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clarion II

EDITED BY ROBIN SCOTT WILSON
AN ANTHOLOGY OF SPECULATIVE FICTION AND CRITICISM

FEATURING: HARLAN ELLISON
DAMON KNIGHT
URSULA K. LE GUIN
FREDERIK POHL
JOANNA RUSS
JAMES SALLIS
KATE WILHELM

and including the NAL Prizewinning stories by:
ED BRYANT
ROBERT WISSNER
F. M. BUSBY
ROBERT THURSTON
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CLARION II

An anthology
of speculative fiction and criticism

Edited by
ROBIN SCOTT WILSON

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We are pleased to announce the winners of the NAL prizes for the best stories from the 1971 Clarion Writers' Workshop (at Tulane University and the University of Washington):

1st prize: "Their Thousandth Season" by ED BRYANT and "Frozen Assets" by ROBERT WISSNER

2nd prize: "Here, There, and Everywhere" by F. M. BUSBY and "Punchline" by ROBERT THURSTON

3rd prize: "Sand and Stones" by GEO. ALEC EFFINGER

Honorable Mentions:

"Magic Passes" by STEVE HERBST
"In the Greenhouse" by LIN NIELSEN
"Crayola" by DAVE SKAL
"I Have Heard the Mermaids . . ." by LISA TUTTLE (does not appear in this book)

For John W. Campbell, Jr.,
who taught us all

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Preface

This is the second volume of short fiction to come out of an educational experiment that started in 1968 at Clarion State College in Pennsylvania. Since the demise of the program there—which followed on my departure from Clarion in 1970—the Clarion experiment has been carried on at two institutions, Tulane University in New Orleans and the University of Washington in Seattle. And here I must quickly assert that the workshops held at Tulane and Washington were not simply transplanted Clarions, and that their successes are entirely to be credited to the sympathetic administrations of both institutions, to the excellent staffs of professional writers who served at each workshop, and to their two moving personalities, James Sallis at Tulane and Vonda McIntyre at Washington.

If there is any common ground for the three workshops—Clarion, Tulane, and Washington—it probably lies first in their adherence to the workshop method refined by Damon Knight during his years as director of the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference, and second in the conviction shared by those who have led these workshops that—given some selectivity in the choice of students—the combination of high pressure, great motivation, carefully structured intimacy both within and outside the classroom, and total submergence in the craft of fiction can produce a substantial number of new writers capable of turning out, at a minimum, commercially successful prose. Although it is difficult to keep track of everyone, to the best of my knowledge, out of some ninety-three participants in four years of workshops, thirty-five have already become selling writers; a very considerable number of others soon will be. I can think offhand of only one nationally distributed science-fiction publication of any merit—magazine or serially published anthology of origi-

nals—which has not contained the work of a workshop alumnus.

The question that nags all of us who have had anything to do with the workshops is: are writers, after all, born and not made? Do we teach anyone to be a writer? Or do we simply facilitate the passage of talented people from latency to accomplishment? I doubt we shall ever know; perhaps both processes go on simultaneously. Only one thing is clear to me (and even so I'll admit the possibility of rationalization here): a fair number of people are writing and selling fiction who just might not be doing so had the workshops not existed.

Now, being a true-born English professor, the philistinism implicit in my emphasis on "commercially successful prose" and "selling writers" troubles me a bit. As a trained student of literature, I should be—and am—interested principally in high art; as a writer I have aspired to (but not achieved) the same elevation of quality; but as a teacher of writing, my interests open off a little to one side. Art is the bull's-eye we all aim at, but some of the inner rings score too. In a nation in which electronic images, frantic political rhetoric, and the chanting language of snake-oil salesmen are rendering the populace increasingly illiterate, anything that improves the writing (and reading) skills of even a few people must be accounted good. And then, if some of the work in this and similar collections is to be discounted as merely popular fiction, somehow beneath the purview of serious criticism, I ask the reader to recall that popular fiction is the vaudeville system for the serious writer, the farm club from which the major leagues will recruit their stars. The decline in the fortunes of magazine fiction in general, and pulp fiction in particular, has made itself felt in the relative paucity of good writers in our culture.

And so I assuage my professorial self-doubts with the thought that all the new writers who have passed through the science-fiction workshops are at least undamaged by the experience, that almost all of them are, indeed, a little better off for it, and that—in the fullness of time—many may become artists and not simply professional writers. Some in this volume already have.

In the meantime, if they can give an honest 95¢ worth of professional entertainment, continue their metamorphoses of craft into art, and earn a little eating money while waiting for the muse to anoint them with holy oil, why not?

And so Clarion. And Tulane. And Washington. And—I hope—the "Clarions" to come.

Robin Scott Wilson
Winnetka, Illinois, 15 October 1971

Introduction

by

James Sallis

It began when I realized that the Clarion Science Fiction Workshop, at which I'd helped the year before, was now an orphan with no home and no place to go. From there, it's a long way to the time you pack twenty-five would-be writers (not to mention innumerable lizards) into one wing of a dormitory for what rapidly becomes a twenty-four-hour-a-day, six-week writing workshop, but we made it.

I was helping an old friend teach Tulane's first course in science fiction, and since my friend was head of the English department and offered his support, it seemed reasonable that Tulane become host of the workshop. (And now let's all stand up and give Joe Roppolo a hand.) Several weeks later, after God knows how many letters and phone calls and appointments with administrators, we were ready to start picking students: Tulane was officially the new home. (And *now* let's all stand up and give Dr. Earl, Dean of the Summer School, a hand.) Not only did it make available the resources of a major university, it also gave a lot of people an excuse to come to New Orleans.

No one, I believe, really thinks it possible to teach people how to write; one can pass on a number of tricks and literary devices which are all part of the basic baggage, and that's all. Most of the Clarion students can write, and write very damned well—some of them better than the people who are presumably "teaching" them—when they arrive on the front steps. So for six weeks we give them an opportunity to write and do little else; we put them in an intentional living situation in which nothing else but writing, actual production, is important. And we

expose them to attitudes which may be new; on any given day the discussions may include basic story structure, references to poetry and the new French novel, hard and soft criticism. And perhaps the real work takes place after hours, in long personal sessions between teacher and student, or among the students themselves. From every side, they receive an absolute encouragement.

Insofar as there is a secret, it's in the teachers, one a week for six weeks. They read everything that's brought to them, and they comment on it, marking up manuscripts, doing word-by-word critiques, suggesting rewrites or revisions and submitting to lengthy, boozy rap sessions. Two of them, at least, are professional teachers; three are editors; they are all successful commercial writers. Add to this the fact that the field we're working in is a small one, a kind of subculture in which everyone comes to know everyone else and, for the most part, is eager to help others, and you have a potent engine. You have editors and publishers watching for the word "Clarion" on submissions. You have teachers calling New York editors just to introduce new names. You have students who have never before made a sale, and some who have never before been able to complete a story, suddenly selling four stories during the course of the workshop and going on to sell novels in the following months.

Arguments go on for days or weeks. Group jokes abound. You wake up at four in the morning and find your room full of lizards or Silly String or a prop someone's ripped off the theater department. Everyone's acting as confessor to everyone else, and the teachers—among them some of the top names in science fiction—are right in there: the atmosphere is electric.

No one's bothered yet to draw up a batting average for the workshop, but it would be an impressive one. A very large number have sold to commercial markets; one has sold over two dozen stories and articles; another has written and sold, already, two novels. That's an impressive record, and one which I'm sure remains unparalleled by any other writing workshop. I can think of at least five names among them which should be very well known to readers in a few years. Together, these writers are doing some of the most interesting work in current science fiction.

What else can I say? I'm pleased that I had some part in Clarion and only hope for better things in the coming years.

See you then.
Now read.

James Sallis,
September 1971,
New Orleans

Punchline

by

Robert Thurston

Human beings operate on the sweet assumption that there is an order to things, that some kind of logic, however arcane, governs them and the people around them, "And even the pang preceding death / Bids expectation rise."

No way. Bob Thurston's comment on this story: "I am not the world's best listener to a joke. On the other hand, I am not the world's best listener to Greek tragedy."

—There was this traveling salesman, see—

Cold-skinned. Anyone who touched him remarked on it. Skin as cold as the Beadsman on St. Agnes' Eve. As cold as the hymen of a virgin witch.

Not ugly, not handsome. Not much to speak of. Between tall and short, slim and fat, lined and smooth. Eyebrows, thick, were noticeable; eyes were not.

You couldn't have called him a Willy Loman type because Willy Loman hadn't been invented yet. You wouldn't anyway, since he was shy, promoted the product with reluctance, and had been shunted off to an unlucrative salesroute by a compassionate district manager. He hated the road. *All* roads. Dirt, asphalt, concrete, patches of blobbed tar. He feared the miles ahead and drove with his eyes staring steadily down at a point just a few feet in front of the car.

—and one dark night—

All light switched off above, below, and to the side. Weak headlights that needed adjustment picked out a triangular section of monotonous gravel. Cold seeped in through the cracked rear window and entered his cold body at the neck. His eyes ached from staring at the road. He wanted to stop and rest but knew he would freeze in place if he did. What vengeful God had made the Great Plains so vulnerable? There *must* be a place near, but in pitch blackness it was impossible to make out any outlines. He was well read enough to ponder the meaninglessness of a death practically on the doorstep of an unseen farmhouse.

—his car breaks down on this lonely road, see—

Without even a wheeze or a decent dying gasp. Just rolled to a graceless stop. Wearily he leaned his head against the steering wheel, right up against the horn, which blew or choked with a long echo that seemed to travel far without encountering human ear. He sat up. The draught caught him a particularly frosty blast on the back of the neck. He listened for some sound, then began to pound the horn like crazy for comfort.

Finally, he decided that freezing in motion was probably preferable to freezing stationary, and he left the car in order to seek sanctuary.

—comes finally to this farmhouse—

Hardly aware he had been going uphill, he came near the crest and saw the single light shining in the distance. Unshaped and too far away to tell whether it was a fire, another headlight (perhaps with another salesman cursing another dead car), or a window. Over the crest and downhill to the glittering beacon he ran. The shuffle of his shoes against the gravel sounded like rapid asthmatic breathing.

—runs all the way to the farmhouse and knocks—

Where? The light from the window was so weak it didn't illumine the shape of the house or any detail beyond the windowsill. The light source was a lamp in the window, and even with his head pressed against glass, very little

of the room could be seen. A patch of wall seemed faded and grease-stained.

Then should he knock on the window? Or holler? Such actions were too aggressive. But he just couldn't stand there and die that meaningless death which had haunted him earlier.

Hand over hand, palms pressed against rough siding, he began to make his way along the house. He caught one sliver in the side of a palm, another more painful one in the web between thumb and forefinger. He stepped into a rosebush, thorns punctured his calf. He couldn't refrain from some strained cursing. A sound came from inside the house, something like shin banging against chair.

He reached the corner of the house and felt his way to the door. He knocked once. The door opened before his arm had completed its full backward arc. A fat man blocked some of the glaring light that flowed out at him.

—farmer comes to the door and asks—

"Who's out there?"

The voice seemed gruff, billy-goatish, angry. He retreated three paces, almost wishing he could run back to his car and freeze in peace.

"Speak up, boy. I got a gun sittin' here by the door powerful enough to blast ya to double-smithereens before ya get outta the light."

"No, don't!"

He stood still, trying to look as nice-guy as possible.

"Who are ya?"

"My name is Leonard Brack and my car broke down just up the road."

"We got no phone but you can . . ."

—farmer took him in and—

". . . spend the night here and I'll drive ya up to the gay-rage in the mornin'. Come in and get warm, boy."

For this relief, Leonard felt much thanks. Once in the house and by a flaming gas heater, he enjoyed the rediscovery of warmth. The farmer, Cyrus McConnell, fed him coffee and dull conversation.

—well, this farmer had two beautiful—

"What is it, papa?" came a soft voice from somewhere above.

"Come on down and see for yourself."

Hopping footsteps followed skipping footsteps down a stairway to the hall. Two shapely forms came through the doorway.

"This here's my two daughters:

"Jeanie—"

Who was tall and blonde with the kind of pretty farmgirl face found on tractor calendars and in almanac illustrations.

"—and Joanie."

Who looked exactly like Jeanie except for her raven-black hair.

"They're twins."

Which didn't really have to be pointed out.

—each o' these babies was built like a—

"Brick shi—" Leonard stopped suddenly, realizing he was thinking aloud.

"What's that, son?"

"Ah—brickshi. That's a traditional Ukrainian greeting."

—salesman ogled the twins up and—

"You're breathin' heavy, mister," said Jeanie.

"Like a thirsty heifer," said Joanie.

"Don't spook the gentleman, girls," said the farmer. "Of course he's breathin' heavy. He's tired out from trottin' over the whole durn countryside."

Leonard, in nine years on the road, had never before encountered such breathtaking beauty. Packed well, too, including ribbons.

"You're pale, mister," said Joanie.

"Like a harvest moon," said Jeanie.

—then the farmer said the salesman could sleep in the guest room provided—

". . . that you let me lock you in there till dawn."

The words acted like an emetic on Leonard, as disappointment dissipated his desire. Still, he comforted himself with the thought that the brief sight of these twin delectations would, for a change, give him something more exciting than invoices to think about as he drifted off to sleep. Sneaking one more look at the girls, he cursed fate for always springing on him Surprise without Resolution.

"You look sad, mister," Jeanie said.

"Like a hound dog that's just flushed a feather hat," said Joanie.

—locked him in and he went to bed, but sure enough in a minute—

Ready to sleep, kept awake only by the dilemma of whether to dream about blond Jeanie or brunette Joanie. Or was it brunette Jeanie and blond Joanie?

Then a warm hand touched his face.

"You got cold skin, mister."

He sat up straight.

"How did you get in here?"

"That's my secret."

"It's too dark in here. Which one are you?"

"That's also my secret. Move over."

—so they, you know, made out, all the rest of the night, and it was—

An hour and a half of incredible warmth. A journey on apparently familiar roads which turned out to be untraveled. A trip to the moon on gossamer wings. An ecstasy like nothing else he'd ever experienced in his plodding one-step-in-front-of-the-other life.

She was an energetic delight, some part always in motion until she left him just before dawn. Several times he tried to detect which of the daughters he grappled with, but it was impossible to tell. When she'd departed as mysteriously as she'd arrived, he regretted not knowing which one to thank in the morning.

—so next morning he looked for, you know, signs to tell which one it was but—

When Jeanie blew in his ear while serving a plate of hash, he thought the issue was no longer in question. Then Joanie blew him a secret kiss.

"You look all perplexed, mister," said Joanie.

"Like a sow with silk purses hangin' offa its head," said Jeanie.

—so he went away, frustrated by the mystery—

Back to the daily monotony. Adventures came few and far between these days. Far between? Between this and

what? Well, back to shoving unsuitable material into the greased fingers of sleepy storeowners.

He drove his revived car by the house for one final look. He thought he saw two girls in two windows waving at him.

—bugged all the next year by the memory, you know—

Waking him suddenly at nights. Making him conscious of plaster cracks forming crooked involved rivers along dingy hotel walls. Causing sweat to appear on his forehead at unusual times.

—so one day at twilight he found himself on a familiar road and sure enough there was the same farmhouse—

Run, Leonard, run. See (in your mind's eye) the girls. See Jeanie or Joanie at the window. Stop. That's not the way. Be cool and calm. They must believe this is just a coincidence, that today you found yourself on a familiar road and sure enough you spotted the house of last year's kindnesses.

"You're trembling, mister," said Jeanie at the door.

"Like a apple tree bein' shook by a nervous boy," said Joanie in the hallway.

—so he was invited to spend the night again and the farmer locked him in again and he waited until—

"I startle you again? Mister, your skin's solid ice."

His reflexes keener from a year's planning, he reached for the lamp beside the bed. It clicked sharply but gave forth no illumination.

"I pulled the plug. It's you, me, and the pitch dark, mister. Move over."

"Who *are* you?"

"I'll never tell."

—and they had, you know, one more hot night of it—

Better than last year, as if sharpened by 364 days of training. Metaphysically, an almost-felt electrical current surging through all outlets and connections. Psychologically, ego-building after so many sleepless frustrated nights but also nerve-racking due to the silly confusion of identity.

Philosophically, a hasty reshuffling of old values to accommodate new situational contexts.

—and he tried to find out which twin had his tony—

"Hey Jeanie!"
"You can't trick me into telling."
"Why not?"
"That's my secret."
"Why is it so important?"
"Secret."
"But a guy's got to know who he's doing it with."
"No he don't. It is merely a natural act between two consenting individuals, and identity has nothing to do with it. Identity is superfluous, incongruous, inadequate."
"Damn it, that's what knocks me out. You talk different here than both of you do downstairs."
"A woman's mantle varies from parlor to bedroom."
"Well, give me a clue at least."
"Clue implies a mystery to be solved, a corner puzzle-piece to begin interlockment. Therefore, there cannot be clues here, since I do not wish you to arrive at a solution. Quit jawin'."

—again, just before dawn, she disappeared—

But where to? Nobody just disappears. Not without a long drum roll and a puff of smoke, anyway. The ritual was same as last year: a quick ascension to a kneeling position, a warm kiss upon his chest, the residual bounce of the bed as she left it, a couple of footsteps.

The absence of further sound upset him. No click of key in lock, no raising of secret trapdoor, no sliding of secret panel, no pushing open of window.

Her departure method was only the penultimate mystery. The question of her identity furnished more mental tension. In daylight there was not sufficient contrast between Joanie and Jeanie's behavior to provide any indication of who warmed his bed these annual nights.

At breakfast both girls looked a bit puffy-eyed, as if they both had been awake all night. Two pairs of eyes studied him knowingly.

—had insomnia all the next year worrying about it—

Maybe Jeanie because blondes have more fun. Maybe Joanie since brunettes relish mystery.

