanoid robot. After . . . after all the troubles, years after, the factory was found again. It had been very little damaged, so it was put back into operation. The original idea was to build enough robots to repair part of the city . . . of Geneva. By the time the factory was started up again there were enough resources available.” She paused, made a shrugging gesture with her hands. “More and more robots were produced. Gradually, somehow, the relationships changed. They always maintained it was for our own good, that they were dedicated to looking after our best interests. But that’s a tough thing to have someone else decide for you always. Each time they took away some thing, some freedom, they had such a pleasant explanation. When they imposed a new restriction it was presented as something we really needed.”

“It isn’t only robots who govern that way.”

“Yes, but right now with us it’s the robots who tell us what we can read and what we can’t read, what is news and what is dangerous unfounded rumor. They tell us who to mate with, even when. They attempt to tell us what we can learn at the schools, what is of no value. They tell us how to dress, how to eat, how to live. They do it all in what they believe is a kind, paternal way. It’s so . . . smothering. They’re our government. Our dictators. Nowadays if people like my father try to get rid of the robots, even try to control them . . . they are taken away. Once some are taken away they never come back.” Hildy paled.

“Are most of the people in Villedeux dissatisfied, not happy?”

"I think most of them are unhappy, but not all of them are like my father. Some—*many*—aren't willing to take chances."

"He was working with others?"

"Yes, a sort of secret opposition party to the robots," replied the girl. "They believe the robots must be completely destroyed and that the wall be broken down. You can imagine our robots aren't fond of such people and such ideas."

"I want to talk to someone in the opposition group."

Hildy was watching him. "You could take us all out of Villedeux, couldn't you?"

Nodding slowly, Gypsy said, "I might be able to, I'm not sure. Even when my powers are working full force I can only move a few people at a time. I might be able to get rid of the robots by teleporting them. Then you can all go on living here."

"I don't know if I'd like that," Hildy said. "I've been inside here so long, and there's so much outside."

Gypsy glanced at the window. "Let's not plan too far ahead. First I have to talk to one of the opposition people."

"Zillerman is probably the one to see," the girl said. "He's very hard to unsettle, he's not afraid. Zillerman and his family live in a house on Street 260. I can tell you how to reach it. You . . . what's the matter?"

Gypsy ran to the window. "I thought I noticed something out here," he said. "I don't see anything *now*, but—"

Gypsy looked towards the sky. From out in the night, he heard the diminishing sound of the flapping of wings.



“In the wall.”

“In the wall?”

The grey-haired Zillerman rubbed at his chin. “So far as I know, my friend.”

Gypsy was at the drape-covered window. “Okay, where exactly?”

“That I don’t know.” Zillerman glanced across the circular room at Hildy, who sat very straight and still in a blue chair. “The man to ask would be Joel Bennin. He kept track of such things.”

“The robots’ idea,” put in the girl, “sealing up the records and artifacts of the old city inside the wall. I know my father talked about their having done it, but I don’t recall any specific details.”

“One more reason why the wall has to come down,”

said Gypsy.

"Do you have an idea how such a job could be done?" The opposition leader looked skeptical. "The wall is six to eight feet thick in many places. There are hollow places where such things as the records of the European Security Office have been stored . . . but even there we're talking about brick walls a foot or more thick. Stockpiling explosives is very difficult and we have nowhere enough for the job."

"I won't need explosives."

"He can do things," said Hildy, "very unusual things. You saw how we arrived."

"Long ago, before the collapse, there were said to be men in the world, a few, with such powers," said Zillerman. "I didn't think—"

"There isn't much time," said Gypsy. "Let's talk about the wall, not me."

"If a part of it is smashed, will your people be ready to act?"

"You mean *now, today?*"

"Yes, within the next few hours."

Zillerman thought. "To alert them all . . . there are hundreds of citizens involved in the movement . . . will take most of the day. With the robots looking after us, mass communication is not swift—or safe."

Gypsy left the window, with a look over his shoulder. The night was quiet. If the vulture was observing them, it did so silently. "You're certain that you all want to abandon Villedeux?"

"Gypsy, when your home becomes a prison, a part of you *hungers* to escape—if for no other reason than to experience the feeling which escape would bring. Yes, friend, we *all* wish to leave Villedeux—for our own future and the future of our children."

"Are they not the same thing?" Gypsy faced Zillerman.

"True. Do you have children, Gypsy?"

"Children? No, I . . . I don't know."

"You do not know? Then you may suffer a greater injustice than we."

Hildy eyed the traveler. "No, Mr. Zillerman, I think he's much too young to have children."

"Let us return to the escape," said Gypsy. "Where do you think the robots have taken Hildy's father?"

"The Middle School," answered Zillerman. "This is the first time Joel's been taken in, suspected of any sort of dissatisfaction. They'll question him, threaten him, but I doubt they'll use any of their equipment on him . . . this time. Joel will be kept there a few days, then let go. The first time they bring you in you usually come back."

"This Middle School is where?"

"On Street 150. It used to be part of the education system in the days before the population of Villedeux was brought under control by the robots."

"Will Hildy be safe with you?"

"Yes, the robots still allow us one house guest per month, and we haven't had one lately."

Gypsy said, "I'll contact you once I get Joel Bennin out. We'll hide in the ruins until nightfall. Can you have your people ready by then?"

Zillerman's head bobbed up and down. "Most of them."

"You'll get a message from me, telling you where the wall's going to break."

Hildy got to her feet. "Gypsy, wait."

"Yeah?"

She hurried across the room, hugged him, kissed his cheek. "I didn't want you to vanish before I said good-

bye and good luck to you.”

Gypsy disappeared with a smile.

The morning sun nestled itself into the pores of red tone wall on the Middle School's North side. Gypsy scaled the rusting fire ladder which had been bolted into the brick and as he rose Gyp took note of the ceiling light panels on each floor. “Park on this level.” He climbed towards the fourth. “Bennin must be above me.”

Gypsy slipped quietly into the fourth floor window. There were tiers of chairs and viewing machines. Above on a giant corkboard, students' work faded with prolonged exposure to sunlight. The classrooms hadn't been used for years, but the ceiling panels were illuminated.

“The robots must be nearby,” thought Gypsy. “I wouldn't pull any materializing stunts if I could. A sudden surprise might jeopardize Joel Bennin's life. I have to find a way to warn him.”

Gypsy climbed down to the teaching platform, crossed it and eased the door of the abandoned classroom a few inches open. He became aware of a metallic clatter. Gypsy recognized the sound of approaching robots. “Two or three of them at least.”

They came marching into view, an identical pair. Tall as large as Gypsy. They had humanoid features. Both shared the same face, bland and unobtrusive. Both wore pale green tunics and visored caps. Their arms swung rigidly in cooperation with kicking legs.

Gypsy's eyes narrowed, his grip on the door handle tightened. “Let's see if I can . . .”

Both robots stopped in midstride, as though suddenly



and instantly frozen.

Waiting nearly half a minute, Gypsy stepped into the hallway. He'd specifically disabled an internal mechanism of the facistic machines. In the glistening silver hand of one of them was a key. Removing it from the robot's palm, Gypsy continued on in the direction they had been going.

Further along in the hall he came to a series of doors. Each door had a large file card affixed to it. A name was neatly printed on each card. "Warren—Ackerman—Bennin."

Gypsy tried his borrowed key on the lock of Joel Bennin's door. It must have been a master.

He was turning it in the lock when a voice began shouting, "Help! Danger! Escape! Help!"



“Well, I don’t enjoy the perishing smell at all.”

“It’s only apples being pressed into cider.” Annabelle pointed at the underground processing room they were passing.

“Not used to all this fresh stuff,” said Walpole. “It’s too much for me delicate senses. Don’t like being all the time underground either.”

The girl asked, “Why didn’t Gypsy take you with him?”

“Same reason he didn’t drag you along. He ain’t sure what he’ll encounter at that Villedoux place.”

“Oh, really?”

“He didn’t want nobody getting hurt.”

“Could it also be Gypsy doesn’t trust you anymore?”

“He trusts me,” snapped Walpole. “Even though you

tried to put a ruddy bee in his bonnet." He began striding very rapidly along the corridor.

Annabelle caught up with him. "So Gypsy told you he knew about the papers you destroyed."

"Only one bloody piece of paper."

"But he did talk to you about it."

"The topic arose during a discourse while he was among the heathen of Tangier."

"I hope you told him what the memo said."

Walpole scowled at her. "No, I didn't. And I ain't going to confide in you, don't start nagging at me all over again. You got to understand . . . I never quite come up against something like this before . . . takes a whole lot of thinking about. He's going to find out eventually anyway . . . either that or he'll just up and remember one day. Same as he's remembered other things about himself."

"You give me the impression," Annabelle said to him, slowly and carefully, "you know something pretty terrible about Gypsy."

Walpole stopped walking. "I ain't even sure if it's terrible or not. Could be he won't take it the way I would."

"Can you—"

"No, I can't tell you." He started moving again. "Maybe I won't even have to tell him. Maybe he'll find out all he needs to know at Villedeux . . . and I won't have to tell him nothing when he gets back here."

"I still think—"

"Too much thinking, lass, it ain't good for nobody," Walpole said. "Off with you now, I'm going up into the fresh air to visit Jessica."

"Not this time you don't." Walpole pitched another

rock into the cluster of mechanized Barbary apes which was trailing him. "You blithering idiots ain't going to take no further liberties with me person." He flung another heavy rock.

Bong!

"Blimey, now what?"

sizzle!

One of the apes, after waving its shaggy arms in the air, fell face down on the rocky path. Some kind of thick green machine oil came spurting out of its left ear.

"I believe I've smashed the blooming thing."

The rest of the apes, four of them, formed a half circle around their fallen contemporary.

Walpole hurried away. "Is that considered murder in these parts? No, not bloody likely." He reached the path which led down to the Plow & Stars. "Besides you haul the beggar into the shop and they can no doubt fix him up good as new. Left him up on the rack, change his oil or whatever it is you do to mechanical monks, and he'll be up and around and making a perishing nuisance of himself in no time."

In the small man-made harbor below the inn two hoverships were loading. Walpole stopped in front of the inn to watch for a moment.

"Are you paying me a visit or just wandering by?" Noticing him, Jessica had stepped out of the Plow & Stars.

"Where are those boats from, lass?"

"Sicily," she answered. "They bring us hard liquor in exchange for produce."

"Know the blokes who run them?"

"Certainly, but—"

"Find out if they'll take on a passenger."

Jessica said, "Meaning yourself?"

Eyes on the silver and blue ships, Walpole said, "I been thinking about things . . . I don't feel quite up to seeing Gypsy when he gets back. I don't want to have to . . . to explain things to him."

"But he's your friend, isn't he?"

"Right, he's my friend. Which is why I think I'd best go away."

"Very well then," said Jessica, "I'll go down and talk to the captain."

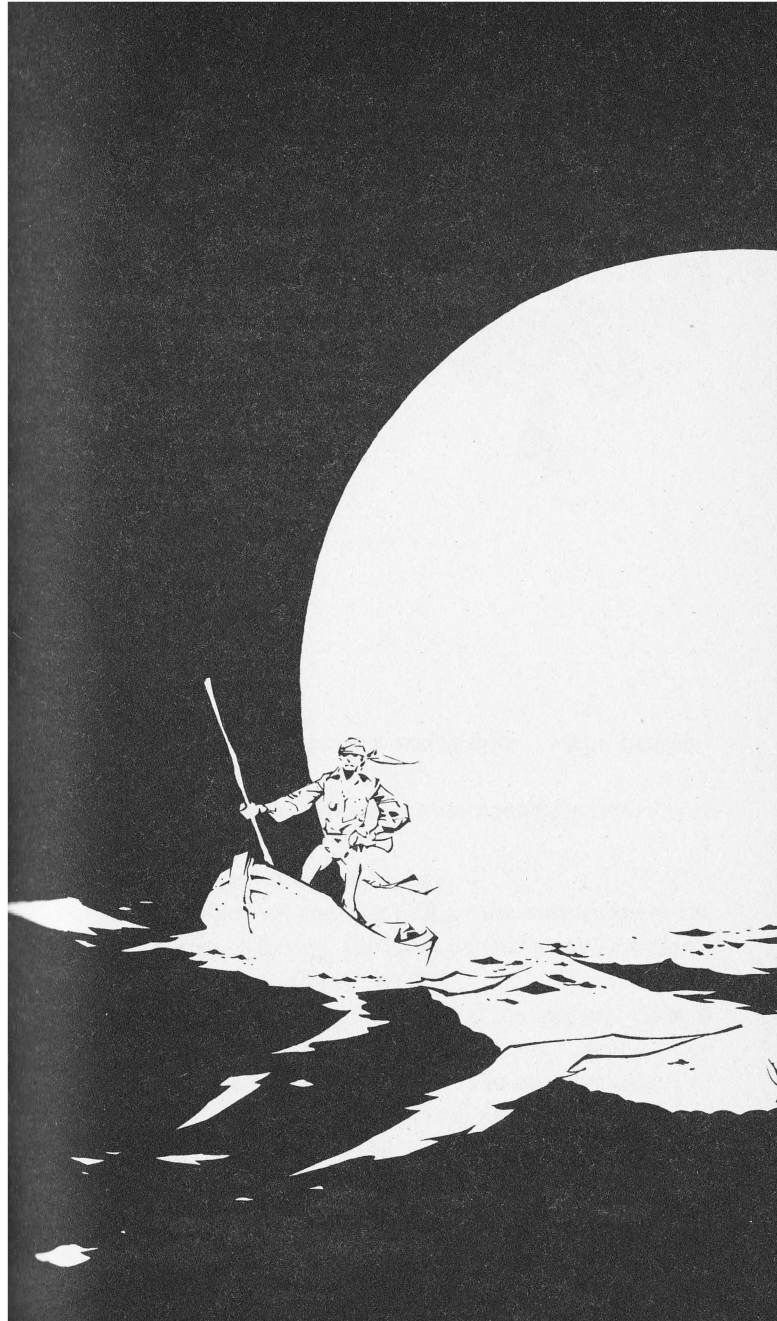
"Don't look so sad, Jess. I won't be gone for no great long time," he promised. "No long time at all."