And how could he be sure it was the same girl both years? Maybe Joanie one year, then Jeanie's turn the next. Or vice-versa. But the second said the same things as the first. Well, that's possible. They're sisters and the first could have told the second all the details of the first's experience so the second could sneak in the room and pose as the first. Or not really the second *posing* as the first but the second being the second and, since she was a twin, acting very like the first. The consequences of such possibilities terrified him because then it was not just a problem of which one came to his room, but which one at which time? It had the effect of cubing the mystery.

He developed nervous tics. Chewing on a pillow, then retreating in disgust from the saliva puddles. Mind blanking off in the middle of a sure sale. Stopping at any old farmhouse, but finding the occupants had no daughters or married daughters or homely daughters (who, though they eyed him knowingly, left him alone at night) or pretty daughters (who laughed at his advances).

—so he went back to the farmhouse and the farmer and the farmer's daughters—

With his new spectacles he could see the house better than before. It was a genuinely ugly structure. Gray paint peeled off the siding at a thousand places. Windowsills sagged. A corner of porch was held up by old lumber.

Joanie opened the front door and greeted him indifferently, like an old friend. So did Jeanie.

Cryus came into the hallway, greeted Leonard with a hearty *brickshi,* and held out his left hand to shake. The right one was missing, lost when he'd tripped and reached up to a thresher for help.

—and this time, what do you think—

Surprise, Leonard! Here comes Jeanie with a three-month-old kid in her arms. Don't choke.

"Is he yours?" he said to Jeanie.

"Might be," she answered.

"Might be mine, too," Joanie interjected, taking the baby from the arms of Jeanie, who gave him up willingly.

He studied the baby carefully for a clue. A few strands of medium-brown hair, about as many as Leonard had on his own head, and the same shade of brown. No other indications.

"Your girls do like to fun me," he said to Cyrus. "But I'll bet you'll tell me whose it is."

"Can't, Leonard. Wish I knew. I was in the hospital for five months recovering from *this*. Came home and found the little tyke nestled in a crib. They won't tell *me* neither."

Leonard's face revealed his disappointment.

"You look despairin', mister," said Joanie.

"Like a young 'un when they take down the Christmas tree," said Jeanie.

"Can't understand how she done it," Cyrus said, "whichever one it was. Lock 'em both in every night."

—so he went to bed that night more mixed up than usual and sure enough—

"Move over."

Acting quickly, he whipped out the flashlight he'd concealed under the covers and shined it on her navel. She grabbed it out of his hands, flicked off the switch, and flung it across the room.

"*Now* move over."

—so he had another night of, you know, fun—

"But I've *got* to know now."

"I don't see why it's so damned important."

"Because of the kid."

"Why because of the kid? It's just a baby like all others."

"Because it's mine, that's why."

"Who said it's yours?"

"Isn't it?"

"That's a secret."

"How can you be so callous about your own child?"

"Who said it's my child?"

"Isn't it?"

"Secret."

"I would think, for the kid's sake, that he ought to know which of you is his mother."

"Who said either of us was his mother?"

—and so another night went by without him being any the wiser—

"The trouble with you, mister, is that you think your one-nighter per year is the only thing that happens around here. As if my father, my sister, and I go into suspended

animation, lifeless until you saunter in again. Frankly, I nearly forget you from one year to the next."

"Then—it really isn't my baby?"

"I never said that."

—and he left the next day as confused as ever—

"Here—I saved a can of peach preserve for you," Joanie said after breakfast.

"And some tomato puree from me," Jeanie said.

Leonard divided an expression of fury between them.

—another year—

He developed several plans, as follows:

PLAN A: Scratch her someplace. Draw blood. Next morning see which girl is scratched.

PLAN B: Bring two flashlights.

PLAN C: Set off a tear-gas bomb and quickly don gas mask. In ensuing confusion, plug in lamp and turn it on.

PLAN D: Whip out a set of handcuffs and chain her to me so she can't leave before dawn.

—and another return to the farmhouse—

The girls, bustling around, paid little attention to him except to show how well little Timmie could walk all by himself. Cyrus sulked in the kitchen, so despondent he even had the girls lock Leonard in his room.

—and another night—

All plans failed, as follows:

PLAN A: The next morning both girls wore bandages on the spot he'd scratched (the back of the neck).

PLAN B: The second flashlight got lost in the covers when she descended upon him.

PLAN C: He left the bomb in the trunk of his car.

PLAN D: The handcuffs, purchased in a novelty store, were too big for her wrists and she slipped out of them.

—and still confusion—

"I'm more than just confused. I think I'm on the verge of insanity."

"Don't dramatize. You've just got a simple ego hang-up, that's all."

"When I'm in an asylum, you'll laugh out of the other side of your mouth."

"If you're so determined, try catatonia. It might do you some good to shut up for a while."

"*Please* tell me."

"And the truth shall make you free? No deal."

—and, well, he came back again—

Puffiness around Jeanie's eyes, Joanie's black hair graying. Cyrus, bedridden, just nodded his head hello, never said a word. Timmie bugged him unmercifully, saying look at me do this and look at me do that. The kid was homely enough to be his.

Nobody locked the door. That bothered him.

This year, poised, he asked few questions and she seemed bored.

—and again—

She came through the door, unslinking, unmysterious. She went through the bed motions like a high priestess at her thousandth sacrifice.

"I've had ten women besides you this year," he said.

"So?"

"I just wanted you to know that I'm compensating, that's all."

—and again—

"Move over."
"Not tonight. I'm bushed."
"New strategy?"
"No strategy. I'm just tired."
"Okay."

—and again—

Three years in the army as a middle-aged private and corporal had depleted the curve of his belly. He felt almost jaunty as he approached the farmhouse. With some delight he noted that the house had been painted a dull yellow in the intervening years, as if it too had been rejuvenated by the war.

The kid—how old was he now, six, seven?—played on a swing. His homeliness was not enhanced by the mean expression of his face.

"You again?" Joanie said, looking up briefly from a bowl of string beans she was stripping. Gray locks now balancing the black in her hair, she had also put on weight. What the hell, though, it was still a good build.

"In the war, huh?" Jeanie said, coming out on the porch. It was not an especially perceptive observation, since he still wore his uniform.

The years had ravaged both twins about equally. The sheen of Jeanie's hair had faded and she was pudgy, but also, like Joanie, in fairly attractive places.

Yet there was a difference. Some of the liveliness had gone out of Jeanie's eyes. No longer as pretty as Joanie, she also seemed more careless in appearance.

"I'd like to say hello to your dad," he said.

"Cemetery's four miles down the road," Jeanie said.

"Oh—I'm sorry."

"Sure."

The girls worked at chores until suppertime. They served him a fine meal, but responded indifferently to his compliments. They would not even tell him which one had prepared the dressing for the roast pork.

The door to his room was not only not locked, it was left open. Light plunged in from the hallway. He settled into the bed, noting the lack of resiliency in the springs. Around midnight she came to him. She entered the room in a businesslike sweep, unmindful of the light which outlined her. He could not recognize her; her face and hair were too much in shadow.

"Move over."

As he shifted quickly to the wall side of the bed, he realized how much he'd been longing for her; how much the memory of her had nagged at his brain while on troopships, in foxholes, standing around the stage door of the canteen; how much he'd been disappointed by liberated whores whose too-clear faces had mocked him or remained indifferent with vacant looks in their wasted eyes.

Happily they enacted the ritual of returning warrior and girl left behind, their lovemaking more intense than at any time since the first years. Afterward they lay silent, with nothing to say and no questions that required asking, each comfortable in the repetition of myth.

"It's been a long time," she finally said.

"I love you, Jeanie or Joanie as the case may be."

"That's nice."
"And you still won't tell me who you are."
"I'd like to, but I won't."
"Why not?"
"I don't know. I guess it's just decreed, that's all."
"But that's silly."
"Is it? Tell me, after tonight will you stay here?"
"I'd like to, but I can't."
"Why not?"
"Well—uh—I've got to get back to the road. To my job."
"Is that the real reason?"
"Of course."
"No, it isn't."
"How do you know it isn't?"
"I just know."
"How?"
"That's my secret."

In the morning they both kissed him goodbye. Each kiss was polite, but with an extra touch—or slight push—of buried affection. He could not tell from the kiss which pair of lips belonged to his yearly bedmate. He tried to pat Timmie's head, but the kid squirmed away and ran to the sink, where he played listlessly with a sponge.

Jeanie and Joanie had tears in their eyes as he left. He assumed that, if he could weigh their tears, the scale would be evenly balanced. Damn them anyway. Damn both of them, the one he loved and the one who posed as lover.

—and, you know, years went by—

The house tilting to the east. Yellow paint peeling, replaced by new yellow coat, which fades to off-white. A new porch with uneven latticework, bits of which break off from time to time as the porch ages and cracks under the strain. Furniture comes and goes, and gradually the newest furniture is indiscernible from the oldest.

Timmie growing up with little strain, cultivating indifference to everyone. Going off at sixteen to join some mythical military service, polishing off a few Myrmidons and settling down in a southern port with a chubby girl whose face in photographs has little resolution.

Jeanie and Joanie adding weight and puffiness by degrees. Joanie's hair becoming gray starkly, Jeanie's fading to gray subtly. A gradual advance of eyelids downwards, so the visible portion of each eye decreases until the two

women look out at the world through narrow slits. Which causes them to tilt their heads backward when making an important look-them-in-the-eye statement.

Leonard losing weight, but becoming emaciated rather than slim. Piling up further nervous tics, an ulcer, and a recurring case of athlete's foot. Skin hardening, stretched like artist's canvas from bone to bone. In his face deep lines which gradually link, through tributaries, into an intricate network.

—and finally, now get this—

A fluffed-out pillow shelling peas, a bent and dented pipe cleaner watching the painfully slow movements of the pillow's shelling.

—uh, he comes up to her and says—

"Where's your sister?"

She took the bowl out of her lap and placed it beside her on the stair. She tilted her head backward. He felt uncomfortable under the stare of eyes he could not see.

"She died. Months ago. Been a long time since your last visit."

It took a while for him to understand her words.

"Dead?" he said. "I'm sorry."

"Sure."

She held position, rigid, a trace of breathing in her amplified bosom.

—uh, he looks her right in the eye and says—

"Which one of you is dead?"

She might have laughed. Or the sudden sound that echoed around him might have been a cackle of disdain.

"That's my secret, old man."

He very much wanted to sit down, but she sprawled over most of the steps and the ground was too far away.

—uh, then he, then he, uh, goddammit!—

"Of course you won't tell me who *you* are," he said.

"Can't you tell?"

He looked for a clue, searched his memory for some feature that had differentiated the two. A difference in

the depth of shadow beneath the eyes, a contrast in the shade of gray that had invaded the girls' hair.

—uh, this is stupid, I can't think, dammit—

"Are you coming to my room tonight?"
"Yes."
He felt relieved. At least *she* was still alive, it was the other one who'd died. He might not know whether or not she was Jeanie or Joanie, but by this time how important was the name anyhow? He anticipated the night with some pleasure.

—uh, this is really *stupid but I can't—*

"Move over."
His heart began to beat fast. She hadn't even waited for night to fall, had entered the room in broad daylight just as he was edging into his nap. In broad daylight without subterfuge. And what the hell kind of subterfuge could she use now anyway? The complete rejection of the Ritual excited him.

Moving her body as if it were weightless, she made love like a young girl. He responded energetically and the effort almost killed him. But, gasping for breath and hurting in all the usual places, he nevertheless felt abnormally happy.

"I don't need to know who you are," he said.

"Really? For what reason?"

The concern in her voice surprised him. Had he, after all these years, finally won the game by giving up? Defeated her because the mystery she'd created so carefully was now irrelevant?

"I don't need to know for—well, I guess for sentimental reasons. You've given me so much, memories of love and affection, and this night every year that's given a meaning to my life. I love you for that and for everything."

"Well, that's sentimental all right."

—Goddammit, I can't remember the punchline—

He gazed at her tenderly, pleased that for once he could lie with her and actually see her beside him. She had an odd smile on her face. Then her cheeks began to puff out spasmodically and he realized that she was suppressing a giggle. She lost the battle. The giggle exploded, without transition, into full-scale laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked. But she couldn't stop laughing long enough to tell him. It was all so infectious he began to laugh himself.

—it was something about, no that's another joke—

"It's just that—" she started to say, but instead capitulated to another fit of laughter.

"This is silly," he said and buried his face in her ample bosom. The pitch of his laughter deepened to what sounded to him like a resonant bass. At the same time he heard the wheezing part of her laugh reverberating in her chest.

—sorry, I know you think I'm a real idiot, but—

"Now—what's funny?" he said for the umpteenth time, as her laughter ebbed back to giggle proportions.

"It's not—it's not that funny. It's just that you look so silly and so confident."

"Shouldn't I be?"

"All that stuff about love—"

"I'm sorry you think it's stuff. But really, I don't care if you don't return my love."

"I never said that."

"But I no longer care what you said or never said. None of that is important any more. It's the total experience that's important. The years of loving you are more important than knowing whether you're Joanie or Jeanie. Pardon the *stuff*, but I love you now and have loved you since the first night years ago when you so attractively materialized inside this room."

"Who said it was *me* that materialized in your room? Who said that *I'm* the one you've been diddling with all the time or half the time or any of the time over the last few decades?"

—punchline just slipped my mind and it's a real zinger, too—

"Are you the one who's made love to me all these times?"

"That's a secret."

"Please—I've *got* to know now."

"Why now? I thought you didn't care any more."

"I didn't, but I do now. I still don't have to know your name, I just have to know if you're the one."

"I get it. Although knowledge of specific identity is unimportant, what *does* matter is whether I, whose identity you don't know, am your lover, whose identity you don't know, because if I'm not, then the one who died, whose identity you don't know, *is*—so that you, whose identity you don't know, will feel secure in the knowledge that your real and truly genuine affection will be asserted in the right direction, toward the woman in your bed or at the grave of the deceased. Right?"

"Of course. Isn't it important?"

"Is it?"

"Isn't it?"

"It might be, but I am now at this moment in your arms and ready for more, and I want the affection directed at me, whether or not I am the one who deserves it."

"Then you're not. Not the one who deserves it, I mean."

"I never said that."

"Why can't you tell me?"

"I just can't. Can't you understand that? I can't."

—but, never mind, a joke's a joke, and I got another one that'll just send you into hysterics—

Magic Passes

by

Steve Herbst

Steve Herbst is a compulsive experimenter; no two of his stories are anything at all alike. Each is a personal odyssey into the dangerous unknown of the human spirit, and that is the only aspect they share. Last year, Herbst's "An Uneven Evening" won NAL's Third Prize award. Of this year's contribution he writes: "The unpleasant fact is that mommies decay, they fade away. Each day of a child's life uses a mommy up one more day's worth. The child, who must want to grow, must not look at her. And grown men are forbidden to lest they fear hurting her. Life continues in this way. I am probably in no position to understand any of this."

Hammer looked up into Mr. Petey's soft eyes. Hammer was a little boy. "And what shall we do with this very pretty day?" Mr. Petey said, his mustache swinging outward as he bent over. There were tractors to ride on the lawn outside, and tape recordings to make, and beams to build towers with to climb onto the sky. Hammer said, "I dunno," and spun himself around in the swivel chair.

"Oh, look," Mr. Petey said. The walking suction-cup dragon was almost all the way up to the ceiling. It pulled itself along a wall and clacked. When it reached the top, Mr. Petey was standing under it; when it fell he caught it in his gentle hands. Shall we send him up again? No.

Hammer kicked and jumped off the chair and watched his shoes in the carpet. "Where's Mommy?"

"Sleeping, Hammer, as I have told you before. Mommy is getting her beauty sleep."

The garden was wet and Hammer had to take his shoes off. He wanted to climb the tall stalks that opened flowers at their tops, but he knew that they would break. He ran to the moss patch and stuck his feet in. "Goosh," he said. Rain trickled down the glass; Hammer touched it and touched his face with it.

"Some poetry," said Mr. Petey, who was staying on the path.

"No."

" 'The Lord wants to be praised for rain
But trees don't talk too good;
All he hears is nervous growls
From beasts inside the wood.' "

Mr. Petey reached and tickled him, the tips of his own brown leather shoes getting wet. Hammer laughed and would not let go of Mr. Petey's hand. "Oh, oh." The walk was slippery; Mr. Petey fell knees first into the moss. "Humph." His mustache blew.

Hammer hugged him and closed his eyes. Mr. Petey hugged back. The knees of his gray suit and the cuffs of his shirt were muddy. Water made trickling noise; Hammer giggled, stood up, rubbed mud in Mr. Petey's hair. Mr. Petey turned his eyes up with an incredible look of surprise. He felt around up there and said, "What's this?" He rolled his eyes. There was mud on his finger so he stuck it in his mouth to taste. Mr. Petey screwed up his face.

They both laughed, and then Hammer looked serious for a moment and said, "Mud is bad for you."

Mommy looked beautiful. She had a tiny flower painted on her eyelid. Her dress was long and white and it brushed the floor at if Mommy was whispering. Her long hair made her look magical.

Mommy had used a wipe on her face and it was no longer greasy. She had painted out two freckles on her chin. She hated distractions on herself. Her facial muscles were tight but not stretched, and Mommy looked considerably younger than she was.

Her hair was natural red; she made it hang girlishly on her shoulders. She was slight, perfect and pretty. With brown contact lenses in place, she looked seductive.

And everywhere that Mommy went, the men were sure to go.

"Why, yes I am, honey. I'm going out with a man who brought you a card game once, I don't know if you remember him. One night he kissed you on the forehead while you were asleep." She smiled in the mirror. He bounced on the comfortable sofa across the room.

Closets lined the walls. Mommy kept her dresses and her hats and sometimes special toys in them.