Suddenly he was on a small ship, smaller than the hovercraft on which he'd commenced his journey. It had a large sail, chiefly for propulsion of the ship by the powerful ocean winds. It was dusk now, a purplish misty twilight, and Walpole saw no land on any side of him.

"Fancy that," he said, surveying the craft. "How exactly did I get here I wonder. This looks something like the blooming craft which passed us a bit anterior to now." Shrugging, he leaned on the railing to watch the darkening water rush by.

Walpole thought again of his friend Gypsy. Then he smiled. "Of course! I should have guessed!" The smile softened and Walpole looked out at the new-born night. "But *why* is Gyp doing it?"

He wasn't.





The vulture repeated its warning cries. “Help! Danger! Escape! Help!”

Already metallic footsteps were sounding in the corridors.

“You!” Gypsy dropped his key.

Claws rasped on the flooring as the vulture dove for Gypsy’s prize. Missing, the bird spun around to face him. “How’s every little thing, Gyp?”

Ignoring the bird, Gypsy replaced the key and opened the door to Joel Bennin’s detention room. “Bennin,” he said as he crossed the threshold, “I’m on your side. I’m working with Zillerman and your daughter.”

Bennin, a medium-sized wiry man of fifty, said, “What’s happening out there?”

“Right this way, boys,” the vulture called invitingly to

the fast-approaching robots. "Full scale prison break in the making."

"I can get you out of here," Gypsy told Bennin.

"Who are—"

"Explanations later." Gypsy took hold of the man's arm.

"This is not pleasing conduct." A bland-faced robot was in the doorway. "You both ought to be ashamed, making all this extra trouble for everybody. Stranger, will you please let go of this fellow."

Gypsy did, and suddenly tackled the robot. His right hand went to a spot on the back of the humanoid mechanism. He hit it hard, a tiny door popped open and Gypsy thrust two fingers in.

"You will be punished, I have no—" The robot froze.

"How did you know to do that?" asked Bennin.

Frowning, Gypsy answered, "I knew." He took the man's arm once again. "We'll go now."

It was too soon.

Nothing happened. They remained in the room.

Out in the corridor more clanging footsteps.

Gritting his teeth, Gypsy tightened his grip on Bennin's arm.

And this time it worked.

The chart progressed slowly, since Bennin paused frequently to stare at Gypsy. "Someone with your abilities . . . there's no reason for you to waste your time in Villedeux."

"I told you," said Gypsy, "I want the files of the European Security Office."

Bennin returned to the map he was sketching on the floor of the ruined villa with a charred stick. "At the time the wall first went up—and the robots claimed the wall was to protect us all from the barbarians who then roamed the world—at that time they had human help in carting and storing of the materials removed from the ruins of Geneva. I've made it my business to talk with most of the men involved in the work." He scratched an X on the floor. "The papers from the ESO, what was left of them, were stored here."

Gypsy came over from the window to study the rough map. "At the foot of Street 23? All right, then that's where the wall will break." Crouching, he tapped various places on the map with his forefinger. "What else is around there, what sort of buildings?"

Bennin drew a small circle. "A robot guard station about a half block from the spot you want. They have stations placed all around the wall, at mile intervals. To "prevent" us from getting out and being "hurt" in the world outside."

Standing, Gypsy said, "I'll take care of the guard station. What else do we have to worry about?"

"Once the wall goes . . . if it goes . . . more robots from here and here and here will be rushed to the break spot."

"With weapons?"

"They'll probably try stunguns first, before resorting to blasters."

"You have weapons that'll work against them?"

"Some."

"Okay, then your people will have to be responsible for disabling some of the second force robots."

"We've also got to worry about the wall mender. It's a gigantic—"

"I saw it."

“The second anything goes wrong with the wall the mender will show up.”

Gypsy crouched. “Anymore things to worry about?”

“More than enough already.”

“I’ll send word to Zillerman about where to be and when.” Gypsy took a slip of paper from a pocket. “You write the note so that Hildy will know you’re out and free.”

Bennin said, “We have to put a good deal of trust in you, Gypsy. If you can’t—”

“I can.”

“You left something on your plate!” Zillerman’s kitchen was calling after him.

“I’m not . . . Yes, I’ll finish up my meal. Excuse it.” He returned to the table, and quickly ate the rest of the abandoned kelpwaffle. “There, plate wiped clean.”

“Much better.”

Zillerman, with a short sigh, left the table and returned to the circular room where Hildy was waiting. “Don’t want to make any of the servos suspicious.”

“It’s been hours,” said the girl.

“Not actually, Hildy, only a shade over an hour.”

“But by now . . .”

Zillerman said, “This young man of yours, this Gypsy. There’s something quite unusual about him.”

Hildy laughed. “Yes, that’s obvious. Most of the young men you run into can’t teleport, for one thing.”

“Yes, yes. That was a foolish way to state it. I mean beside these powers he obviously possesses. He . . . there’s something about him . . . something which

reminds me of . . .” He shook his head. “I can’t . . . something I heard about a long while ago.”

“You can’t have heard of Gypsy a long time ago. He’s not very old.”

Zillerman said, “Isn’t he?”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s the trouble, I don’t really know what I mean.”

Hildy said, “The important thing is that he’s going to help . . . oh.” A note materialized on her lap. “It’s from my father. He’s free from them. Here, this has the information from Gypsy.”

Taking the note, Zillerman said, “If only I could remember.”



There was the wall.

It rose up forty feet, made of stone and brick, the top of it blurred by the grey fog which had been drifting across Villedeux since sunset.

Bennin coughed into his fist, hunched his shoulders.

Gypsy was a few paces behind him, following him along the alley leading to Street 23. Swirls of fog came between him and the small, bent man.

Bennin halted. He waited for Gypsy to catch up, then spoke, "There's the place you want." The wall loomed some three hundred feet away.

Gypsy stood watching the high wall, and listening. "Are your people here?"

"I'll have to check. If all went well they ought to be waiting in the alleys and back streets that fan out from





this spot.”

“Check then.”

With a nod Bennin moved out of the alley. The fog circled round him, finally hiding him completely from Gypsy.