Through the window next to Mommy he saw the night skyline, all the way at the bottom of the hill on which they lived. He had been inside the skyline so many times with Mr. Petey that he knew a lot of important places in it. But from such a large distance he found himself wondering what it was like. It seemed that the lights would hang in the air around him in all directions if he were there, like clouds of tiny stars.

"And how is Mr. Petey, darling?"

"Fine."

"What did you do?"

"Went in the garden and played with bats."

"Bats? Oh, dear. What do bats do?" Mommy turned on her brush and ran it all the way down through her hair, again and again. Her body made a ninety-degree angle at the waist, her dress draping the chair to either side. The knees, the calves, the bare feet. Mommy smelled all clean.

"They fly. We took pictures."

"I see." She turned around. Here was Hammer's other self, reversed from the one in the mirror. He bounced nervously on the sofa. His knees were dirty, but she never bothered him about such things.

Hammer stopped bouncing to stare at his mother and wait for what she was going to do next. He wished that she would smile again and be pretty.

Mommy smiled and tilted her head. She pouted.

"Were you happy today?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Petey is a good friend, isn't he?"

"Yes."

She watched him and brushed her hair. Turned the brush off and held it in her lap. "Mommy really doesn't see enough of her kid, does she?" she said sadly. "She needs so much sleep to stay pretty."

Hammer nodded. Mommy put her arms out; the brush dropped to the carpet. She made a point of ignoring it,

even though it bothered her. Hammer put his arms out too, and walked awkwardly across the room to her.

Her hair was wonderfully soft. She gave him a kiss on the lips. "Be happy, little boy. Be as happy as you can." The room was quiet. "And take care of Mr. Petey, baby, because he needs you."

She kissed him again. They sat together. From the living room came the sound of the front door opening. Mr. Petey's voice and another were muffled by all the rooms in between. Mommy started, turned around on the chair and put her little boy down.

"Hammer, would you close me up?" she said. She turned and Hammer reached up. He touched the lightly freckled skin of her back first, between the dress flaps, feeling how soft it was. He pressed the two flaps together, then pulled so that they would stick. Mommy sucked in her breath and adjusted the front of her dress.

"You mother's titties aren't as firm as they used to be," she said, sighed, and glided out the door with Hammer behind her.

The man met her in the hall. He grabbed her roughly to kiss her and Mommy was not embarrassed. Hammer was not embarrassed. The three of them walked into the living room, where Mr. Petey stood holding a package.

"It's for you, rich kid," the man said to Hammer, bending down to touch him on the back. Hammer turned. "Go on, grab it."

"I'm sure you're going to tell Nash thanks, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Hammer. He walked calmly to Mr. Petey, took the package, brought it to the low table, and said, "Thank you." Mommy and the man sat together. Mommy's toe touched the man's leg. Mr. Petey sat on the piano bench, his eyes bright.

Inside the package was a foot-and-a-half-high doll with huge arms and huge chest muscles. Hammer lifted it out of the box. In a compartment underneath there was a thick sheet of plastic. Hammer unfolded it and held it up. The plastic was printed with the outlines of streets, and a bright blue river ran across it. Hammer put the sheet on the floor and tried to smooth it down, having trouble because of the carpet.

Nash got up. "He's Muscleman, see, the strongest thing in the world." Hammer watched while Nash turned Muscleman on and held him in the air. The doll moved its arms and legs. Nash shut it off and got down on his hands and knees next to the sheet of plastic.

"Look," he said. Checked the instructions on the box He pressed a spot on the plastic, and a small house popped up

"Go ahead." Hammer pressed the plastic wherever there was a spot, and a house or barn or car or train unfolded. Soon there was a little town on the floor Nash lifted Muscleman and pointed to his switch. Hammer turned Muscleman on. Nash put the doll down and it walked heavily over the plastic town, crushing everything in its path.

Mr Petey clapped Nash chuckled and turned Muscleman around to get more houses. "Really something, huh?" Hammer popped houses up again where Muscleman had trampled them.

Mommy came and popped a house, then she tugged at Nash's hair. He smiled at her. "Play with it awhile, he told Hammer He stood, groaned, took Mommy's hand.

Muscleman left the town and stomped across the room Mommy warned Hammer not to let it walk into the TV set. She followed Nash to the door

"If I don't see you, honey, good night. I'll be thinkin' about you." Hammer ran to be kissed. She lifted him, kissed him, put him down. Glanced back on her way out the door.

Nash said, "Take it easy."

Mr. Petey was holding Muscleman in the air, moving He pretended to be frightened. We can build a tall, tall building for Muscleman to knock over. Hammer liked the idea.

"But I'm hungry," he said. Mr. Petey put the doll down and led the way to the kitchen, without a word. He waved his arms, touched a panel, made some magic passes, and produced suddenly in his hand a big, shiny glazed doughnut

But in the quiet night Mr. Petey's smile was cold and glowed phosphorescently Metallic reflections of room lights moved around the arcs of Mr. Petey's lips and eyelids, shifting his immovable stare. Little metal pinwheels turned in Mr. Petey's pores. He was humming but not through his face; while Hammer listened anxiously, he heard the hum come from every part of Mr. Petey's charged body. It changed pitch by large increments.

Bap! Hammer's hug hit hard arms. Hammer hugged harder. Around him the room threatened to move, and he wanted more and more to hold on. Bap! Soon Hammer

was hitting Mr. Petey. No, the walls whispered, do not do that. But the walls grew colder and Hammer had to do *something.*

I want, said Hammer. Mr. Petey did not hear him. Little patches on the arms were turning crystalline white. They flaked off on Hammer, sprinkled on his tennis shoes. I must, whispered Hammer in Mr. Petey's ear, and Mr. Petey only grinned while sweating white flakes. His hum was growing loader. He started to vibrate.

One of Mr. Petey's rubber hands lifted. Hammer smelled cement. The hand flexed, rose, made foreboding signals in front of Hammer's face. The grin was tightening.

Oh no, Mr. Petey. The hand spun and white powder flew from it. Not.

Mr. Petey's suit was tearing. Hammer heard long, painful ripping noises. The seams on Mr. Petey's back were coming undone. Rips ran up the legs and hips. An all-over rip, painful as if it were skin.

Where's Mommy, asked Hammer. Mommy, Mommy.

Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy. She is not here.

The rubbery hands touched Hammer's face. They kneaded his cheeks. Hammer could not even frown, or speak.

Asleep. Do you not know. Talk, Mr. Petey. Talk? One rubbery finger was in Hammer's eye. Hammer tried to blink.

A thousand rubber fingers sprouted from Mr. Petey and touched Hammer, lightly.

Everything in the world wiggled. And Hammer sat up in bed and cried.

There was fluff all around the room; he finally quieted down, to realize that nobody had heard him. Even the clock on the wall did not make a ticking noise. Outside, the sky was getting lighter. Hammer clung to his covers and waited.

Then he remembered the tongs at his bedside. He picked them up. Hammer wanted the book of photographs that sat on a shelf; in his hands the tongs extended until they reached the book. They took hold; Hammer locked them closed. He lifted up with all his strength and pulled the book toward him.

But the pictures were too silent. The new ones of bats stopped in their flight provided ghoul-faces for him to see He shut the book and let it drop beside the bed.

The mean dog had fangs but they were only made of

felt. Hammer loved the mean dog. He looked around his room for it. The mean dog's eyes were dull in the brightening daylight. Hammer took him off the shelf with his tongs.

As soon as mean dog's fur touched Hammer, Hammer dropped the tongs and hugged him fiercely. Dog, dog, mean mean dog. Growly growly.

Quiet. Hammer wanted to get up. Come on, mean dog, come with me. Mean dog knew that it was unusual and wrong to get up before breakfast, but Hammer explained. He needed to because he had had a nightmare. Yes. He pulled down the covers and wiggled his feet.

But stop. Could Mr. Petey be waiting for him with moving hands? Hammer watched the doorway, beyond which he could see nothing. He knew that if he walked into the hall he would be able to see the moon through the window. Behind him, Mr. Petey could be standing right there.

Mean dog, you take good care of me. If Mr. Petey comes, tell him I don't want to play now.

The moon was not there. Tinted glass made the sky appear to be still dark. Hammer held his toy up to the window but mean dog could not see a thing. Hammer took him into the kitchen.

Into the lobby. Into the living room. At the bottom of the hill, the lights were still on. Into the morning. Mommy?

Mommy. Was she asleep? Would she come to him? Could he run to her? There was not a sound in the house, no matter how long he waited. The stuffed dog was soft and round, but it did not smell sweet. It smelled like plastic. It did not stand above him, wrap around him, or speak gently in his ear. Mean dog was his friend, but it was not his mommy.

The front door light went out. She had sat with him in the living room, hands plumping a pillow. She had whispered, "Go to bed, darling, and I'll wait up." He had been so very grateful. He had called, "Good night!" from his room.

And what would his ears do when he called now? The glass of the tables would break and all the furniture would slide to the center of the room. Would Mr. Petey come? All the closets would shake, and toys would pop out.

Would Mr. Petey come?

"Mommy?"

Hammer winced. He patted mean dog, hoping mean

dog would not be scared. I'm going to do it again, he whispered to mean dog.

"?" There was not even a rustle of covers. The hundred teacups that rested on Mr. Petey, on top of his covers, did not roll off and clatter. Hammer's own timid sound sank into deep carpet on the walls and floor, zigzagging away from room to room to be lost.

He squeezed mean dog and walked up the hall. The door to her room was closed. Hammer knocked politely, called again, but she did not answer. Hammer waited for as long as he could. Soon the silence of the huge house was too scary and he had to push. He pushed, heard a click, looked inside.

The bed was messed up. Hammer walked forever before coming to it; he knew that there was no one there. He touched the sheet: cool. Glanced all around the room and wanted to cry again. Sat down and buried his face in the shiny covers.

That was when he heard the humming sound. It came through the bed and buzzed in his ear. Sitting up, he could still hear it. When he put his hand on the wall, it was there. Even the wall seemed chilly now, and Hammer was trembling.

Where was anyone? There was a door next to the bed. Hammer saw its knob, ran to it, did not stop to wonder. He turned the knob once, for try. Turned it again and pushed. Pulled. The door was not locked. It opened smoothly, and cool air came out.

"Mommy?"

The room had no windows. Soft pink lights outlined the ceiling and made the room glow. Beneath them, on a platform, was a long pink cabinet. Hammer stepped timidly forward.

Under glass he could see Mommy's head and arm. She had no clothes on. Hammer touched the glass; his heart beat very quickly. She was sleeping.

Her skin was smooth and perfect, without a blemish in the pink light. Her lips were pressed together, lip-shape, no wrinkles. She was so very pretty. Her eyelids never tightened, never moved. Almost a smile. Mommy. With the warmth of certain beauty.

Cold. Hammer knocked on the glass, called to her. He could not pound hard enough. When he stopped, the hum rose up again to burn him. Make him ache. Worry him: it had her in a trance. Could he touch her?

He hit the side of the cabinet, and the humming sound

changed. Something bad was happening. He called to her urgently, but only the room answered. The room moaned; the noise of machinery separated into hundreds of parts that all ran down. Hammer hurt his hand on the glass. "Mommy?"

She did not hear; she did not see. The downy surface of her was unaffected. Hammer struck out at the cabinet, jumped when it made clicking noises, fell backward onto the carpet when the whole thing shuddered.

The lid hissed open, high into the air.

Hammer got up and threw himself on her; his cry faded in cold air. Mommy did not open her eyes or put her hands on his shoulders. Her body was hard and terribly cold. Hammer's knee slipped on her. An icy breast jabbed his face, and Hammer screamed, his throat choked with tears. He clung to her. A puddle of water was forming by Mommy.

He looked up in terror when the door open. Mr. Petey was wide awake, energized. He ran to Hammer swiftly and tossed him onto the carpet. His hands touched the cabinet, closed its lid.

Mr. Petey said, "It's a good thing that I am a light sleeper." Hammer grabbed Mr. Petey's pants leg and hit him with his other hand. Mr. Petey's hands got tears all over them when they lifted Hammer up.

Mr. Petey said almost sadly in his ear, "You'll have to leave the room."

Hammer ate a chocolate bar and watched sunlight change on the front lawn. A breeze came through the window. Hammer's head rested on his knees. He tried to sigh like an old weary person, but music came out. On the living-room sofa were some of his books, a variety of toys, a pair of binoculars. Hammer picked up the binoculars and stared through them down the hill.

Behind him he heard her coming. He did not turn around; she stopped by the window and adjusted his collar. His shoulders came up and immobilized her. Hammer did not like the cold, bumpy feel of her hands on his skin.

Mommy took her hands away. "What do you see?" she said.

"Bats," said Hammer, looking through the binoculars.

"Don't be silly, there's no bats out there." She sat down. When she brushed against him, Hammer instinctively pulled away, thinking about blue-splotched arms. The tiny

veins in Mommy scared him like spiders. Even though it had been a while.

Shaky, she stroked his hair. Hammer listened to the sounds of birds and aircraft. The television was going in her dressing room. And that other, that loud frightening noise? Don't be scared, Hammer, Mommy only smashed her mirror.

Hammer wanted to yawn but he was not sleepy. Without looking, he extended his hand over her lap and she took it. She sighed heavily.

"Looks like I won't be neglecting you any more, huh? Mommy's got more time now to spend with her kid." Hammer put the binoculars down and looked at her.

"Ain't that the truth," she said. It was the truth. No more beauty, no more beauty sleep.

If the binoculars could work on her, Hammer would have held them up to her face. Far away, veiled by aching skin, dainty in a bent wood of bones, she could perhaps be dancing. Her dress could keep small animals in its folds.

But something cried too in her, and in no particular way was she the same as she had been.

He felt her muscles strain as she held him, balancing herself while protecting him in her arms. He felt more than her weakness. The arms did not really want to hold; the smile was forced; the skin had trouble touching him. Mommy was not able to forget the ways she had changed, or what had changed her.

Hammer knew that her touch, to him, would always be a needle. He held his knees, shivered.

And could not keep from asking, finally, "Where is Mr. Petey?" After all, the house needed Mr. Petey's noises. The gadgets needed to be charmed again. They needed and they wanted that, besides what Hammer wanted.

She faced the window. "I sent him away, Hammer. We don't need Mr. Petey any more." She patted his knee. Hammer could not move.

He waited uncomfortably with nothing to say. Nash's car parked quietly in the driveway; the car door opened and slammed. Mommy jumped when she heard the sound and she shook her head sadly. The doorbell rang. Hammer had to answer.

"Hi," said Nash. "Where is she?"

Hammer pointed to the living room. Nash went in and stood by the doorway.

"Hello, Lynnda," he said. She frowned ironically and shook her head.

The rest of the house was dead. Hammer sat at the kitchen table and thought for a while. He listened to conversation from the living room but could not make out any of it. He only sensed that it was careful and wrong. There were cakes to mix up, to put in the oven and watch them rise through a window. Outside, there was a target to practice on with air guns. So many things to do.

A closet in Hammer's room was piled to the top with old games. He pulled one out and spun the spinner. Four. Two. Nine. Another closet had only clothes in it; Hammer stuck his head in and looked behind them, found only more clothes. Under Hammer's bed, half-hidden in the carpet, were a few toys.

He went from room to room, checking the closets. The door creaked on one and inside, just barely revealed, was an old television. Hammer pulled the door wide open and ran to hide his face in a pillow. When he looked again, he grinned. Knew, barely, something worse than monsters, something sadder than being scared.

Hammer turned the light on in Mommy's dressing room, and pieces of mirror glass sparkled. The floor was covered with them. They crunched under his shoes. Hammer wanted to pick some of them up, but he knew that he was not supposed to touch them. They were sharp and dangerous.

The dressing-room closets surrounded him. They were no longer sacred, it seemed. Hammer had to look inside every one, just to be sure.

Dresses: the tight ones, that wrapped her up. Pale ones that deepened her color. They smelled very faintly the way she used to smell; would she keep them closed up, therefore, and never use them again?

Hammer closed each door carefully. He looked at creams and vanities only long enough to see that there was nothing else inside with them. He did not try on any of the closetful of hats.

Mommy came into her room to cry. Hammer was startled; he sat down quickly and expected to be scolded. But she did not scold Hammer for looking in her closet. She had no secrets any more.

She sat at her dressing table. The front door closed, loudly. She stared at Hammer, tried to see a sign that he wanted to come to her, or that she could go to him. But they did not touch each other. They sat on either side of the room, and stared.

Hammer knew that she was not Mommy any more.

She looked old and scared.

Maybe, Hammer thought, she would bring Mr. Petey back some day.

Fifteen Vultures, The Strop, and the Old Lady

by

Ursula K. Le Guin

During the month of July 1971, I took the noon bus daily from Portland to Forest Grove, via Hillsboro and a lot of cow pastures, to meet my one o'clock Science Fiction Writing Workshop at Pacific University. The workshop consisted of me, three registered students, one unregistered student who just appeared, and one registered but disembodied student who never did appear. The atmosphere at Pacific in summer is exceedingly serene and relaxed. In fact, they frequently forgot to unlock our classroom building. My ingenious students picked the lock, or if it was sunny we sat out under the oaks, and batted ideas around and gnats away.

This was delightful, but it wasn't much preparation for Seattle in August. Seattle was different. Fifteen or twenty of 'em. Sharp. Razors, honed to a fine edge by Johnson, Russ, Ellison. And the Strop himself sitting there with them, Samuel R. Delany, looking innocent, waiting for me to open my great big dull mouth. All perched around above and below me, vulturelike, in this ghastly black futuristic underground coffeeshop-mortuary which the University of Washington gave us for a classroom. All with piercing eyes. Some with English accents. Some with knives in their boots. All carrying sawed-off short stories and concealed MSS. Oh, Lord! Do not—I strongly recommend to you—do not undertake, in almost total ignorance, to teach the sixth week of a six-week workshop, following after four of the best performers in the business, to a set of people between the ages of sixteen and fifty who have been working like crazy for five weeks and are all tuned

up to, or past, concert pitch, and who are probably brighter than you are to begin with.

I was supposed to *teach* these people something?

I don't think I ever did, but I ended up having a very good time not doing so. That was largely because of the infinitely welcome presence of the Strop, who could bring reassurance to a rabbit as it was disappearing down the python's throat. And also because the kids were not only sharp, but gentle. They forgave the confused little old pipe-smoking lady her presumption in "teaching" them anything; and they did, most of them, what was necessary. They wrote. They wrote hard, and often. They wrote too much, too fast. They wrote in class, on order. They wrote at odd hours of the night, and even ones. They wrote very well and very badly, in the same piece, in the same sentence. They did what writers do. They wrote.

The sessions of mutual criticism in such a course are fascinating to participate in. By the time I came the kids had had sound training and five weeks' practice, and they knew how to criticize a story much better than I did. I should like to record here my lasting gratitude to them all, for teaching me all I know about the Art of Workshopping.

If the leader wants, I'm sure that workshopping sessions could serve as a poor man's Esalen. Since neither Chip nor I was looking for that, they were mostly mild, my week, emotionally speaking. Intellectually they were pretty surgical: deep, sharp, and skillful. If they caused pain, that wasn't their intent—only a by-product.

Workshopping is the finest blood sport I know. It is splendid intellectual exercise, and highly stimulating to the brain and the adrenals. It may also provide something which is genuinely necessary, even essential, to the development of a certain type of writer's personality; of this I am not sure. I am inclined, at this point, to question the nature of its real function.

It is a truism to say that a writer (or any artist) cannot depend, in any profound sense, on the judgment of others: he has got to see his own mistakes and his own virtues. But what is not said so often—and is very hard to say to the young, the ambitious, the impatient—is that this takes not only will, not only work, but *time*. An intellectual decision can be reached quickly, a rational perception can be made all at once, but in order to be useful to the artist, it has all got to get down into the unconscious, and ferment in the darkness, and work slowly back up into

the light. The artist's judgment of his own work—upon which the value of his work depends—is made *with his entire personality;* and until the personality is formed, and the psychic processes are perfected, the judgment will be incomplete.

For example, the alternations of moral preachiness and savage cynicism that characterize (and always have characterized) most writing by young people are not going to be talked away. They are essential. They are part of being twenty. The young writer has to live through them—and *write* through them—in order to get on to the next level. He cannot be elevated to that next level by the efforts of others, even the best critics with the best intentions in the world. He has got to walk there.

I have never found anywhere, in the domain of art, that you don't have to walk to. (There is quite an array of jets, buses, and hacks which you can ride to Success; but that is a different destination.) It is a pretty wild country. There are, of course, roads. Great artists make the roads; good teachers and good companions can point them out. But there ain't no free rides, baby. No hitchhiking. And if you want to strike out in any new direction—you go alone. With a machete in your hand, and the fear of God in your heart.

I am not convinced, then, that the purpose of workshopping, of mutual criticism, is what it seems to be. I wonder if what it really does is this. It tells the writer whose story is being criticized: Your opening is awkward, page 6 is incoherent, Asimov used that idea in 1938, what kind of idiot doesn't know you can't have a low-mass planet with a high-density atmosphere, you don't spell reliable with an o, your characters are wooden, your prose is leaden, your story is rotten, you are a writer . . .

You are a writer, because here we sit, fifteen vultures, the Strop, and the Old Lady, and take your work seriously (rip, tear, shred).

You are a writer because you sat down and wrote it, last night. And tonight you're going to write another one. And tomorrow, and tomorrow . . .

Whether we can really teach any more than that, I'm not yet sure. Whether one should call that "teaching," I'm not yet sure. That it is worth doing, I am convinced.

In the Greenhouse

by
Lin Nielsen

Lin Nielsen is a Junior at Illinois State University and was one of Ursula Le Guin's vultures at Seattle. Here is her account of the genesis of "In the Greenhouse":

"Sick of rewriting technological stories, I thought it was time for some software. A new revelation in plant research: plants react internally to injury and then repeat the reaction whenever the person who has hurt them enters the room. Who says they aren't sentient? I remember how my high school botany teacher had to coax his bird-of-paradise plant to bloom. Green things teach patience and love not by being better but by mirroring the actions directed toward them.

"Take two house plants, for example, and put them both in the sun. Talk to them. Tell one plant that it's clever, beautiful, and nice, and the other that it's nasty, ugly, and you wish it would die. You know what will happen?

"Everybody will think you've flipped."

"Snicker," said Barney through his polygraph-voicer.

"Shut up, plant," Les gasped as he staggered across the tiny greenhouse, his arms full of protesting potted palm. He put Porno next to the one unfrosted windowpane dur-

ing the lunch hour so that it could watch the girls sunbathing on the lawn.

"Child molester!"

Les dropped the clay tub with a swish of leaves. "What are you talking about, you dumb philodendron?" He looked up to Barney, who sat in a green tangle on a shelf next to the door.

"Not you. Old Porno. He's still complaining because you gave that Lucy fern to your mother."

"I had to. He was corrupting her morals. And you watch your language in front of the morning glory or I'll move your pins." That was a threat. A thought took so long to travel to the tendril tips that it was a whole philosophy when it arrived. His caustic friend spoke best from the pulp of the stem through the wires connected there.

Les swept up the peat moss in Porno's wake. The palm rustled dryly.

"Porno says there's a naked green girl out on the lawn." Barney had to relay because they had only one Baxter voice unit to hitch to the school's lie detector.

"I'll water him. He's been having too many of these fantasies."

Les kicked the broom under the planting table, an old door across sawhorses, and unraveled the hose to the window.

The girl had her arms wound tightly around the elm in the parkway. Sunlight dappled her chartreuse bottom.

He dropped the hose.

"Don't stand there like an ass. Go save her," Barney said.

Les didn't want to save her. She seemed to be having a nice time with her elm. It might be a harmless tree-love demonstration, and as long as she clutched the tree, Brumson couldn't get her for "excessive exposure in a school-oriented situation." And after he saved her, what could he do with a naked green girl?

"Phyllis says He just left His office." Phyllis was Principal Brumson's desk planter.

"I'll go."

As Les walked toward her, the girl crumpled sobbing at the foot of her tree. She was definitely green. She turned liquid, evergreen eyes up to him and hid the rest of her face with long fingers. He wished she would cover other parts.

"You," he said gruffly. "Get your clothes on and get back to class."

She shook like a leaf.

"Get up. Brumson's coming." He raised her by the arm and hustled her in the greenhouse door. "Whose class should you be in?"

She fluttered her hands.

"Les," Barney interrupted. "She says Charles doesn't love her any more."

"You can't read people's minds, you dumb plant."

"If she's green I can. Charles doesn't love her because of the cement boxes, and she doesn't know what to do. Her name is Siri."

"Who's Charles?"

"Her tree. She wants us to help."

Her face tear-wet, the girl pleaded to them with her hands.

Outside someone rapped on the frosted-glass door.

"Just a minute!" shouted Les. He pushed Siri down under the planting table. She curled into a fetal position next to the broom. "Who is it?" He pulled the door part-way open, pushing down on the handle to scrape the frame across the cement as though the door had not been opened for a long time.

Brumson stood outside with the school's plainclothes detective behind him. "Did a girl come in here just now?"

"What did she look like?"

"She didn't have any clothes on. Somebody reported she was green."

"Did you try the door by the biology rooms?"

"Yes."

"What about the cafeteria?"

"Tried there."

"Are you sure there was a girl?"

Brumson scowled at him. "Thank you, Mr. Paxton."

Les scraped the door closed. The bell rang for the first afternoon period. "Talk to her, Barney." He went into his classroom, closed the greenhouse door carefully behind him, and hung up the *Herbicides—Poison* sign.

Les returned after teaching his three afternoon classes.

Siri sat on the counter between the steel bulk of the lie detector and the smaller voice hookup. Barney's pot was level with her shoulder. She was untangling his tendrils from the wires and laying them along the shelf in the sunlight.

"She wanted to know what the polygraph box was," Barney said.

"Tell her it's to pick up your vibrations so you can talk."

"I did."

Les decided she looked very nice without clothes. The hair on her head was brown, but her body hair was dark green. Her eyes were jade, her fingernails yellow. She was a charming vegetable girl. Siri smiled at him without showing teeth, and he realized she had lips but no mouth.

"Did you ask her about Charles and where she came from?"

"I get the impression that she lives with Charles," Barney said with plant delicacy. "He got angry and kicked her out. I didn't quite follow those parts. Actually he's angry at your people—something about some new prisons for trees—and decided she was a human too. He couldn't stand to live with one, so out she went."

"I can understand Charles' reasoning, but what's she going to do now?"

"She says if her tree doesn't take her back, she'll die. I don't know if that's the truth or if she's being dramatic."

"How could she live with Charles? In his branches?"

"Not *with*, really. Inside, maybe."

"Barney, you're no help at all."

"Look, it's hard to be precise when vibrations are all that I've got to work with. She assumes I know what she's talking about and doesn't stop to explain."

"Okay, I'm sorry. I've got to go home now, and obviously I can't take her with me."

Les lived with his lilac-powdered mother. You could bring a talking philodendron home to her but never a girl. Girls were outside her limited experience. What is sex to a sox washer and tired old she-wolf?

"Obviously," the plant said dryly. "I'll take care of her, Lester. Maybe by tomorrow I can find out more."

"Mom, can I have one of your old dresses?" Les asked that evening.

"Whatever for?" She turned around with soapsuds in her hands.

He couldn't tell her about the green-skinned girl, but his mother liked the philodendron. "I want to make a cover for Barney." He was going to say it would keep off the sun, but you don't keep the sun off a plant. "Like a birdcage cover for at night. To stop drafts. To keep him from losing water."

She cocked her head sideways. "And you need one of my old dresses?"

"Well, I figured I could cut off the top and gather in the waist."

"Why don't you let me do that, Lester? I could sew it up right now."

"Really, Mom, I've got to measure his pot first. Just let me take one to measure him with tomorrow."

"It seems like a waste of a good gardening dress." She smiled. "But anything for that nice little plant."

The blue dress hung on Siri, but he ripped and belted it to a close enough fit. She seemed unhappy.

"During the night she went out to talk to Charles," Barney said. "He was rotten and said he'd rather be a hollow tree than live with her. She tried to explain, but he wouldn't listen. He told her to go destroy the stone pots, then come back."

"Have you figured out that part?" Les sat on the edge of the planting table, and Siri crawled into his lap like a kitten. He was embarrassed by her friendliness and pushed her away. She climbed up to put an arm around Barney's pot.

"I'll bet he means the paving of the lunch place." It was a yard with classrooms along three sides and the cafeteria on the fourth. Two days ago they had put in bricks to replace the poor, beaten-down grass, circled the trees with benches, and set out picnic tables. "There was some kind of an ecology demonstration, wasn't there? Maybe we can get it torn up again and make Charles happy."

"Go ask Brumson."

"Yes, what is it?" The principal looked up over Phyllis.

"Mr. Brumson, I've been examining the benches around the trees in the lunch yard. As a botanist, I think they should be removed and the holes around the trees widened to allow room for growth."

Les could see the muscles in the principal's jaw working.

"Mr. Paxton, do you have any idea how much those benches and that paving cost?"

"Living things should be more important than money."

"Out of the question. You should have brought this to our attention when we first considered the project. Where were you then?"

"Probably in class or working on the greenhouse," Lester said stiffly. "Sorry to bother you, sir."

Every school issue has two sides. His other alternative was Kinley, and he called him in for a conference during lunch study hall.

"I didn't do *that* bad on the last test, did I?" Kinley was a six-foot-tall senior with a smear on his upper lip that might become a mustache. He tried to be cynical and vicious but settled for being imposing and dumb. He had a voice in every lost cause in the school.

Les gave him a chair in his tiny office. It smelled of pressed leaves.

"No, no, you did fine on the test." Les thought Kinley might be able to "arrange things." "I want to know how we can get rid of the bricks around the trees in the lunch court."

Kinley laughed. "You're a week late, guy. You fat-assers didn't support us soon enough. It's all over now." He tilted back his chair. "Don't you think we tried? Demonstrations, confrontations, sabotage—we did it all."

"I don't want the whole thing ripped up, just the part around the trees."

"You're strange, guy. I told you, it's all over."

Les went to explain things to the elm tree.

"Look, Charles, I talked to all the people involved, and there's no way to get that cement ripped up. Why don't you be a nice tree and take Siri back. She's not like us at all. She's a plant. She's like you."

Les felt silly standing there talking to a tree. He thought the tree was listening, but it wasn't like talking to Barney, who could answer back. Barney was special—a little independent research in a field mostly ignored. If you talked to trees, you could still be branded as weird, and the people walking along the sidewalk detoured around him. He went inside.

"Charles wasn't listening to you anyway, Les," Barney told him. "Siri says humans are beneath his notice. And Phyllis tells me that Brumson has been looking at your files since you left."

Les shrugged. "I must have made him nervous."

He taught a class in botany and two in biology for the rest of the day. Kinley was in his first bio class and kept shaking his head. Evidently he didn't understand the material. Les worked into the evening in his office preparing

final exams for the next week. When he finally locked his office and went to unplug Barney, it was dusk. A few early-season fireflies were out on the lawn. So was Siri.

"Barney, you were supposed to watch her," he said angrily and pulled open the greenhouse door.

"It's all right, Lester. There's nobody around. Let her have her fun."

She danced across the lawn in her torn dress and bare feet, catching the lightning bugs. *Snap*—she leaped into the air like a dog after gnats. She cupped her captive in her hand as one would hold a match to a cigarette in a draft. She watched it for one flash and blew it off her palm.

"She's telling Charles how to do it," said Barney quietly.

Charles doesn't know what he's given up, Les thought.

Her skin glowed palely in the light from the corner street lamp. Les had noticed that she was changing her color and turning more yellow. Now it was obvious. A green-skinned girl would have been invisible in the twilight.

"Siri." He softly called her inside and left her with the philodendron.

"You look moody," his mother said as she turned off the television.

"It's all right, Mom. I've just been working hard on these finals." Papers littered the cushions and crept up the doilied arms of the sofa.

"Why don't you use the same tests every year? My teachers always did."

"I'm better than that, Mom. At least I try."

"I really don't understand you, Lester." She hugged him. "But that's all right."

Siri bothered him. She was a good girl and stayed inside the greenhouse during the day, though Barney reported that her long talks with Charles continued at night. She always obeyed Les, but still he was bothered.

He remembered his obligation to his profession and started a notebook of observations about her. Somehow the passages turned lyrical. He noticed her dealings with the other plants in the greenhouse. She sometimes talked to the pots of bean sprouts and was very upset the day Les pulled them up for a botany lab on root structure. She was more sentimental than Barney.

She spent long hours with Porno too. The philodendron wouldn't say, but Les suspected they discussed sex, Porno's only intelligent line of conversation. Les regretted rescuing

the palm from its early life in the lobby of a cheap hotel. Its manners weren't proper for a high-school greenhouse. He considered forbidding Siri to speak to Porno but decided it was useless.

Lester was jealous, especially of Charles and the long night talks. He brought an ax from home and took two wedge cuts out of the elm before Brumson stopped him. Taking the chips to a lab class, he analyzed them for traces of beetles or Dutch elm blight and was disappointed when he didn't find any.

He wanted to spend all his time in the greenhouse and gave his classes written exercises to finish during the last half of each period. When he had to be in his office to grade papers, he rushed through them.

He turned Barney off for half a day and forgot to water Porno.

He began to ache whenever he wasn't near Siri. He set aside the last weekend before finals to be completely alone with her.

His mother worried about him going to school even on a Saturday.

"But I thought you said you finished writing those exams."

"No, Mom, just a couple more days of work." He kissed her and left.

With his own key he let himself in the door by the biology rooms. Tossing his briefcase toward his office, he walked happily through the classroom to the greenhouse.

Naked, yellow, Siri was standing in Porno's tub, knees spread around an armful of fronds and hands clutching the fragile trunk. They swayed rhythmically.

"Don't, Les!" Barney screamed. "Get out, get out!"

He leaped Barney's hookup, which was on the floor in the doorway, and grabbed her away from the palm. She turned a contorted, green face toward him and scratched with emerald claws. He threw her out of the greenhouse.

"Bastard!" Barney was hysterical.

Les turned to the palm. It was ragged and wilting. "You idiot," he said. "You could have hurt her."

"She needs it, she has to have it!"

"Shut up, Barney." He stepped over the voicebox into the empty classroom. "Siri!" he shouted. "Barney, where is she?"

Sullen silence answered him.

"Tell me!" Nothing. He kicked the voicer's off switch.

She was drinking the sun. Green, spread-eagled in the lunch yard, she writhed against the bricks. She was very beautiful.

"Siri." He slowly approached the wild thing.

His shadow crossed her, and she drew up into the fetal position, turning away from him. Her back was as pale as the underside of a leaf. He picked her up and carried her back to the greenhouse.

He spread her out on the cement floor in front of the plants and put his clothes on the table next to his mother's dress. Siri lay perfectly still, as though the sun weakened by the frosted glass could still dazzle her. He kissed her on the face, avoiding the mouth that never opened. He moved his hand over her breasts and down. There was nothing at all under the leafy pubic hair. She was as smooth as a pear's skin. He felt terrible, disgusted with himself and yet frustrated. He put on his pants, sat down next to the voice box, and turned Barney on.

"I can't have her, can I?"

"She's not a girl." There was static in Barney's voice. "She's a parasite."

"She's the first thing I ever wanted in my life, and it's turned me into a bastard."

"She's not a plant, Les. She has to get her chlorophyll from other plants. Please believe me." The philodendron's voice went up a notch at every statement. "That's what she was doing with Porno."