Hildy put her arms around her father. The blaster pistol she held clacked against the neowood wall beside them. “He got you out,” she said, hugging him harder, “and you’re all right!”

All along the lane stood silent people, some carrying blasters, some with sonics, others with makeshift weapons. At least twenty-five men and women visible in the mouth of the lane and many more masked by the night fog.

“There are a thousand of us waiting.” said Zillerman. “This Gypsy had better—”

“He’ll do what he promised,” Hildy answered.

“I’ve go to slip back to him now,” said her father, “let him know you’re here.” He stepped away from her, touched her cheek with his fingertips before hurrying from the lane.

Bennin was out on the wide Street 23 when the lights caught him. Cutting down through the fog from the surrounding rooftops, bright sharp beams, temporarily blinded the hunched father.

“Citizen Bennin, you are under arrest. For your own good, do not move.”

He moved, tried to run.

Stunguns began to hum.

Up atop the wall the vulture chuckled.

Its glowing eyes took in what was commencing below. The dozen robots on the roof top above Street 23, part of those it had alerted, were standing now with their stunguns aimed down at the foggy streets and lanes. Joel Bennin, body stiff, toppled over on the misted street. A voice screamed from the lane.

“Daddy!”

Gypsy concentrated first on the fallen Bennin. The man was suddenly gone from the street, back in the alley beside Gypsy.

Kneeling, he determined that Bennin was alive.

“Your plans are known, citizens!” a robot voice boomed from one of the fog-hidden rooftops. “Surrender and your punishment will be less. Surrender!”

“Not yet,” murmured Gypsy. Hands clenched he looked up toward the robots who’d appeared on the building opposite with stunguns. “There’s the one who got Bennin.”

The pleasant-faced robot was lifted into the air, then flung toward the street. It hit with an enormous rattling crash, fragmenting into metallic chunks. “They never were, are or will be masters!” Gypsy stood fast and concentrated on the other robots. His powers were back completely now. He thought about those robots and they ceased to function all at once, each frozen in a poised and watchful position. The affable expressions still on their identical faces.

From out of an alley a lean old man with a cleanshaved head came running. “Bastards! Bastards!” he shouted. In

his hand he swung a heavy metal tube, something he'd ripped off a home servomech to use as a weapon. "Bastards! Lousy robot bastards!"

"Fanatic," Gypsy said to himself.

Several more people came out to stomp on the remains of the robot, a grim-faced woman, a gleeful child, others. Dancing, kicking, smashing what was left.

Gypsy turned his attention to the walls. The robots had been warned, probably by the vulture if not by one of Zillerman's own people. No matter. They weren't going to stop him from getting at those files. They weren't going to save their damn wall.

Gypsy's eyes nearly closed, his hands gripped each other, his breathing became deeper.

Seconds went by, building up toward a minute.

The foundation rumbled. The buildings swayed, windows rattled.

The sound of the wall exploding filled the night, rolled along the street, pushed into the lanes and alleys, ate up the silence.

Bricks, hunks of rock, twists of metal pelted down, bounced. Dust billowed and mingled with the fog.

Gypsy ran into the open.

The hole he'd made in the wall was ten feet wide and twenty feet high. Through it he could see only darkness.

He kept running, leaping through the jagged opening. "There they are."

Ten filing cabinets at least, stencilled *Property of ESO—Most Secret*.

Shouting all around him. Zillerman was leading the people along Street 23 to the gap in the wall.

But since this wall was hollow Gypsy had opened only a way into it, not through it. There was another thickness of brick and rock to go.

Pivoting, Gypsy jumped out onto the night street. "Wait," he told the approaching crowd. "There's one more—"

—but the people had turned away.

"It's coming!"

"Watch out!"

Gypsy had heard the noise before, the tremendous roar of the giant mending machine. It was coming, rumbling rapidly closer to the break in the wall.

The stone barrier was its concern, people incidental. The huge rolling mechanism's arms were grabbing up citizens, tossing them aside to clear a path for itself. Bones smashed, arms cracked, as the tossed people slammed into the wall, hit the street.

"Clear away! Clear away!" shouted Gypsy. As the crowd scrambled into the darkness, he took a position directly in front of the oncoming machine.

It grew larger and larger, its lights probing at him, its huge metal arms groaning and creaking.

Gypsy concentrated. He had to disable the damn thing, the same way he'd stopped those robots on the roof. He gritted his teeth, directing his thoughts toward the machine's collapse.

It kept coming. The front arm snatched Gypsy up, spun him and threw him.

He hit the wall at the new break. The rough edges of the hole ripped at him, tore at his flesh. Incredible pain sliced into his arm and up his right side.

His head banged against one of the filing cabinets as he landed. Wobbling, swaying, Gypsy got to his feet.

The machine forgot him. It began its real work, mending the wall.

"You're not," shouted Gypsy, "going to brick me in!" He pressed his left hand to the wound on his right arm.

Something sharp and metallic met his touch. Gypsy paid it no mind, giving all his attention to the giant mending machine.

He bit his lip, eyes squinting. The machine had moved six feet away and was already beginning to undo Gypsy's work.

Gypsy dug his heels into the debris-strewn ground. He would run, leap, *collide* with the machine. He took a deep breath and charged.

KTANG! The giant mending machine moved slowly, as if to check the gnat-like action on its back. Gypsy gripped the surface of its hull and tugged at the higher section of the machine's left arm.