Les turned him off. He didn't want to hear about that now. He sat watching Siri. Dazed, not looking at him, she stood up slowly and walked toward the door.

"Siri?"

She went outside. He rose, stumbling over the equipment, to follow. He reached Porno's window and stopped.

She ran lightly across the lawn toward the elm, arms outstretched. Without hesitation she ran straight inside Charles. Les watched her melt and fade, flowing into the tree through the door framed by the north-growing moss. Charles had taken her back, and Les understood why. If she had been so badly treated by him, a human, then she could not be human herself. Charles would protect her.

Someone rapped loudly on the open door to the classroom.

"Good morning, Mr. Paxton," said Principal Brumson, dressed in Saturday clothes. He stood next to Les' mother. "Could we see you in your office for a few moments? I

would like to discuss, ah, some of your recent peculiar actions."

Les' shirt lay on the planting table next to a ripped dress.

"Good morning, Mr. Brumson." He grimaced instead of smiled. "Say hello to the people, Barney."

Barney's hookup sat silent in the doorway.

Les grabbed his shirt. "He just needs to be turned on."

"That's all right, Mr. Paxton. I'm sure you can explain your use of the school's lie detector later." The principal spoke gently. Les panicked.

"If it's about the green girl, she's all right now. Charles will take good care of her."

"All he needs is his vacation and a good rest, Mr. Brumson, sir." His mother looked concerned. Brumson led Lester toward the office.

Mrs. Paxton picked her way around the equipment in the doorway. She smiled at Barney up on his shelf and lifted him down. "You're such a nice plant," she said. She pulled off the wires and carried the silent philodendron out to her son.

Early to Bed

by

Geo. Alec Effinger

George Alec Effinger—"Piglet"—is an amazing talent. His first published story, "The Westfield Heights Mall Monster," appeared in June 1970 in the first Clarion anthology. Another story in that volume, "A Free Pass to the Carnival," won an Honorable Mention in the NAL prize contest. Since then he has sold a dozen more, and his first novel, What Entropy Means to Me, *is scheduled for publication by Doubleday this coming fall. What follows is a subtle tale guaranteed to be deeply affecting whatever the reader's sexual proclivities.*

"This is a tragic love story," writes Piglet. "It's a scene following the usually final one, where the lovers have betrayed each other. You generally don't see it; there's a lot of uncomfortable, guilty standing around. Painful, accusing glances; angry, humiliating words. This situation occurs far too often, and yet we never know how to handle it. We never learn."

Billy Dean Glick opened the door to the bedroom quietly. Inside, the room was dark; the shade was pulled down over the window, and the lamps were turned off. Maybe Lenny's sleeping, he thought. As his eyes adjusted

to the dimness he saw Lenny, lying on his back in the bed. On his stomach was a small Sony portable television. Lenny? he called.

Shhh. It's all right. Come on in.

Billy Dean closed the bedroom door behind him. He walked over to the chair that was placed by the side of the bed. On it were piled a couple dozen old magazines. The magazine on the top of the stack was an ancient copy of *Radio-TV Experimenter* that offered plans for building a device to measure how fast you could throw a baseball. Billy Dean sighed; he lifted the magazines from the chair and put them on the floor. When he sat down he could not see the TV screen, but he could hear the theme: The New Mike Douglas Show. He couldn't figure out why Lenny would be watching that show. The guy they had found to replace the *old* Mike Douglas was a fool.

Billy Dean sat there for a few minutes, quiet and uncomfortable. Finally, during a commercial, he spoke.

Hey, look, Abbie sent you these flowers. I don't know what you're going to do with flowers, but anyhow they're still thinking about you down there. And I brought you this book. I figure you got time to read now, right? It's about tractors and things. Thought you'd like it.

Wow, thanks, Billy. Yeah, I been reading these crummy magazines and watching television. I haven't watched TV in years. You know, all those people complaining about how lousy it is are right. It's lousy. But why the flowers? I ain't sick at all yet.

Yeah, but you've been confined to your bed, buddy.

The string of commercial messages and station breaks ended. The octet began the New Mike Douglas Show theme. Lenny pulled his left hand out from under the covers and switched the set off.

By due process, Billy, he said. I really can't have any complaints, and, anyway, their Analyst comes by twice a month to help me get over the guilt.

Guilt! I suppose they convinced you of that now. That on top of their crimes and miscalculations, *you're* the one who's guilty. Billy Dean stood up and walked to the window. The drapes were bright turquoise, the only cheerful color in the room. The bedroom was painted in some official scheme: below the level of the window sill the rough-textured walls were a disturbing sea-green. A perfectly straight line split the green from the yellow above it. Unfortunately, the yellow paint showed dirt; the dark smudges of fingerprints were clustered most thickly

around the light switches. The turquoise drapes went well with the yellow, but clashed badly with the sea-green. Billy Dean peeked past the window shade without pulling it up. He half expected to see bars on the windows, but there were none. He looked down to the crowded street. Two Puerto Rican girls were playing hopscotch on the sidewalk.

It was a perfectly legal trial, said Lenny. And it was a perfectly honest jury. If I thought that they weren't, I wouldn't be here. But I have a responsibility to the state to learn to feel guilty, even if I don't completely understand the circumstances.

But now they're sending around their shrink so that you *won't* feel guilty.

With his left hand Lenny reached behind him into the bookcase that was built into the headboard of his bed. He found the *TV Guide* and studied it for a minute. The state has its own ideas of rehabilitation, he said. It knows its responsibility, too. Dr. Bodine is good company, at least. We generally just talk a lot: mostly about books and movies. Speaking of which, at four there's an old Clifton Webb "Mr. Belvedere" thing on. What time is it now?

It's three-forty. I suppose that shrink is getting it all down on tape. I mean, you don't know what other crimes you've been confessing to.

Billy Dean sat down in the chair again. As he sat he pulled up the creases of his purple Dacron slacks. He was wearing sandals on his otherwise bare feet. He sat very straight in the chair, but after a while he opened his jacket (a heavy cream-colored material with gold embroidery) and loosened his tie. He crossed his legs, carefully placing his left ankle on his right knee. Then he covered the ankle with his right hand. Sometimes he put his left hand on his right arm in the area of the triceps; sometimes he just hooked the thumb in his black alligator belt. The pose was specifically chosen to project his masculine image. He thought of himself as being as ruggedly handsome as the scratchy mannikins in the Saks ads in the *Times*.

He looked at Lenny closely for the first time. Lenny had had his head shaved for some reason, just before his incarceration. It had grown back already, but not as long as it had been before. He had not been able to shave in all that time, of course, and his beard was thick and full. Billy Dean could see that Lenny was naked from

the waist up, but he could not guess whether or not he wore underwear or pajama bottoms now. The smell of perspiration was very strong and offensive.

Help, said Billy Dean, help the Mouse in the bottle.

What was that? You quoting something?

Huh? Yeah.

What?

A story. Just a story I wrote once. About this magic Mouse that was powerless inside of bottles.

Did you ever sell it?

What? Sell *that?* I was going to be the Stanton A. Coblentz of our generation until I found out that the markets weren't even real.

What's it mean? The story, I mean.

It means that you can't trust any of those pensuckers from downtown, I don't care *how* good he makes you feel.

Oh, doggone it, said Lenny, not Dr. Bodine. We've developed quite a warm relationship in the last few months.

I'll bet.

Lenny leaned over the side of the bed, reaching among the magazines on the floor. He knocked the pile over and selected an old *National Geographic* with a photograph of a nude Berber woman on the front. The bed clothes slipped down when Lenny bent over. Billy Dean could see a large part of Lenny's naked thigh. He saw the faded brownish-pink of his appendectomy scar, and the very hint of black pubic hair beyond the well-defined curve of thigh muscle. Billy Dean sighed again, thinking of the suffering Lenny had to do.

I mean it's his job, said Billy Dean. Anyway, whether he helps your psyche or not is irrelevant. You're sentenced to life in your bed in the first place. You'll never get out again to have any social contacts that you *could* handle poorly. What difference does it make if you're not well adjusted?

I have to listen to me, you know.

Billy Dean was feeling bitchy. He knew that it was a mask for his own guilt feelings, and for his sorrow. How long you been in, so far? he asked.

Well, I had two months at the hospital in the beginning. I don't suppose that counts, because there were five other guys with me in the ward. But I been here alone in the house now for, I don't know, six weeks.

Food getting low?

Yeah. Right, you bring flowers and books. Look, tell

them out there, if any of them would want to visit, tell them they can stick the books and flowers. Why doesn't anybody think to bring food or water? The water I got's been sitting here a long time. Tastes lousy; what's left, anyway. Before I got in bed I went around and filled up all the pots and pans and containers that I could find. That's still not much, though.

How long you figure you have?

I don't know. Three, maybe four weeks. You got to count evaporation and stuff like that, too. Maybe you could fill them up again before you leave.

You know I can't. Billy Dean took a deep breath. Does going to the john count? he asked. Can you, like, get up to go to the bathroom?

God, no. But I thought about that. Some of those jerks don't till it's too late. I heard about them—they flap off faster. Me, I got one of these Ti-D-Flush jobbies at Sears. I could have got it a lot cheaper if I had wanted to install it myself, but I said what the hell. What do I need money for any more? They put a big hole right in the middle of the mattress and everything. It cost about eight hundred dollars, but I figure that you only die once, right?

And you're supposed to be checked out mentally by then?

Dr. Bodine says I'm making good progress. I don't get mad at those block puzzles of his any more.

Billy Dean was beginning to feel more uncomfortable. He said nothing now, and the strained silence grew worse. Lenny turned on the lamp on his nightstand and paged through the magazine, looking at meaningless pictures. Billy Dean got up again and went to the window. He looked out, across the street toward the apartments on the other side. He peered to the right, far to the west. On the rare, clear days the Jersey side of the Hudson could be seen down between the rows of buildings. Today, however, a dusky yellow haze hid even the traffic light at Broadway. There were no sounds of traffic below: the street was blocked by the shelters of the poorest Puerto Rican and Haitian families, living out their lives in New York, never having a true address. The scene outside seemed to echo his own depression, and he let the shade fall. He went to the bed, where Lenny had set the television. He switched it on again.

It's almost time, he said.

Lenny didn't answer.

It's almost time for that movie, said Billy Dean. Well,

look, is there anything I can get you? Really. Some dope, a newspaper, some cards maybe?

Hey look, if it's not out of your way, send me some baking powder, will you?

You kidding me? You want baking powder?

Yeah, the double-acting stuff. You gotta be careful you don't get stuck with baking soda. Make sure it's baking *powder*. I mean, if it's not out of your way.

I don't know if you're shaking me out or what.

A can of baking powder won't break you, you know. Then I'll find out how you really feel about me.

Yeah, okay. My mom was talking about you the other day.

Oh, really? What did she have to say? She still harping about how I turned her son into a socially unacceptable?

I don't know. She just said what a waste, I mean how good you did in school and all. She said it's a waste how you're just going to fade off in that bed. A waste of your Gog-given talents.

I used them, man. Those Gog-given talents got me here, remember? Besides, I always thought that dying deserved some kind of artistic consideration. I never wanted to go easy, like dropping off stiff waiting for a bus on Fifth Avenue. I deserve some credit for this, don't I? Maybe someday they'll have critics for us condemned. They could do reviews instead of obituaries. Maybe you'll be luckier.

Billy Dean watched the picture on the TV flip top to bottom, over and over. He touched the vertical hold knob, then thought better of it. He turned off the sound and stared at the blinking screen for a moment. Look, he said, so you made *one* mistake. It's not your fault that they need someone for an example. That Judge Cabray just had his sights on State Supreme, is all. Why didn't you appeal? Those Fed courts would never have let the sentence stick.

Il est plus aisé d'être sage pour les autres que pour soimême, said Lenny.

Beckett?

No, La Rochefoucauld. You know what I *am* going to do?

No. What can you do?

I'm going to turn this contrast thing so the picture is all washed-out and white. Now I'm going to turn off the set entirely, Clifton Webb or no Clifton Webb. Like I said,

the verdict was found by a constitutional process. I don't have the right to appeal.

Lenny threw the copy of *National Geographic* across the room. Billy Dean went after it; he saw that it had landed open to a picture of a really plain girl sledding down a snowy hill in New Hampshire. She was smiling like that sled knew all the right places, and the caption insisted that she was one of the more attractive sights in the entire state. Neither the girl nor the picture did anything to encourage Billy Dean to go to New Hampshire.

The government says that you have the right to appeal, he said.

I don't have the *moral* right.

If the government decrees that you do, then the *government* is immoral. If the government is immoral, then you have the moral obligation to disobey their sentence. Q.E.D., said Billy Dean. He carried the magazine back to the chair and dropped it on the floor with the others. He had been trying to think of a graceful and painless exit line, but he hadn't found it yet. He did not sit down, in case one should come to him in the immediate future.

But I just can't. It goes against my grain. I'd be branded for life. How could I live with myself?

It was sure easy enough before. Besides, in a little while you're not going to be living with yourself at all unless you do something.

They're spending their money to heal me.

Oh, shut up. Heal you of what?

Lenny fell silent once more. The TV was off, and all the magazines were on the floor. He pretended to be greatly interested in his hands and fingernails. Billy Dean stood by the bed, angry and, at the same time, very sad.

The sound of someone rattling the garbage cans outside disturbed the silence. Billy Dean listened, thinking about Lenny and making the connection between the rubbish in the cans and the corpse that his friend would soon become, and that he himself would be in a similar position someday. He went to the window for the third time. He watched a lady from downstairs emptying her garbage. He felt a sudden sting of inspiration: a haiku. He hoped that he would remember it until he got home.

You're sentenced to life imprisonment in your own bed. You can't even set your feet on the floor. But what's to keep you from skipping out?

The court knew that I wouldn't. I promised them.

Right. I can think of some promises that you've made

me that . . . Oh, never mind. This is the wrong time, it's too late. I should be weeping. Give that Dr. Bodine of yours my warmest.

All right, said Lenny. I've told him all about you.

He has a right to know, I suppose. Look, when you're dying at last, when your tongue is all black and swollen, don't think of me. Don't think of me at all, any more. I don't have the time.

I'll try, Billy. If it's come to that, I'll try.

Yeah, we'll see if you do. And, Lenny, one more thing. I don't like this at all. You can see that I don't. You knew it before you . . . I mean, before Cathy and all. So look. I need the money. I mean, I need it real quick. And I might not get around to seeing you again before you—

Sure, I see. No need to be polite about it. Go in my wallet, there. It's in my pants pocket, hanging on the back of that chair by the dresser. No sweat.

Wow, thanks, Lenny. I'll . . . I'll never forget you.

I won't forget *you*, either, Billy. Remember all the fun we had in Algebra II. You're a great kid with a nice personality. Lots of luck in the future, though I know you won't need it. Don't forget good old Albert Underwood High and Miss Dayton's geography class. Why won't you forget me, Billy?

You know, said Billy Dean, it would be easy for us to get away with it. I mean, why don't you just get dressed and come with me? There's nothing in the world to keep you from getting on a bus from Port Authority. They don't watch this building, do they? I've got friends in Cleveland. We could stay with them as long as we wanted. We could even get out of the country. I mean, if we looked at all straight, those Western States guards won't give us any trouble. People are always crossing the border. The WSA needs people out there bad. We could go out to California. Nobody would ask questions. Why not, Lenny?

I won't forget you, Billy. Except, like you say, just before I kick off.

Billy Dean turned away from the bed. He tightened his tie, looking into the mirror over the dresser. He saw his face, he saw how tightly his jaw muscles were bunched. He saw Lenny in the bed, behind him. Lenny wasn't even looking in his direction. Billy Dean buttoned his jacket and walked to the bedroom door.

You know, he said, you'd think they'd make these doors lock on the inside for you lifers. It doesn't, does it?

No.

I can't understand it. Why the hell not?
How would you get out now?
Yeah. Right. Well, 'bye, Lenny.
Goodbye—Glick.

Golden Ages Gone Away

by

Frederik Pohl

When the Apollo 15 astronauts landed on the moon they named craters after characters and scenes in stories by Ray Bradbury, Arthur Clarke, Heinlein, Verne, Frank Herbert, and E. E. Smith. University libraries beg the privilege of collecting the papers of science-fiction writers. Routinely we get called on to keynote a scientific gathering or advise large corporations on how to run their affairs. We are very Establishment, these days. So much so that when I teach my college course in science fiction and divide the history of sf into four eras, the name I use for the present stage is the Age of Respectability.

It was not always thus. Time was when science fiction was one pulp category out of a dozen, no more respectable than sports or horror, nowhere near as financially successful as the detectives and the westerns. The magazines typically had names like *Thrilling Wonder Stories* or *Super Science Stories*. The covers matched the titles. A typical scene would be a fire-eyed monster covered with green scales, crashing through the window of a spaceship intent on the rape of a terror-stricken blonde in a stainless-steel bra.

How did we get from *there* to *here?*

It was not a straight line. It was a couple of quantum jumps that really didn't seem like much at the time to us who lived through them (is a germ in an astronaut's bloodstream aware that he has gone to the moon and back?), but have come since to be looked on as golden ages in science fiction. For the world in general these golden ages were gritty, troublesome times; one coincided with the buildup and first disastrous years of the second World War, the other with the sullen McCarthy period in the

United States; there was little joy in either, for most people. But for science fiction they were yeasty times. . . .

As far as I am concerned, the first golden age began around 1937. Probably the dating is personal to me; it happens that 1937 was when I first made a professional appearance, with a poem in *Amazing Stories*. But that's close enough, and all the dates are a little fuzzy. (Even that date, because as it happens I wrote the poem in 1935, and it was accepted in 1936, and published in 1937 —and paid for in 1938, because that was how things went in those days.) It was around that time, at any rate, that John Campbell took over *Astounding Stories* from F. Orlin Tremaine; the Thrilling Group's editorial collective of Leo Margulies, Mort Weisinger, and others had replaced father figure Hugo Gernsback himself on *Wonder Stories;* Raymond A. Palmer was about to acquire *Amazing Stories* from white-bearded T. O'Conor Sloane, Ph.D. And then or in the next couple of years, writers like Theodore Sturgeon, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, and a dozen others, better known or less, were about to make their debuts.

It wasn't only in the titles and the covers of the magazines that science fiction was a different breed of cat then. The craftsmanship was poorer. Thematically, it was limited. Large areas of discussion common in today's science fiction simply did not then exist: race, for one. If a black man appeared in a 1937 sf story he was likely to be either a villain or a shambling Stepin Fetchit figure of low comedy —or if neither of those, he was certain to come from Mars. Sex was a dirty word. It existed on the covers, but inside the magazines it was important mostly for its consequences: usually a state of mind which caused the principal boy to invent space travel so that he could win the principal girl. What he did with her after he won her was not described.

These were areas of science fiction which were not explored because they were off limits. There were other areas, and more important ones, which writers did not investigate because they didn't know they were there. In sf as in any other creative effort, today's practitioners stand on the shoulders of their predecessors. None of the kinds of sf that we write today fell as a gift from heaven. Each was given to us by some single writer somewhere in the world who woke up one morning and proceeded to invent a new kind of sf story, and some of them were just doing

the inventing at that time. Their insights and innovations provided capital on which all of us have since drawn.

For instance, there was A. E. Van Vogt, a young Canadian who had been reading science fiction for some time and, at the age of twenty-seven, decided he could do as well as the published writers. He was right. His first stories included "Black Destroyer" and "Discord in Scarlet," and with them he was an immediate success. The impact of "Discord in Scarlet" was perhaps helped along by the otherwise irrelevant fact that at the time the advertising department of *Astounding* was playing with two-color printing on a few pages, as a ploy to lure in advertisers, and so some of the pictures for "Scarlet" were scarlet—we will see again how front-office decisions have had large effects on science fiction—but they would have been hits anyway. Van Vogt had enlarged the canvas for everyone with his alien protagonists. Other writers had invented aliens—Wells made them real in *The War of the Worlds,* Weinbaum made them personalities in *A Martian Odyssey*—but Van Vogt's aliens carried the whole story; we saw events through their eyes and discovered that to them Earthmen were aliens.

Then there was that former bulldozer artist, hotel clerk, and would-be trapeze artist (he gave it up after six years' training, figuring that if he hadn't caught on by then he must be in the wrong line of work), Theodore Sturgeon. He started slow with a smart-alecky little joke piece called "Ether Breather," but before long he found a line of country all his own, with stories like "Killdozer" and "Microcosmic God" and dozens more. Sturgeon once said that all of his stories were about a single subject and that subject was love. What most writers have to say about their own work is interesting only to psychologists, but there is truth to this statement; he did indeed bring into science fiction a sort of tenderness and compassion which was very much his own—but which, too, has become a part of the repertoire for a hundred writers since.

Then there were L. Sprague de Camp and Robert A. Heinlein. I link them together because in their early work at least they were rather alike, and quite different from anybody else. Their heroes were not aliens or supermen. They were not even heroes. They were the kind of fellow who pumped your gas at any crossroads filling station. What was special about De Camp and Heinlein was the engineering exactitude with which they fleshed out their imaginings. Their cities were complete with toilets and

tax collectors; they were not stage sets but habitats, and though they might be filled with thousand-year-hence machines, one felt they were real and could be built and made to work. Heinlein and De Camp taught the rest of us to imagine in detail, warts and all.

One could go on forever cataloguing writers from this time. It is hard to omit the likes of L. Ron Hubbard, that dominating picaresque creature who learned how to make his fantasies come true with Dianetics and Scientology, or a dozen writers hardly remembered now, but new and innovative then, like Ross Rocklynne and Malcolm Jameson. But the most interesting thing about these writers is not only what they are in themselves, but the organizing fact about them all. What gave them a home in science fiction was a single editor, with a single magazine. The magazine was *Astounding Stories* (now rechristened *Analog* as part of the general process of dignifying what we do), and the editor was, right up until his death the other day, John W. Campbell.

That particular golden age is usually called the Golden Age of Campbell's *Astounding,* and it was all that. There were other writers, good ones. There were other magazines, with merits of their own. But Campbell was the one who picked up everything and put it down again in a different and better form. As one who has labored long in that same vineyard, I cannot conceal my admiration for his feat. In a period of no more than a few years he single-handedly wrote off a whole generation of science-fiction writers and bred a new one to his own new standards.

That statement is so true that it is partly true even where it is false. There were writers—Clifford D. Simak, Jack Williamson, Murray Leinster—who were ornaments to Campbell's Golden Age, and who had been ornaments to other magazines while Campbell was still an undergraduate at M.I.T. What he did with them was almost more remarkable. He made them new writers. From purveyors of space opera and gimmick adventure, Campbell retooled them into writers who competed on equal terms with the best of his new breed.

How did he do it? I'm not sure I know. Perhaps Campbell never knew himself; perhaps no one can tell how much was due to his own wit and wisdom, and how much to the power of an idea whose time has come. Certainly the '30s and '40s were years of technological ferment. The fission of the uranium atom was discovered in 1938, and Campbell recognized its importance and had his

writers using it in stories in a matter of months. It was a time of marvels. It seemed that every day there was a faster plane, or a bigger ocean liner, or a taller building. It was a time for looking ahead, and one of Campbell's great innovations was the systematic process of describing possible futures that the think tanks have called morphological mapping.

Of course, after a while other people began to see what he had done. Some of his writers were won away from him by the blandishments of other editors. New writers came along, and new things happened in science fiction, to which John Campbell and *Astounding* contributed only a minor part. But those few years of growth and change are a landmark forever, and they are all John Campbell's.

It was a golden age for me, too, although I really had no role in those Campbell years of *Astounding*. I did manage to appear once or twice, in pseudonymous or collaborative stories of no great importance, and I even managed to be one of the competitors wooing his discoveries away from him when, at the age of nineteen, I became editor of two sf magazines of my own, *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories*.

But I came at science fiction in a different way. I was a writer and editor pretty early, but long before that I was a fan.

That was the other revolution that took place in science fiction around the beginning of our golden age: The development of fandom, as an auxiliary force and seedbed for science-fiction writers.

The beginnings of fandom are lost in antiquity; it may be as far back as 1930 when the first trufans appeared: here and there around the world, mostly in the big cities of the United States, addict met addict and started a club. They weren't big, and they didn't last, but around 1932 *Wonder Stories* tried to hype its circulation by starting a big mail-order club called the Science Fiction League. It did nothing for *Wonder Stories*, but it was the making of fandom. While *Wonder* was slipping steadily down the drain, the SFL was signing up members, chartering local clubs, bringing fanpower into contact with itself. Chapter Number One was in Brooklyn, and by mid-1933 it was having monthly meetings at which fifteen or twenty of us teen-agers (plus an occasional old man of twenty or twenty-five) solemnly debated whether A. Hyatt Verrill or John Taine was the best writer in science fiction and

bragged about our collections. Live chapters sprang up in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia (the latter two are still in existence, though they've changed names and membership lists over the years). A few split off from the SFL, and new clubs were born.

Along about 1937 (remember that landmark date!) a group of us formed a club of our own called the Futurian Society of New York. The founders and general big men were Don Wollheim, Robert W. Lowndes (editor of various science-fiction and fantasy magazines over the years) and myself; the troops included people like my late collaborator C. M. Kornbluth, Richard Wilson, and Isaac Asimov; and a little later on, Damon Knight, Judith Merril, Hannes Bok, and others joined up. We were all pretty young. Don Wollheim was probably our senior citizen, for he had been old enough to vote in 1936, and he was senior in an even more important respect: he had actually sold a story or two to *Wonder Stories*.

That proved it could be done, and so the rest of us started out to win our share of the gold and glory.

We worked hard. Probably we worked hard, because it didn't really seem like work to write science-fiction stories. (In all truth, it hardly seems like work now. In my downest moments I find to say for our world at least that it has managed to pay me a lifelong living for doing things I would have been perfectly happy to do for nothing.) Not all of our work was aimed at the paying markets, for all of us had our own little fan magazines—mimeographed or hectographed, published in editions of a dozen or a hundred copies—for which we wrote invariably rotten amateur stories and sometimes quite good scathing attacks on everybody else. But our sights were aimed higher, and by and by most of us began to sell to the newsstand magazines. Not easily. Not often. But all the same, somehow, we began to break in. Asimov got the new editor of *Amazing* to buy a story called "Marooned Off Vesta," which for some reason he does not usually include in his book collections these days. Wollheim and John B. Michel together managed to get a story into *Astounding*. Bob Lowndes sold a poem to *Unknown*. In permutations and combinations beyond counting we collaborated: Wollheim with Michel, Kornbluth with myself, Lowndes with somebody, Dirk Wylie with Dick Wilson . . . sometimes three of us would join forces on a single story, sometimes even more. The all-time record may have been six Futurians col-

laborating on a single 2500-word story, which sold somewhere for a fraction of a cent a word, bringing each of them a dollar and change for their efforts. After a while, in 1939, I somehow got it into my head that I could edit a science-fiction magazine.

I had no particular reason for believing this, but it didn't look particularly hard. So I went to see an editor named Robert O. Erisman, whom I had come to know in the course of having a dozen or two stories rejected by him, and explained to him that as it seemed too difficult to make a living out of writing stories I would be delighted to become his assistant, please. He was marvelously kind. He didn't throw me out of his office. He didn't give me a job, either, but he suggested that I go to see another editor who was in charge of a large chain of pulps that did not include an sf magazine and see if I could talk him into giving me a shot at it. And so I went to see Rogers Terrill at Popular Publications, and Rog surprised all of us by giving me a desk and a budget and a printing schedule and orders to create a couple of sf magazines.

The budget was tiny, to be sure. My salary was even tinier. But there I was, buying stories and hiring artists and having a hell of a time. It was so much fun that the rest of the Futurian Society wanted to play that game too, and so Bob Lowndes persuaded a publisher named Louis Silberkleit to put him in charge of a magazine called *Future,* and Don Wollheim convinced a father-and-son team named Albert that what they needed was an sf magazine called *Cosmic Stories* with him as editor (they went along, but only up to a point: the sticking point was that they refused to pay for the stories, so Don had the problem of getting his writers to donate their stories). And all of a sudden, we Futurians were no longer on the outside looking in, we were the inside. We were being allowed to act out our fantasies in the real world. The inmates had taken charge of the institution.

Camelot never lasts; a war came along and blew us all away. Some of us went into the service. Others stayed out, but the magazines died in the wartime paper shortages. And that interlude passed into history.

But a few years later, a little older and hopefully a shade wiser, we were all back for more.

The war ended in 1945. Three or four years later the publishing industry had got back to its normal state of rosy optimism shaded by bankruptcies, and science fiction

began to move again. Honorable hard-cover houses (Random House was the biggest) brought out sf collections from the magazines; four or five fans around the country took their savings out of the bank and set up as semi-pro book publishers specializing in sf and fantasy, and there was talk of new magazines.

In the years just around 1950 occurred another of those editorial revolutions like John Campbell's; the difference was that this new golden age appeared on two fronts at once.

We mentioned earlier that business-office decisions have had major effects on the history of science fiction. Two of the quirkier ones occurred here. The publishers of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* decided that for corporate strength it ought to add a couple of titles. And an Italian publisher of gamy comics was making so much money that he decided to break into the American publishing world.

What the *Ellery Queen* people did was talk to their contributor Anthony Boucher, then mostly known as a mystery writer with a few sf stories and fantasies to his credit. Tony proposed what they called *The Magazine of Fantasy* (the title later broadened to include *and Science Fiction*, or *F&SF* for short). They thought it worth trying out. Tentatively. They brought it out as a one-shot, and were pleased enough with the sales to try it again as a quarterly, as a bi-monthly, and ultimately as a monthly.

What the Italian publisher did was to open a New York office and then go looking for magazines to publish. I will not list the magazines because it is too painful; but somehow someone put "science fiction" on the list, and their editor, Vera Cerutti, was appointed to make it happen. Vera didn't know that much about sf, but she knew that she didn't, and more than that she knew somehow who did. His name was Horace Gold.

The Golden Age of Gold sounds like either a misfired attempted joke or a Shostakovich ballet, but it was very real. Around 1950, Horace Gold was a prematurely bald man in his mid-thirties, somewhat the worse for a World War II disability but well able to cope with the world. Where the coping was difficult it was the world that had to change, not Horace. He had written God's own quantity of material of all kinds, and among the comic scenarios and the radio scripts and the true detectives there were a few sf stories—not bad, but not great—and a couple of outstanding fantasies: "Trouble with Water," and above all

a fine tingly novel called *None but Lucifer* (which, for reasons which cannot possibly be any good, has never appeared in book form, to everyone's loss).

All this was commendable, but was there anything in that record which qualified Horace Gold to make sf over in a new and better form? If so, it is hard to identify the diagnostic symptom; yet that's what he did. He wasn't scientifically trained. His own writing was best where it had least to do with science fiction. But he had two traits that served him well. For one, he had a mind that retained everything; for another, he had persistence that moved mountains. Horace Gold's chosen weapon was the telephone. There are few writers active in sf in the decade of the '50s who do not remember the phone ringing at any hour, at all hours, and Horace's voice picking up a month-old conversation about writing a story or revising one without missing a beat.

His new magazine was called *Galaxy*. It began with a burst of bombastic promises about a new kind of science fiction. The funny thing was that it made them good. In its first years it published any number of wise and witty and wonderful stories—by Alfred Bester, Fritz Leiber, William Tenn, Robert Sheckley, Robert A. Heinlein (wooed away from *Astounding*), Clifford D. Simak (coaxed out of semi-retirement), and countless others. Very few of those writers set out to write for *Galaxy*. Even fewer intended to write the stories they ultimately published. Mountie-like, Horace Gold tracked them down wherever they hid and made them stand and deliver. I mean no denigration of him when I say that he himself suggested relatively few stories to his writers. (There are exceptions, including one of the most successful of my own.) But Horace's talent was not tutorial. It was obstetrical. When he came at you with those forceps, the story got born. Nearly every one of those early stories has appeared in the best sf anthologies, some of them a dozen times and more; a publisher offered a not-so-small fortune, not long ago, for the privilege of reprinting all those issues verbatim; and that's what Horace Gold did, all by himself.

And uptown at the offices of *The Magazine of Fantasy*, Tony Boucher and his sidekick, J. Francis McComas, were doing something rather similar with a quite different list of writers. Their notion was that it was possible to merge the two previously disparate streams of science fiction: the literary-humanist tradition (the novels of Wells, Olaf

Stapledon, S. Fowler Wright, and others) and the gimmicky, high-flying, innovative, adventurous sf of the pulps. They made it happen. They broadened the universe of discourse for sf writers to include everything there is. Nothing was off limits. No concept could not be explored.

If this seems like a small thing, consider what the world was like in those days of the early '50's. It was the Joe McCarthy era in the United States. Dissent was penalized. Careers were being blasted. In those years, when senators and presidents headed for the storm cellar, when journalists and statesmen guarded their tongues, science fiction was the home of free speech—almost the only public forum there was, for some people, in some ways. One still meets graying ministers and scientists who remember those 1950s issues of *Galaxy* and *F&SF* with eternal gratitude, for letting them think about the unthinkable when it was costly to speak out loud.

But that Camelot ended, too, with a whimper. All golden ages come to an end. Pericles met the Peloponnesian War; the Caesars lost out to Alaric and the barbarians. What defeated that golden age of science fiction was a stock manipulation.

It was one of those front-office things we have seen before, but on a heroic and catastrophic scale. Magazine publishers do not deliver their publications to your local newsstand themselves. They employ intricate chains of distributors and wholesalers to do the job. Until the mid-1950s there were two major channels for national distribution: the collective resources of a dozen independents and their wholesalers on the one hand, and on the other the massive, ancient American News Company with its countless subsidiaries.

In the mid-1950s a stock investor looked upon the American News balance sheet and found it good. Over the decades it had acquired vast equities in restaurants and warehouses and real estate, and all of those assets had been bought when the world was young and prices were low. You could buy up the stock, he mused, and sell off all the assets, and close up the company, and come out with a ruddy fortune. And so he did. ANC was liquidated, and dealt the magazine business in general a blow from which it has never recovered—as anyone can see who has tried to buy a copy of *Look* or *Collier's* lately.

So science-fiction magazines were done in, most of them.

There were thirty-seven titles at the peak of the boom in the 1950s; at last count, there were perhaps half a dozen struggling to stay alive. There's still plenty of science fiction—in books. But the magazines are only a shadow. . . .

It *could* be different. A new publisher to take a chance. Another Campbell, or a latter-day Gold. Some bright new ideas, and some bright new writers to make them real. . . . But that's another story, and a different Golden Age!

Goodbye, Henry J. Kostkos, Goodbye

by

Damon Knight

A confession: all through my thirties I clung to the idea that someday I would write a critical history of science fiction. I still have the notes I made for it. Here is one sample: "Magazine sf has continuity, the factor which makes it more vital & more important than book sf, though the latter has generally been of higher literary quality." There were to have been some general remarks of this kind here and there, but mainly the project would have involved my rereading and evaluating all the stories in the back issues of the magazines from 1926 on, a crushing but congenial task: I saw myself sitting in an easy chair night after night, with an open magazine in my lap, a drink in one hand, pen in the other. I have no doubt that at one time I could have found a publisher for such a book, but when I got around seriously to think of doing something about it, I realized the audience that would have appreciated it was gone. My investment in the stories of Henry J. Kostkos and J. Harvey Haggard had melted away like fairy gold. The lineal succession of stories in the magazines, on which we depended as if it were the law of primogeniture, had ceased to operate; the tradition had pinched out while we weren't looking. Nobody reads the stories of the '20s and '30s anymore, because with the rarest of exceptions they have not survived into the anthologies. It took me a little longer to find out why: the wonderful old stories that I remembered with such affection were junk. I know that some critics, P. Schuyler Miller among them, still believe there is a conspiracy to exclude these stories, but the fact is that

the early sf magazine writers were terrible, awful, rotten writers; and we did not know it, because we were all in our teens and we were hooked on the marvelous things they wrote *about*.