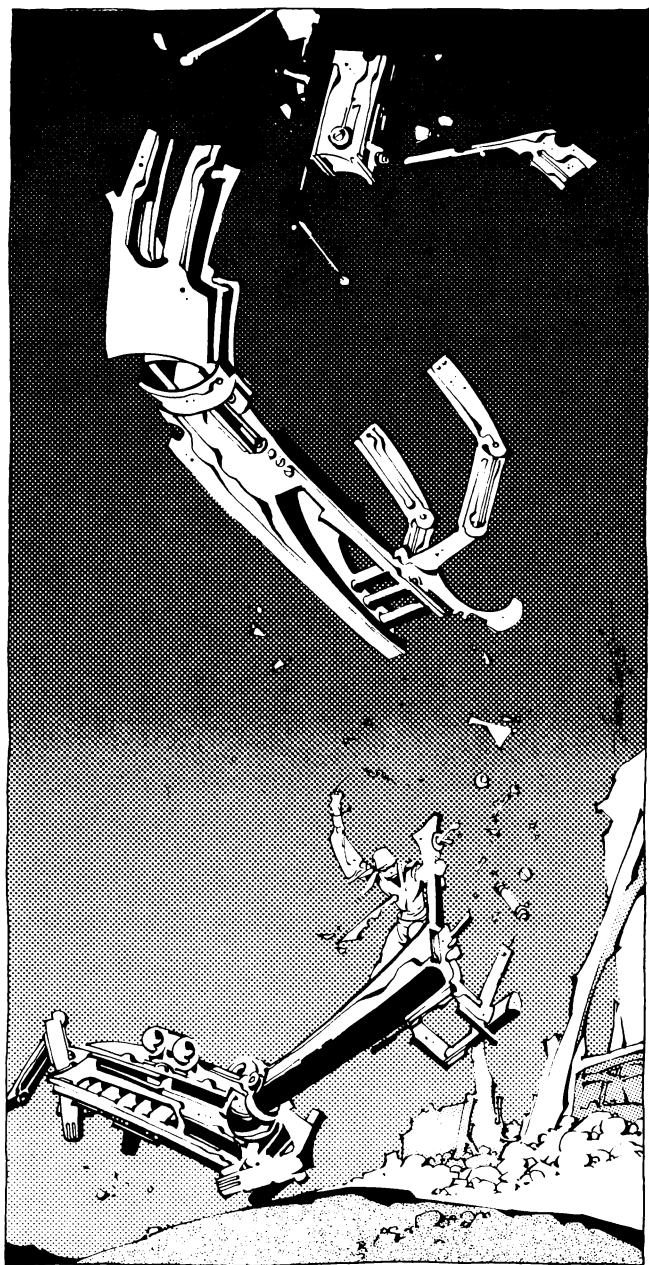
The robot shook. Gypsy pulled harder, harder, oblivious to himself, oblivious to the shouting of the crowd. The monster moved its right arm to swat the hero. As it did, the left arm fell off.

"Rip it! Wreck it!" The frenzied dwellers of the shadows began to move into the streets.

"The rest of the guards will be here in seconds. Have to stop this thing *now!*" Gypsy grabbed hold of the robot's remaining arm. The goliath waved him madly, trying to throw Gypsy into the wall. He held tightly to the arm and as he flew back and forth through the air, Gypsy inched slowly towards the connecting collar between the arm and the machine's right shoulder.

"Rock him!" "Topple him!" The crowd edged closer, foolishly entering a circle of light. "Back away!" yelled Gypsy as he reached the juncture in the arm. "The guards! Back away!"

The machine's hand was free to smash him now. Gypsy had seconds to pull it loose or die between steel fingers. He strained the coils, tugging for his life. The arm broke free!



"Victory! We are liberated!" "Vive Gypsy!" "Vive l'etranger!" The crowd scattered from the falling arm.

Gypsy maintained his grip on the metal monster, awaiting its next action. There was none. He had removed the components which the machine needed to perform its function. Without the arms, the machine could not repair any walls. It simply stopped working.

"Look out!" A blaster ray shot into the crowd, bouncing off a crumbling brick. "The guards! Over on the roof! The guards!" The crowd rushed towards the darkness.

"Blast!" Gypsy jumped down from the mender.

"Trouble, Gyp?" The vulture circled overhead.

"You *know* there's trouble, bird!"

"Bird, is it? How informal for a player of the game!"

Gypsy did not pursue the matter. There was still the wall. He had to break through to its other side before all the oncoming robots could attack. This time, his abilities had better work.

He crossed his forearms, tilted his head forward. Concentrated.

There was an implosion. Loud, rattling. The wall section collapsed, taking with it twenty of the forty or so new robots.

He nodded. "Done. All I have to do is get those files away from here."

"Congratulations, Gyp." The vulture was perched on the limp right arm of the wall mender. "Looks like you've reached the end of your quest." It gave a cackling laugh.

"Have I?"

Laughing still, the bird flapped its wings and went rising up into the fog. "The game isn't over, not over at all."

Gypsy quickly returned to the other things at hand.

Echoes of shouting, the hum of stunguns and the sizzle of blasters filled the air.

The people were fighting with the robots, trying to get to the gap. He had to help them.

"Smash them! Stop them!"

"Rip them open!"

"Mash them!"

Shouts and screams of triumph, mingled with the smashing and breaking of metal, the shattering of glass.

"Dirty robot bastards!"

The head of the robot came flying to the ground, bouncing at Gypsy's feet. An eye popped free as the bland-faced head came to rest. Wires trailed from the jagged metal neck.

"Mash them, smash them!"

Clanging, pounding, battering. The noise grew louder.

"Break their heads, rip out their wires!"

Men shouting, women crying, children yelling.

And they went on fighting the robots, mangling them, breaking them, smashing.

Still unsteady, Gypsy took a few steps forward. Concentrating, he disabled one of the pleasant-faced robots as it was about to fire its stungun at an old woman with a plastic crutch . . .

"Look! He's one of *them*!" cried the old woman as Gypsy moved toward her.

Gypsy turned, looking behind himself as if he expected to see another guard.

"Look, look! He's one of these lousy robot bastards!" A bleeding teenage boy stared directly at Gypsy.

"Led us into a trap! Lousy robot bastard!" A circle of citizens stood in front of him. Gypsy turned to his left and saw Hildy watching. Zillerman was there too, holding the unconscious Bennin in his arms.

The sounds of the struggle swept around them. Screams, blasts and the crumbling of the wall echoed as the citizens of Villedeux rushed forward on the road to liberation.

But in the circle around Gypsy there was an accusing silence. Slowly, incredulously, he looked down at the focus of the crowd's attention.

The flesh on his injured right arm had been torn away by the ragged bricks of the broken wall. Below the skin, there were no bones, no muscles, no blood.

There were only *wires* . . . and rods . . . and the cold gloss of metal circuitry.

"Who am I?" he whispered.

"WHO AM I?" he quivered.

Gypsy's body shook violently and he shuddered to the ground.

Everything swirled. The circle above him looked cold and white like long ago. Then it was wild and dark and filled with the faces of Villedeux.

Gypsy reached out toward Hildy and pleaded;

"Who am I?"

"Who am I?"

"WHAT AM I?"

The carcasses of eighty robots cluttered the area around the wall. The citizens of Villedeux smashed the metal men as they fell from the walls and vehicles in the center of the conflict.

For once the struggle was out in the open. Acting as a group, with collective spirit and independent thought on

their side, the citizens risked death for liberation. As the children rushed through the wall, their parents blocked the onrushing robots. Adults alternated, blocking and escaping in a steady flow.

In the heart of the frenzy, five people stood apart from the exodus—but not from the action.

Hildy shoved and pushed the sick woman away. “Leave him alone, leave Gypsy alone!”

“Lousy robot bast—”

Nostrils flaring, Hildy swung and slapped the woman across the mouth. “Get away, leave him alone, he’s hurt, damn you.” Hildy was oblivious to the fighting all around her. “You’re hurt, Gypsy . . . I’ll help you.”

Gypsy didn’t speak. With the fingers of his good hand he was touching at the wires and rods which made up his right arm.

“I didn’t know you had an artificial arm,” the young girl said. “I’m sorry Reisber did what she did.”