In those days science-fiction readers were so few and so isolated that in defense of our own egos we had to invent a mystique of superiority. Some of us carried our adolescent visions of chrome-helmeted supermen into adulthood, and compensated for our unconfessed feelings of inferiority by "the long view"—the vision of mankind's ultimate conquest of the universe, spurred on and perhaps even inspired (who knows?) by Science Fiction Fans! We warped science fiction by our limitless appetite for re-assurance, and in a perfect example of circular reasoning, one of us who has kept the faith is able to write, "When all the many highly inventive minds of science-fiction writers find themselves falling again and again into similar patterns, we must perforce say that this does seem to be what all our mental computers state as the shape of the future."

The quotation is from page 42 of *The Universe Makers*, by Donald A. Wollheim (Harper & Row, 1971). Don Wollheim was one of the earliest organizers of fandom, founder of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association and of the Futurian Society, editor of the first important sf anthology (*The Pocket Book of Science Fiction*), and for many years editor-in-chief of Ace Books, the publisher which in 1965 pirated the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.[1] I take his book for my text not because it is well written, or factually reliable, but because it sums up concisely and even with a sort of stammering eloquence the faith of an old-guard sf fan.

Wollheim speaks for a dwindling majority of fans when he tells us that Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series created "the point of departure for the full cosmogony[2] of science-fiction future history." All sf stories laid in the future, Wollheim intimates, can be fitted into this scheme, viz.:

"First, we have the initial voyages to the moon and to the planets of our Solar System. In this sequence we also

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[1]Wollheim alludes to this episode in a typically struthious way: "Those who felt that Tolkien had somehow been injured by the publishing competition rallied to his name with the ardor one would only expect from religious fanatics." (*The Universe Makers*, p. 109.)

[2]He means "cosmology."

include stories of the contact of man with intelligent species elsewhere in this system . . . space pirates, asteroid mining . . .

"Second, the first flights to the stars. . . . Commerce—exploitation or otherwise.

"Third, the Rise of the Galactic Empire. . . . Implacable aliens in the cosmos who must be fought. . . .

"Fourth, the Galactic Empire in full bloom, regardless of what form it takes. . . . The exploration of the rest of the galaxy by official exploration ships, or adventurers, or commercial pioneers.

"Fifth, the Decline and Fall of the Galactic Empire. . . .

"Sixth, the Interregnum. Worlds reverting to prespace-flight conditions, savagery, barbarism, primitive forms of life, superstition. . . .

"Seventh, the Rise of a Permanent Galactic Civilization. . . . The exploration of other galaxies and of the entire universe.

"Eighth, the Challenge to God. . . . The effort to match Creation and to solve the last secrets of the universe. . . ." (*Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.)

For Wollheim and his generation of sf readers, it is humanity's manifest destiny to colonize first the solar system, then the galaxy, and finally the universe. In Chapter 26 ("Cosmotropism"), Wollheim makes the familiar comparison of mankind on the verge of spaceflight and a mold culture in a petri dish:

"Let us watch what happens next. . . . The several spots grow. They begin to touch each other's borders. There is a brief period of stasis, then they grow around and into each other. In time the petri dish is one solid surface of mold life and no untouched part of the nutriment can be seen. The mold flourishes. It grows dense. It grows tall. It then flowers—it begins to form spore balls.

"Assume that the lid of the dish is taken off. The spore balls reach maturity—they burst and send out into the atmosphere millions and millions of new spore seeds to float away. After this flowering the mold forest begins to diminish. The nutriment of the dish is being exhausted. Some of the mold begins to dry up, to die away. . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 112.)

Apparently beginning to realize how apt this comparison is, Wollheim adds hastily that we are really not like a mold culture at all, since we are able to think, etc. But what is the basis for this almost universal belief that it is good for us to explore, colonize, and annex new lands? (I call

it "almost universal," because there are some few non-believers—the American Indians, for example, the black people of Africa, etc.) Wouldn't it perhaps be better to stay on this planet, clean it up a little, and reduce our numbers to some reasonable figure, so that we don't have "to dry up, to die away"?

Wollheim, who is a compassionate man, is able to see that we have despoiled our growing lands, poisoned our streams and even our oceans, polluted our air and made our cities all but uninhabitable; but he can't see that the same goofy idealism that made us welcome the atomic bomb (because it would lead to the world state and Utopia), urbanization, the federal highway program, and so on (Progress) will lead us to still greater triumphs of stupidity and greed if, God forbid, the program of interstellar conquest he cherishes should ever be carried out.

What the new science-fiction writers are telling us is precisely that a culture can't keep on growing geometrically forever; that Bigger isn't necessarily and always Better; that the quality of life is more important now than the quantity, and that we are faced with a whole congeries of unanswered and mostly unasked questions about ourselves: who are we? where have we come from? where are we going? what is a man? and how should he live? If we are to survive as a culture, which at this hour is not certain, these are the problems we are going to have to solve, and they are as exciting now as the problems of space travel were fifty years ago—because they are almost entirely unknown; we've got to solve them from scratch.

Science fiction has been changing for the last ten years, not through gradual evolution but in a catastrophic convulsion that has turned father against son and brother against brother. The old-guard writers are interested only in plot and background, and consider it irrelevant to ask whether a science-fiction story is well or badly written (and it is no accident that the authors of the most reactionary criticism in science fiction are also responsible for its most abominable prose). But the schism goes much deeper than this. The claim is often made (Wollheim makes it repeatedly) that the old sf is *morally* superior to the new; and in fact the old science fiction is highly moralistic. In a typical space opera, you know that a man is good if he is over six feet tall, with gray or blue eyes, blond or brown hair (black hair and eyes, like the black hat in a western, are a sign of villainy); if he is

respectful toward women, used to wearing riding boots or puttees, and able to kill with either hand in defense of his mate. In his early and pure form, this hero is invariably of British stock. Later writers have rather self-consciously made him French,[3] Jewish (from Israel, however, the home of the Nordic Jews), or even American Indian (from one of the Plains tribes, the Anglo-Saxon Indians)—but where is the space hero who is an Indian from India, or a black African, or a Malay or a Chinese, or—all right, let's not ask too much—where is the hero who is Italian? And if there were one, what would you want to bet that he would be a *North* Italian?

For contrast, the good man in "A Special Kind of Morning," by Gardner R. Dozois, is a conscript in a future army who must decide whether to obey orders and kill a helpless "null"—a human zygote grown and adapted for use as a component in a man-machine computer. In Vonda N. McIntyre's "Spectra," the good person—a woman, I think, although the author does not make that clear—is seen as the victim: another plug-in person, blinded, her optic nerves adapted for industrial purposes, whose masters are not cruel but simply indifferent.

This idea, by the way, is not brand-new. Pohl and Kornbluth used it in their 1959 novel *Wolfbane*, and I suppose you could say there is a remote echo of it in the "Durna Rangue" stories of Neil R. Jones, published in the '30s, in which human slaves were surgically altered, e.g. by decapitating them and replacing their heads with those of hypertrophied ants. But every such comparison only emphasizes the difference between the old stories and the new. Here are a few more examples which the interested reader may consult for himself:

New	*Old*
"They Cope," by Dave Skal	"The New Accelerator," by H. G. Wells
"Shark," by Edward Bryant	"Desertion," by Clifford D. Simak
"The Fifth Head of Cerberus," by Gene Wolfe	*The World of Ā*, by A. E. Van Vogt

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[3]This is one degree more latitude than E. E. Smith permitted himself in his *Skylark* series—his *villain* was French: "Blacky" (please note) DuQuesne.

The Left Hand of Darkness, by Ursula K. Le Guin

"Continued on Next Rock," by R. A. Lafferty

"The Bright Illusion," by C. L. Moore

She, by H. Rider Haggard

These comparisons are absurd. I'm trying to demonstrate that although many of the old ideas of science fiction turn up in new guises, that's not what is important. The significant difference is always one of attitude. The sf of the late '20s was full of wonderful gadgets, because it seemed then that technology might save us, and any hope was better than none. Today we have seen what the unrestrained technological exploitation of our planet can do to us, and we realize more and more as each day passes that our only hope lies in ourselves. Science fiction is turning inward (and there *are* new ideas here—see Kate Wilhelm's "The Encounter"), not in despair, as the old guard would have it, but because that's where the action is. Since, after all, science fiction is a branch of literature and not a magical device for influencing history, what matters most is that the realists are writing very good stories and the idealists are not. But the reason is that the new writers have learned something, and the old guard nothing, from the events of the last forty years.

It can happen that while you're watching an event in the future, time catches up to it and you're looking into the past. The future of the old-guard fans has not merely arrived; it's over, we've had it! There are other futures coming, and that's what keeps us interested in living: no matter how many clouds of pollution we see on the horizon, at least every day is new.

Here, There, and Everywhere

by

F. M. Busby

F. M. Busby is a retired communications engineer who spent seventeen years engineering the entire telecommunications system for the state of Alaska. Back in Seattle to warm up, he was a student at Vonda McIntyre's sf workshop and delivered himself of the following story. He describes its genesis in these terms:

"I never know what my stories really mean until I read them after they've had time to cool off and find out what my subconscious was up to. Harlan Ellison insisted on a story a day and then griped at being handed all that first-draft crap. I'm not knocking his system; it makes you work, and that's what it's all about."

Abris of the Hill People was soon to produce our child. As agreed at the meeting of clans she had come to live with me during this period, one of the women who came to our lowlands. At the same time my sister Fearl and others of our own women went to the hills. It is a pleasant arrangement.

Abris was a fine mate. Her voice was sweet both in speech and song; the iridescence of her skin, augmented in the child-carrying changes, was delightful. I believe that even the Terran, my friend Tom Leone, could tell that Abris was exceptional in beauty of person and activities.

Certainly he always rendered her every courtesy as he understood these matters.

Leone the Terran no longer appeared monstrous to me; I knew that within the dwarfed head atop his outsized body were a mind and spirit like my own. He labored for half a year to learn to use our language with skill. Although I despair that any Terran will ever fully grasp the Wholeness, with Leone it was not for want of effort. So we came to be friends. Even the filaments of dead cells that grew here and there on his head and body no longer repelled me, nor the drab color of his skin, leathered at face and hands by our wind-driven dusts.

But on the day we first met, the day I saved his life, I thought him a monster indeed.

To say I saved the Terran's life sounds as though I had done something exceptional; it was not so. I merely repelled, by our method of projecting a deterrent feeling, one of the mindless Leapers. Although no one could stand against that voracious flesh-eater or evade its swift charge, the Terran could normally have killed it with the weapon he carried.

But Leone the Terran had fallen from a height and was unconscious. Had I come to that place only a short time later, the Leaper would have eaten him. I would have found only bones scattered around the fed, torpid creature, which I would then have killed, accepting the temporary breach of Wholeness that killing brings. But I was in time, and repelled the beast instinctively. Only then did I look to its intended victim.

I had not seen a Terran before, though quite a number of them are present at the settlements across the Roaring Straits.

So I did not know what to do to help. I spread a cloth to shield him from sun and wind and dust, and sat waiting. After a time he came awake.

We could not speak, of course, but knowing each other as Terran and Gelban respectively, and so not hostile, we could gesture and try to begin the exchange of words. He could walk without aid; I took him to my home, of which I have some pride. It is my own design, all roof and dust screens with no opaque walls except of course for the central chamber. It was not a time for me to have a mate in residence, so I put that chamber at the disposal of Leone the Terran.

Over a considerable number of days we learned to speak with each other. Others who lived at civil distances from

me occasionally came to see and hear Leone also. Perhaps the most surprising thing to learn was that his activities were not entirely of his free choice. It was equally a surprise to Tom Leone, I think, to find that no Gelban does another's bidding. We of course do what must be done, I told him, but freely.

"You really don't know then, Fairn," he said to me, "what it is to agree to work for someone, to do a job and get paid for it?" I didn't, and furthermore I am not sure I understand the concept even yet.

"Well, Fairn, just take it that I hunt funny-looking rocks up in the mesas because when I find the right kind, somebody across the Straits will take them and give me something I want in exchange." We spoke no more of it. He showed me some of the rocks; they were of the kind that show patterns of creatures long dead, some ancestral to those presently living.

I was equally at a loss in trying to show Leone the Wholeness, the way of seeing all that is. It is such an obvious thing, almost instinctive with us, that at first I felt he had to be pretending not to understand. But finally I recognized that Terrans have not evolved the basic concept, and suggested that Leone resort to inner-withdrawal to discover it for himself.

"Meditation, I guess you mean," he said. "I've tried it, one way and another. I always seem to end up biting the back of my own neck." Since it is as impossible for a Terran to do such a thing as for a Gelban, I knew that Leone was indulging in the Terran habit of saying that which he does not mean, for some strange form of personal enjoyment that is of no injury to the listener. It seemed a sign to cease discussion of the Wholeness for that time; we talked of other things.

Leone had a mate on Terra, a permanent mate, though that concept is difficult to accept. She was called Margaret. He showed me a representation of her and asked me, did I not think her beautiful? To him she had beauty, so I spoke as though I saw it also.

He was to be separated from her for five Terran years, a period nearly equivalent to three Gelban. He wanted to be with her, and at all times, though he did not know or could not tell me if it were the time for him to produce a child.

Soon of course it became that time for me, so that Leone could no longer reside in the central chamber of my home. I and a few friends arranged to help him build

a home for his own residence, not uncivilly close to mine but near enough for convenient interchange of meeting.

I felt that Leone was shocked when my mate of that time, Inarre, began to show the child, growing in the translucent pod outside the lower front of her body trunk.

"Your children grow *outside* the body before being born? Before being separated from the mother?"

"We have so evolved, yes. Yours grow inside the body, I assume," I said. "The comparative size of Gelban head and body would make that impossible for us, you must see."

"I see it," he said. "I just don't believe it." Another instance of saying the unmeant, accompanied as usual by a lip-grimace.

Leone was also startled when Inarre's nourishment gland began to appear and enlarge from its matrix at the center of her chest. But he did not say a great deal about it; he merely drew a picture of the Terran equivalent function which is once-redundant and explained that these glands are present in Terran females at all times, even when not needed. I had deduced or surmised as much from the fact that Leone himself was burdened by external sex organs at a time when he could have no possible use for them. And I am sure that he was puzzled because I and other Gelbans have no such handicap. But he did not ask, so I did not tell him. Imposing unwanted information on others is not truly civil.

So time went on, and although Leone never grasped the Wholeness as we know it, his speech and actions were as those of one who is Whole. Perhaps Terrans interact with All That Is in a fashion that does not involve conscious speech levels. It may not be necessary for them to see the Wholeness as directly as we do, to be a true part of it.

In a manner without doubt, Leone the Terran became truly my friend. You may not understand without having experienced such a thing yourself.

And so for a time Tom Leone lived at my home when I was alone, and away in his own when it was the time for me to have a mate to reside here. It was a good time. I did not like to think of his absence, which must happen so that he could return to Terra and to—strange concept—his permanent mate.

There is a Terran thought that I do not fully understand but I think it must bear on what occurred. It is called irony; I believe it means that which is irrelevant while still causing effects.

It was when Abris of the Hills was near to shedding our child and its protections. A woman preparing to shed child must have all her energies reserved for that purpose, just as must a man or woman contemplating the Wholeness. And on that day I was in full contemplation atop the little hill at the side of my home, preparing to help Abris project the Wholeness to our child as soon as it was free, so that its life would be Whole in our Gelban fashion. As I contemplated, I watched Abris sitting on the mat she had unrolled in the open space before my home.

Either I had been careless or the Leaper had been shell-encased and undetectable, which is a rare thing at that time of the year but not unknown. It appeared suddenly from behind a tumble of boulders, directly in line with Abris from where I sat and over twice as far from her. Yet I knew it could reach her before I could; they are swift, swift, when they wish to be. But for the moment it moved slowly.

I strove to wrench myself out of contemplation, heedless of mind-risk and the danger to Wholeness, hoping to free enough energies to project and repel the Leaper. But I had trained myself too well; my mind would not leave contemplation except in the slow whole way it had always known. Nor could I move, save slowly and clumsily; contemplation is an act of mind and body as well as spirit.

I saw Abris look up to the Leaper, and knew she could act with mind or body no more than I. Divert her energies at child-shedding time? Impossible. She looked to me; I could not hear her saying but I knew and whispered it back to her own knowing mind. Then she bowed her head, placed both hands on the child's protective cover, and began to sway gently back and forth, consigning herself and our child to the Wholeness as she waited for the death. I followed her movements with my own; nothing more could I do.

Then Leone the Terran appeared, coming by the low path beside the water, carrying a spray of colorful leaves and blooms of the kinds most enjoyed by Abris. I ceased my swaying and flailed my arms to draw his attention, then pointed to the Leaper. For a moment I thought all was to be well, but when Leone reached for his weapon it was not there; he had lost the habit of carrying it in the usual peace and safety of our homes.

Terrans cannot project from mind, and so I did not know what he might think to do. He dropped the spray of color and ran to Abris, faster than any Gelban but not

so fast as a Leaper. The Leaper still came on slowly, darting its great toothed head from side to side as if puzzling about the two of us who did not move and the one who did.

Leone took one of Abris' hands in both of his. For a time he did not say or move. He shouted something to me but I could not hear it clearly and spread my arms wide to show the lack. He nodded and spoke to Abris, then turned to face the Leaper.