“Reisber?” Gypsy was frowning, tracing the path of a yellow wire through the exposed inner working of the arm.

“The old woman who attacked you . . . called you a robot.”

Gypsy looked up now. There were many faces turned toward him, watching. “Maybe they all think that,” he said.

“No they don’t,” insisted Hildy. “You’ve helped us. We know what you are as well as you do.”

Gypsy raised his head, but found he couldn’t stop shaking. “I don’t . . . know at all . . . Hildy.” His whole body was shivering violently. “Maybe she’s . . . right . . . I don’t . . .”

“Get him now!” cried Reibser, “Before he gets up! Smash—”





“Shut up!” said Zillerman, and he motioned for Hildy to help Gypsy through the wall.

The dawn brought no warmth to the newly-occupied region outside Villedoux.

As Gypsy set aside another stack of papers, he heard a noise from the woods below. Someone was climbing up the leaf-strewn hillside.

“Gypsy?”

He wrapped the dark scarf tighter around his injured arm. “I’m here, Hildy.” He was sitting on a mossy log.

The young girl, face glowing from the climb, stopped a few feet from him at the edge of the clearing. “What have you found out?”

“First, what did *you* find out?”

“We lost fifty of our people. The rest made it through the wall. The robots haven’t followed.” She came closer. “My father and I are going to Vinordinaire. Would you like to join us?”

“My quest hasn’t ended. The game isn’t over,” he said. “I appreciate your help in getting the files out of Villedoux, Hildy. After I was hurt last night I—”

“Everyone wants to help you, Gypsy. Reisber is almost the only one who had anything to say against you—and she has been ill for years.”

“*Almost* the only one.” Gypsy smiled at her. “I’ve been through most of the ESO reports and memos that had anything to do with me. Most of what they had must have been destroyed. There wasn’t much I didn’t already know. The vulture’s my supervisor . . . so they call him in the files.”

“Did any of the memos tell you where you had to go?”

"Yes. To the south—*Africa*."

"Africa?"

"I have the feeling that the quest is far from over, Hildy. I have a lot to learn . . . and no guide to tell me where to go. Only the clues of the quest and that crazy bird give me any direction."

"What about yourself?"

"Myself? I—I guess so. Somehow I understand the way many things operate. Like that mender . . . and the guardian back in Gibraltar. Yes, I do have some direction. I know what I have to do, Hildy . . . and I know I can do it." Gypsy smiled. "I have to find out who I am."

"Find out? You know who you are. Just because you have an artificial arm—"

"No, I *don't* know, Hildy. I felt like a complete human being when I came to Villedeux. Now I know I have a cybernetic arm. What about the rest of me? Am I, was I, an engineer? Or a doctor? Or mercenary soldier? Why am I playing this game? Who set it up for me? I have memories, Hildy . . . few, but distinct. I have to find out what they are."

"Stay with us for today, Gypsy. You have to have your arm mended."

"Thanks, Hildy," Gypsy stood up, "but that's something I must do by myself."

Hildy stared at this man, the stranger who saved her father and helped Villedeux. She ran her tongue over her lower lip. "Is there anything I can do?"

Gypsy stood up. "No. I'm not going to learn anything more here. I'll be moving on."

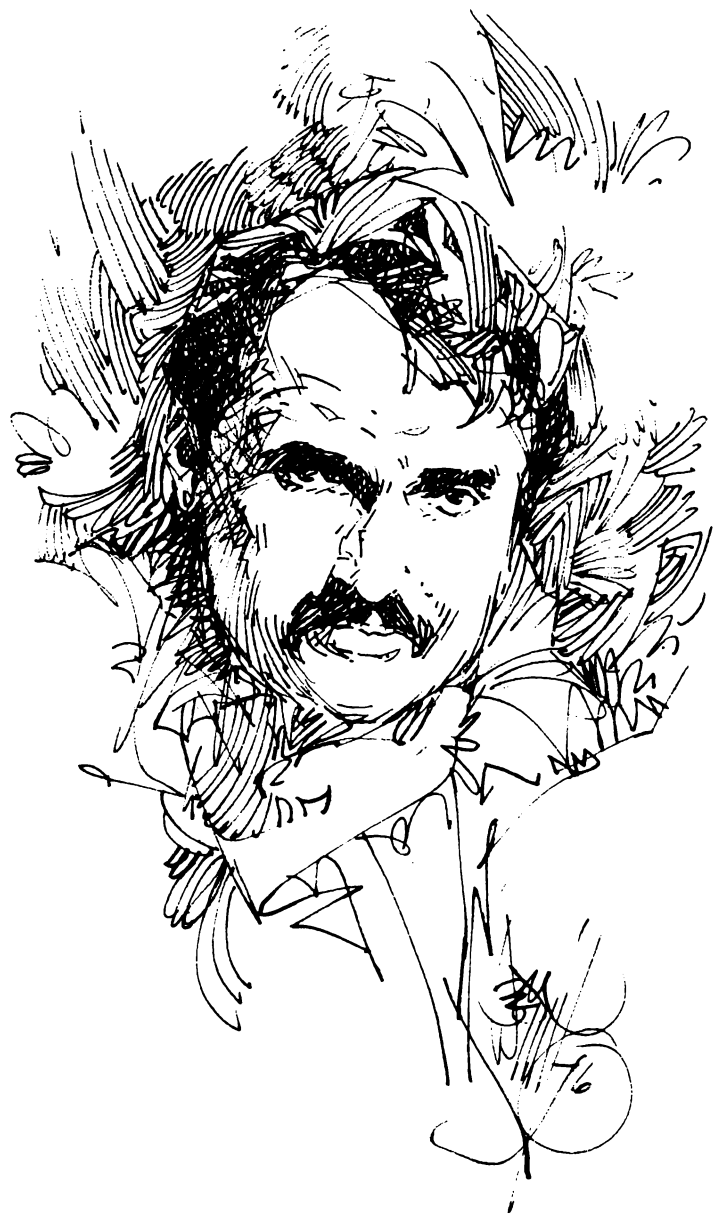
Hildy lowered her head. "I guess you do." She held out her hand. "At least we can walk down the hill together."

Gypsy smiled. "That we can."

Seconds later they materialized at the bottom of the

hill. “Fooled you!” cried Gypsy and he joined the young girl in a long, free round of laughter.





BIO/Ron Goulart

Despite my apparent youth, I've been writing professionally for about a quarter of a century. In that span of years something like two hundred of my stories and articles have appeared, in magazines ranging from *Playboy* and *Penthouse* to *Ellery Queen* and *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. I didn't get around to novels until 1968, when I wrote *The Sword Swallower*, but since then I've turned out about seventy five of the things. Over half of the novels have appeared under my own name, the rest using an assortment of pennames. Some multi-name authors have worked out elaborate biographies for their alter egos. All I know about mine is that they are even more crass than I am.

I was born in 1933, came East in the late 60s. I'm a native Californian and someone told me recently I have a California accent. Until then I assumed my style of speaking was an amalgam put together from imitating the announcers on boyhood radio serials and listening to my Portuguese relatives talking English. I attended the University of California at Berkeley, where I distinguished myself in ways other than academic. A week before I was set to commence graduate school a San Francisco advertising agency offered me a job. I took it. From the ad game I learned how to drink three martinis at lunch and still find my way back to the office, how to sleep comfortably on top of an average size desk and how to write concisely. I gave up drinking and desktop naps some years ago, but I still suffer from that conciseness training. Which is why my novels are always a few pages shorter than anyone else's.

My wife, whom I married in 1964, is also a former advertising copywriter turned book author. Though she's a lot less concise than I am. We have two sons and live in Connecticut, where we almost pass for normal everyday commuters.

Most of my future writing plans consist of different ways to write less while earning more. I also have my eye on a Nobel Prize for literature, but they hardly ever seem to give that to a humorist.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ron Goulart

Fiction

The Sword Swallower
Gadget Man
The Fire Eater
After Things Fell Apart
Clockwork's Pirates
Death Cell
Plunder
Hawkshaw
Wildsmith
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A Talent for the Invisible
The Tin Angel
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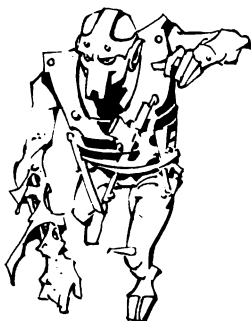
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The Same Lie Twice
One Grave Too Many

Broke Down Engine
What's Become of Screwloose?
Ghostbreaker
The Chameleon Corps
Nutzenbolts
Odd Job #101

Non-Fiction

The Assault on Childhood
Cheap Thrills
The Adventurous Decade



BYRON PREISS

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. It is currently involved with the production of two graphic series in conjunction with Pyramid Books/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, *Weird Heroes* and *Fiction Illustrated*. The latter is America's first graphic novel revue; a sophisticated quarterly series of books produced in the visual storytelling format. Titles—mentioned elsewhere in this book—range from period humor to science fiction. Preiss has written three of the four initial volumes, including *Son of Sherlock Holmes*, a collaboration with artist Ralph Reese.

Weird Heroes Volume 3 is the editor's seventh book.

Select Bibliography

The Silent e's from Outer Space

Weird Heroes Volume 1

Weird Heroes Volume 2

Schlomo Raven

Starfawn

The Block (with Steranko)



ALEX NINO

Alex Nino is aptly described by the phrase "an artist's artist." Respected by his fellow fantasy and science fiction artists as a versatile, innovative illustrator, Nino has spent his 16-year career blazing new paths in design and illustration. His compositions for various comic companies are among the most sensational in a field too burdened by repetition.

A native Phillipino, Alex's first ten years as a professional were spent working exclusively for publications of that country. Of this work, friend and critic Orvi Jundis writes, "His graphic novel, *Gruaga, the Fifth Corner of the World*, is one of the highlights of fantasy art. *Mga Matang Nsgliliyab*, written by Marcel Isidro and illustrated by Alex, is unique in that it utilizes elements and techniques never before attempted in the graphic story medium. He has probably more drawing styles than anyone else in the field."

In 1970, along with many other renowned Phillipino artists such as Alfredo P. Alcala and Nestor Redondo, Alex Nino began working for American publishing companies, including National and Marvel Comics. This work added an entirely new coterie of fans to the Nino stable and established for him an international reputation as an illustrator of fantasy themes. In 1974 he won an award at the World Science Fiction Convention in Washington, D.C.

In 1975, Alex produced a sensational portfolio of full-color paintings, the first-ever such collection of his work in this country. Elaborately produced, with high quality paper, printing and inks, it is becoming a treasured item in the collections of a number of collectors who have seen or heard about it at various comic book conventions around the country. Readers eager to see more of Alex's color work can write to Christopher Enterprises, 14164 West Outer Drive, Detroit, Michigan.

Among Alex's recent work is the completely visual short story, "Na and the Dredspore of Gruaga," produced for Weird Heroes Volume 2 and a rendering job on Mike Ploog's "Wild World," a Tolkienesque fantasy by Doug Moench for Marvel Comics.

The cover of this book is Alex's first appearance as an American paperback cover illustrator.





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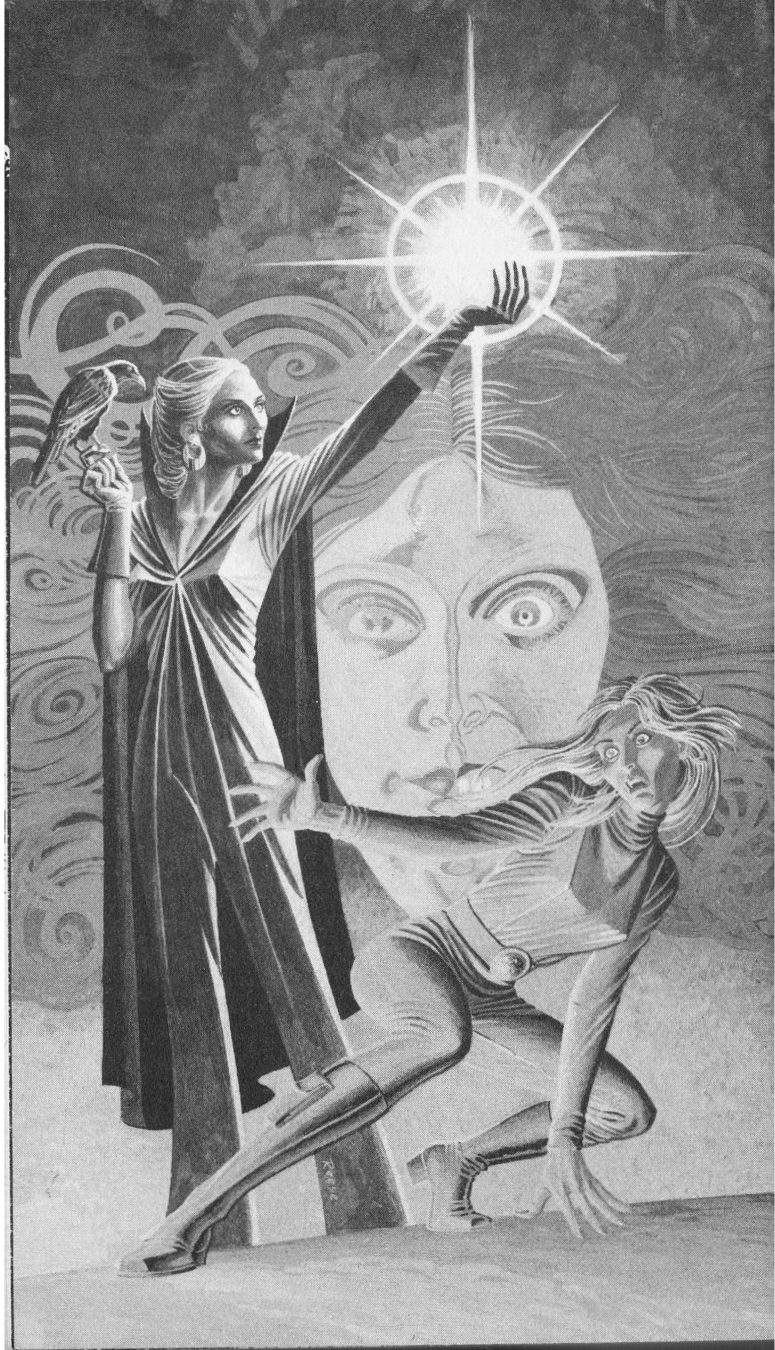
DOC PHOENIX, the star of Volume 5, premieres in a story by Ted White with illustrations (see opposite) by Stephen Fabian. In a tale worthy of the Doc Savage companions-in-adventure sub-genre, the man who enters the mind is pitted with a nightmare world and subterfuge in his own headquarters.

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THE CAMDEN KID, illustrated by Steranko and written by Charlie Swift, is a new entry in the cowboy hero area—with a humorous new twist.

VIVA, by comics writer Stephen Englehart, introduces a ghetto woman undergoing a strange metamorphosis under even stranger circumstances. Illustrations by Spanish artist Esteban Maroto.

Finally, a wordless NA story, a visual fantasy by Alex Nino, a **WEIRD HEROES** first.



NIGHTSHADE

An internationally famous magician . . . a legendary voodoo lady in the backwoods of Haiti . . . an insane creature of the night . . .

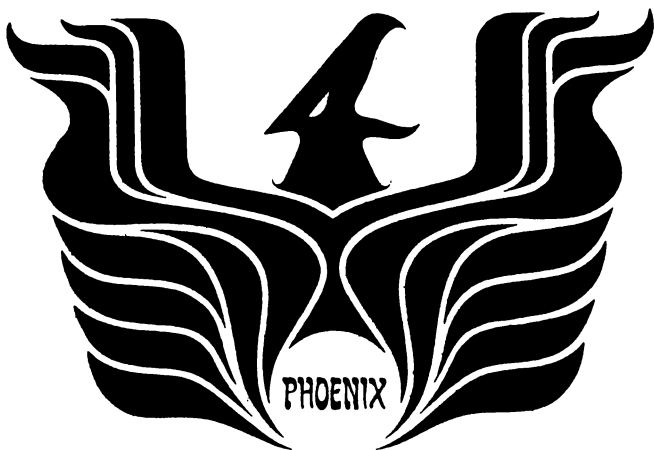
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Of this novel by Tappan King and Beth Meacham, Walter Gibson (author of THE SHADOW) has written, "Mystery, action and suspense worthy of the best of the pulps. A new star is born!"

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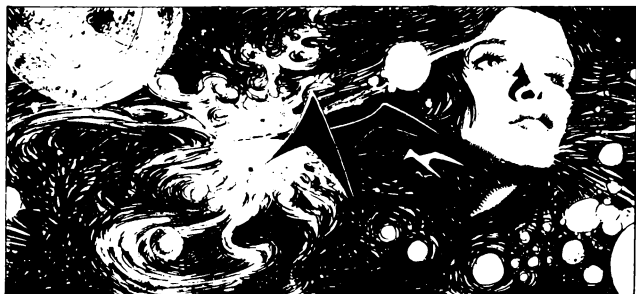
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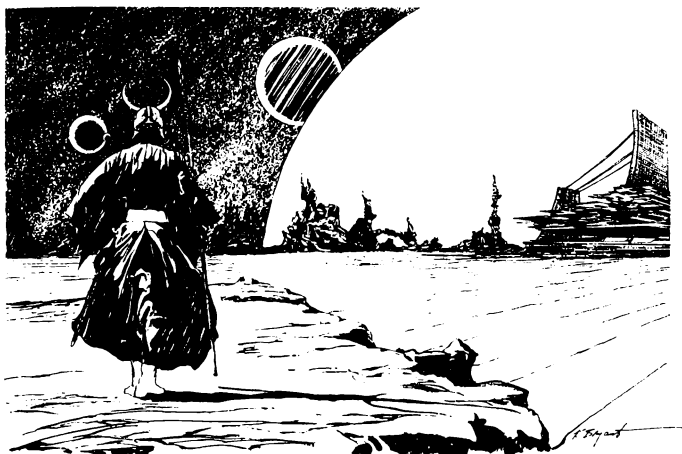
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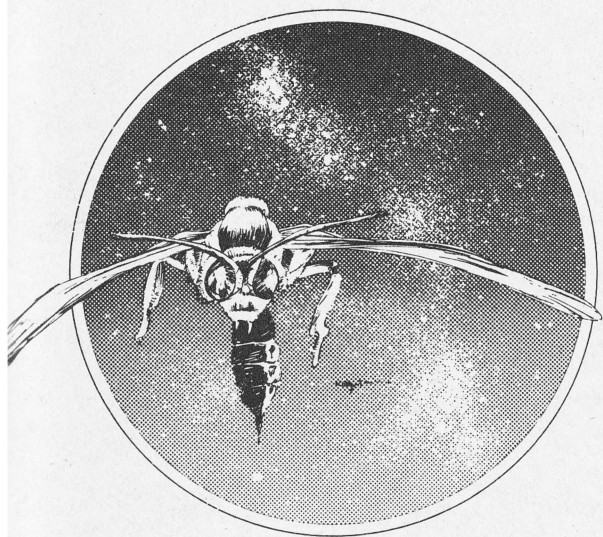


R. Bryant

If you flip to the beginning of this book you'll find the signature of Rick Bryant on the Quest map. Up-and-coming fantasy/SF artist Bryant has produced illustrations for such genre magazine as *Algol*, *Analog*, *Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction* and *Amazing Magazine*. He is presently developing SF paintings in New York. *Weird Heroes* is pleased to present some of his unpublished art for the first time.









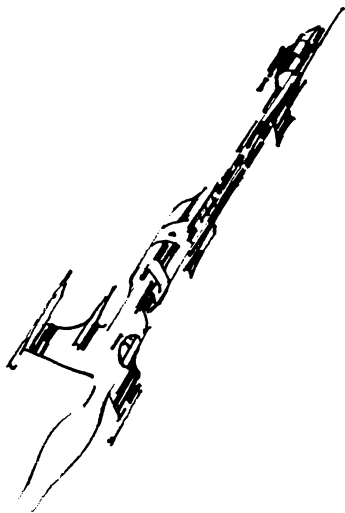
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