Directly toward the Leaper he ran. It had begun its charge but now paused. Just short of it, the Terran paused also. He clenched and raised both hands, and shouted something upward. Not to me, not to Abris, not even to the Leaper, but to the sky. Again, I could not hear his words. Then Tom Leone and the Leaper ran toward each other. And met.

He had told me of a thing Terrans do which is called combat, but I had not imagined how it could be. Now I saw it. The Leaper was half again as big as the Terran, but Leone went to it as though he were the Leaper and it the victim. He jumped and drove both his feet hard against its head. He caught one of its forelimbs and broke it away. At every move he gave a great wordless shout. He clambered astride its upper body and twisted its neck from behind, but that great neck was too strong. He tried to pull its jaws apart, but again the Leaper's vicious strength prevailed; he lost fingers and fell to the ground. The next instant, the Leaper's jaws closed on his head. Then, though my eyes still looked, my mind refused to see. Until I came slowly out of contemplation and could move again. I walked down the hill.

Abris was in need, so I could only look quickly at the bones and at the still form of the fed Leaper. I could not kill it now and break the Wholeness needed for Abris and our child, but it would not move for hours; there would be time enough.

I went to Abris and stroked her gently; the time was near and we must be at peace. "Tell me quickly," I said. "You must finish with it."

"His hands that held this one of mine were cold. When you could not hear his shout he spoke to me: 'Say to Fairn good parting and that Leone never leaves a balance unrestored.' Then he ungrasped my hand and with no word went to the Leaper."

"Yes. Yes. But when he shouted to the sky. Could you hear his words?"

"I heard: 'Forgive me, Margaret! God knows I love you, but you are there, and they are here!' Then he met the Leaper."

I stroked her, here and there and over the child. "There was a Wholeness to Tom Leone, Abris, that I do not fully understand. Come, we must take the peace he gave us." And soon, in peace with the Whole, Abris and I shed her of our child and infilled it with the Wholeness. After a time, as always, Abris went with our child to the Hills, to her people.

I feel the pain of her going, as with any exceptional mate. But I know I will have other mates: perhaps Abris herself again, or another as nearly whole and fitting.

But never will there be another Terran Tom Leone. And his absence is painful.

I am here and he is not.

The Hanged Man

by

Edward Bryant

What if that quiet voice inside us we so often and brutally still could really talk back, really share our agony and dismay at our own actions? Ed Bryant—who more frequently writes of love—takes a look for us.

He writes: "What goes into a story like this? It starts with a half-remembered poem by Baudelaire and ends with terrible puns about well-hung sf writers. In between are fantasies we all share. Final word: there can be worse metaphors for one's life."

"Cut me down," said Rockaway. "Please." The hanged man's voice was low and pained, a whisper. The tight nylon rope cut into his ankles, and his face swelled purple with blood. "Owen, Owen, for the love of God!"

"Yes," I said, "for the love of God."

Rockaway wasn't so far gone he couldn't enjoy a good allusion. "You always read too much Poe, you heartless literati bastard. What, no death-scene toast of Amontillado?"

"A pale sherry doesn't fit," I said. "Perhaps something rich and sanguine." He didn't answer and I sat in silence. Bored, I reached to gently push his upside-down face. Rockaway tried to bite my fingers. I put my fingertips against his forehead and pushed him away. A moment later his body swung back and I pushed again. It was a

good game. The other end of the rope was tied to a branch about ten feet up the trunk. With every swing of Rockaway's body, the cottonwood limb creaked.

"Stop it," said Rockaway. "I'm getting sick."

"I suppose."

"You suppose what."

"That I'll stop," I said. "I'm getting bored again."

"So try a variation."

I was surprised and delighted at his lack of surliness. Taking his head by both ears, I started Rockaway swinging in a circle. The man laughed. "I warned you," he said, and began to vomit. I jumped back and missed the worst. Still, something wet and smelling of new sausage landed on my sleeve and I had to scrape it off with a dead twig from the cottonwood.

Rockaway retched and his orbit became eccentric. He spat on the ground and moaned. His eyes were squeezed tightly shut. I squatted in the shade and waited while his body slowed and became stationary.

Finally he opened his eyes and looked at me. "You're mad."

"Maybe so," I admitted, "but at least I'm sitting down here in the shade. Up there you swing by your ankles, waiting for the crows to come peck out your eyes."

"There are no crows," said Rockaway patiently. "We ate them all."

"Well then, shrikes," I said. "Butcherbirds."

"Owen, there is a strong streak of morbidity within you."

I ignored him. "Shrikes were my playmates when I was about ten. We lived on a ranch north of Tucson and the birds would fly down from Canada to winter."

"Was this before your sister was killed?" said Rockaway.

"Nasty black and gray birds," I said, "with hooked beaks that always looked ready to snag unwary eyes. One of them nested in a tree close to the barn and I spent a lot of time watching it hunt. You know how a shrike prepares its food?"

Rockaway yawned painfully and blood ran into his thick mustache.

"One day the bird brought in a field mouse," I continued, "still alive. The shrike impaled it on a barb of the top wire of the fence. The mouse hung with the barb piercing a fold of loose skin. It struggled weakly. Its eyes were dark and moist, wide open. The shrike pecked them out, then flew off somewhere.

"I waited and watched the mouse. The mouse tried to

follow me with the raw bleeding places where its eyes had been. The shrike soon returned and began to tear the mouse apart. I watched until there was only a smear of gray fur on the barb and some spilled viscera in the dust below."

"So what's the point?" said Rockaway.

"The shrike is cruel," I said, "but its song is beautiful. Did you know I could sing?"

Rockaway shook his head slowly. "You have a definite tendency to overdramatize."

"Would you like to hear a selection? It will have to be *a cappella.*"

"Owen, don't overplay it."

From where I squatted, Rockaway's eyes were even with mine. For a long time I had envied him his eyes. They were blue and Icelandic, always completely open and candid. I noticed something queer. "Your mustache is drooping the wrong way," I said.

"Blood's making the ends heavy. Soon I'll be dripping Pollock patterns in the dust."

After a while, Rockaway said, "I can hardly hear you. You're drowned out by the sea."

"The sea?"

"The sound of waves undercutting sand castles."

"It's all the blood rushing through your ears," I said. "Did you ever listen to the ocean in a conch shell?"

"I never lived that close to the coast."

"I didn't either," I said, "but once my parents took us to the beach. My sister and me. We crossed the border and followed the Rio de la Concepción to Desemboque on the Gulf. It was just a weekend trip, but I'd never seen that much water before."

"Is that where you got your conch?" said Rockaway.

"Eventually. It was after the second night, when my sister fell off the wharf. It was dark and we were playing while my parents finished their clams and mussels in the restaurant."

"An accident?"

I shrugged. "You play, you're excited, perhaps you push a little too roughly. It happens. Leave analysis for the grown-ups."

"And your conch?"

"The next day. I bought it from a boy on the beach. For years after, I would close the door to my room and put the shell to my ear. Occasionally I'd hear my sister

laughing inside the shell, making her obscene bubbling noises."

"The ocean," said Rockaway, wistfully. "Now look where we are."

"Yes," I said, "look." I gave him a gentle spin so he could rotate completely around. There was little to look at. After a few yards the sparse grass stopped and the ground became chalky. The plain ran away to a sharp horizon and an unblemished blue sky. Creation appeared to hold nothing more.

"I don't think there's an ocean out there," said Rockaway sadly.

"Not even over the horizon," I agreed. "This is a circumscribed world."

Rockaway stopped rotating. Again he faced me. "Who drew the limits?"

I was uncertain. "Whose turn was it to be God?"

"Now we're getting somewhere," he said.

"I would be mad to think myself God."

"Not necessarily," said Rockaway.

"I would be mad to think that *you* were God."

"Possibly."

"The one trait I've always admired so deeply," I said, "is your policy of direct answers."

"You're lazy," said Rockaway. "I think you're a secret obscurantist. Figure out your own answers."

"Then I'm mad. That's simplest." I waited for an argument; none came. "Well, am I not?" The hanged man was silent. "Don't sulk, Rockaway." He said nothing. Blood began to drip from the down-pointing horns of his mustache.

Neither of us said anything for what I estimated to be an hour. I became lonely. "Rockaway—" I began. Something buzzed from behind the tree; a large fly tracing a lazy spiral toward my face. Blue-black and shiny, the insect landed on my wrist and began to rub its front legs together. I cupped my other hand and slowly maneuvered it above and behind the fly. The fly saw the shadow, of course, and was gone when my palm slapped down.

The buzz stopped and I saw the fly had landed on Rockaway's inverted nose. I stealthily raised my hand, but the fly disappeared within the hair of one gaping nostril. I waited patiently but the spelunker did not re-emerge. Rockaway, meanwhile, had not even twitched.

I endured another hour of Rockaway's silence before determining to carry on my half the dialogue alone. "Un-

accustomed as I am to solipsistic speaking . . ." That depressed me so much I retreated to my own silence for a while longer. Then, "Rockaway, Rockaway, am I mad?" over and over. It had balance, almost was a chant.

"Well, dammit, am I? I want a final answer."

In the dust a crimson shadow was gathering.

"Poor Rockaway, simple retreat won't save you. I'll have your answer. When a child did you ever play with a magic pendulum? Remember? Hold over a penciled dot a weight on a string. Concentrate on the question. If the answer is yes, the weight will start moving back and forth in a simple arc. If the answer is no, the weight will move in a circle around the dot. Now you're the magic pendulum, Rockaway. And my madness is the question."

Eventually I became impatient. I could detect no movement, neither arc nor circle. Bored with the waiting, I sang to myself. At first they were tunes I'd heard on the radio. Then I sang the songs of childhood, which my mother had taught me.

"A child with monstrous pumpkin head,
Gray pigtail and mustache light red."

I suspected the passage of days. There was no sun, but the sky darkened periodically.

"What need to say how much we spurn it?
For heaven's sake, drown it or else burn it!"

My mother had a misplaced love for bad translations of good German poets, such as Heine. She also liked Baudelaire.

Did I tell you, I sing beautifully?

I shut my eyes and explored Rockaway's face with my fingertips. What I felt was nothing like the features I imagined when my eyes were open. His skin was taut, distended with fluid. I approached so close, my cheek brushed lightly against the stubble on his chin. My tongue told me his right eye was open.

With infinite gentleness, I let my lips cup his orbital socket. I nipped the membrane between an eyetooth and one of my lowers. Liquid spurted into my mouth. The fluid tasted of salt and was slippery on my tongue. I sucked until no more could be gotten that way; then wished for a spoon.

See him dangle: Rockaway, chilled meat on a hook. You wouldn't want to hang your coat on such a hook; the polished point could tear the fabric. Just as it pierced his flesh. (Can you imagine? The hook enters close below the blade of the shoulder, the pain quickly muted by shock. The kinesthetic impulse from the hook's progress is *pressure* as metal slides between tendon and ligament and along bone. The point exits under the collarbone. The wound is bluish and puckered.) His weight is unevenly supported so it is an uncomfortable way to hang.

"Get me something to stand on," said Rockaway. "Please." His toes lacked perhaps four inches of touching the cement floor.

Irritated, I looked up from my book. "Do you mind? I'm reading Thevenot. Listen: 'There are apple-trees on the sides of the Dead Sea which bear lovely fruit, but within are full of ashes.' "

"You're full of shit."

"Pique," I said mildly. "I've never enjoyed it in you."

"It's pain, not pique. I can feel the muscles tearing loose."

"Well, there's nothing for you to stand on."

"The book."

"I'm reading it."

"Give me a rest."

"No respite," I said. "What's that?"

Rockaway's teeth chattered. "I can't help it," he said. "I'm cold."

"You can burn forty calories an hour, shivering."

"Do I care?" He tried to shrug and his face contorted.

"Probably not. I don't care at all." I didn't look up from the page.

A deliberate sigh. "You never did."

I snapped the book shut. I stood and faced Rockaway, tilting my chin slightly to meet his eyes. "Shut up!"

"What's the matter, Owen? Too thin-skinned for even banality?" The corners of his mouth turned up in a ghastly smile.

I about-faced and stared at the near wall. Cold water beaded there on the stone within arm's reach. I traced my initials in wet whorls. Then I touched fingertips to forehead and felt the coolness briefly penetrate. The tiny enclosed cell was damply chill, but I had a fever. The fire had kindled beyond remembering. Where did the fuel come from, and where did the cinders go?

"I see you in the mirror," said Rockaway.

Without turning, "I'm concrete?"

"In *my* mirror. You look much like your sister."

"So my aunts and uncles said. I could never see it."

"Over your left eye," said Rockaway, "there's a thin scar—"

I'd forgotten that. "When I was ten. She was eight. We were playing on a hillside that led down to the creek. We had a half-gallon lard pail filled with water. My sister swung it by the wire handle in a circle to assure herself the water wouldn't spill. She let go at the apogee and the rim caught me over the eye. The amount of blood was unbelievable. My father drove me to town and the doctor took nine stitches."

"And you never forgot."

I said wearily, "Of course I forgot. We all repress our childhoods. But you pulled a string and I remembered."

"Very quickly you remembered."

I closed my lips tightly.

"Let me stand on the book awhile," said Rockaway. "You're not reading it."

"I am so." I stooped to pick up the volume, opening it at random. "I'm reading a selection by Genet."

"Owen, you don't know how much this hurts—"

I smiled sympathetically.

"—but you will."

I said, "This is a fascinating *pas de deux*, but I'd much rather read."

"I want to talk," said Rockaway. "Let's talk about love."

"A canard."

"Then other profundities?"

"Baseless."

Rockaway said, "How about madness?"

"It always comes back to that, doesn't it?" I leafed randomly, from Genet to Berkeley. "You tease but you never deliver." I was suddenly conscious of the pages' musty odor. The room was so damp; how could I prevent decay?

"You're naïve," said Rockaway. "You look for epiphanies in the text."

"That seems a logical place to search," I said.

"Try the flyleaf."

I glanced up at him. The hanged man bared his teeth ingenuously, then winced. I riffled through the book, briefly glimpsed the dedication, passed the table of contents. Pasted to the flyleaf was a label. The stark black letters: "*Ex Libris*, Owen Rockaway."

"Believe it," he said. And I did, had, and how many times? See him dangle on the hook, linked to a length of rusty chain, transfixed by a bloodshot eyebolt.

From his vantage, he pitied me: "You poor, sane bastard."

Ripe and inviting, the apples of Sodom dangle from a branch. But inside is only ash.

Winter Housecleaning

by

Molly Daniel

Molly Daniel is a remarkably handsome young woman of the New South now in her last year at Tulane. She has an analytical turn of mind, able to get at the heart of a matter with economy, as she does in this little examination of the fatal fear of age.

The story, she writes, "is the result of Harlan's assignment on empathy, and I meant for this woman to win. Now I'm not sure. When I'm old, and no longer worried about getting fat, I'm going to eat my way around the world. Here is another approach."

At night there was no traffic along the street where Sarah lived, and when the treetoads stopped chirping the house lay still and quiet behind its overgrown shrubs. Sarah lay in the unbearable dark silence of the bedroom, listening.

Age was seeping through the house like an odorless gas, permeating the floorboards and rising slowly to the ceiling. It was in all the rooms, getting stronger every minute, and it ached. Sarah could feel the ache of old age pulsing all around her, brushing against her face as she lay in bed. A current of it swept her cheek, and she held her breath until finally she had to inhale. She felt age burn her nostrils and throat, finally impacting on her lungs. Her chest rattled with the force and she coughed, a labored,

wheezing sound. She felt her husband's weight shift on the bed, and a voice came out of the darkness.

"Did you forget to take your medicine again?"

She had to fight for breath before answering. "Henry, I never forget to take my medicine."

His hand slid over to touch hers under the sheets. "You mean you never remember."

The hand was heavy and dry, and it trembled in hers until she pulled away. Henry's voice came again, louder and closer. "It isn't the same thing, is it?"

She lay very still on the bed, blotting out everything and trying to think herself far away. She felt herself slipping into the darkness when Henry's words brought her back, sharply.

"It is, isn't it? I thought you were over that. Sarah, we've done all we can do. You've got to quit thinking about it."

Age was swirling around her neck, tugging at the folds of flesh that hung there. She shivered and pulled the covers up under her chin.

"Sarah?"

She didn't answer, and he began to talk in a low voice.

"Sarah, there's no point in trying to start over. We've had our life, and we've had most of it together. Now that's something, isn't it? And we can't throw it away. No matter how hard you try, you can't throw it away."

She had thrown away the dishes when she had realized about the food. It was poisoning them, she knew it in the slight, barely perceptible wrongness that made familiar foods stick in her throat. She changed the cooking habits of fifty years, adding spices and fruits with exotic names, but the wrongness persisted and even Henry began to complain. In the end she saw that it was the dishes. The heavy china that had been a wedding present was releasing age, saturating their food with the pent-up years. She threw it away, bought new china with a bright floral pattern, and found that she could eat again.

The rugs were the next to go, and her feet quit hurting at the end of the day. The old wallpaper was stripped away, all the pictures were replaced, and suddenly she found that her eyes didn't burn whenever she tried to read. Piece by piece, she routed out the years and scoured them away. Age had lulled her into complacency, sucking her gently into death. Now she was awake; every day she worked harder, and felt younger.

Through it all Henry stood by, unquestioning, seeming to understand. He didn't seem to care that she was working to save them both, but he didn't try to stop her. He just stood by, shaking his head, always with the same sad smile.

And he didn't get younger. Every time she finished a project she would come to him a little stronger and a little finer, and he was always the same. He was like the house; heavy, solid, and rotting away inside on his firm foundations. She accused him of not wanting to grow younger with her, and he only said, "I don't ever want to lose you." She didn't know what he meant.

Finally, when everything in the house had been replaced, she realized that she had failed. She felt better than she had in many years, but she was still an old woman. Her skin was still mottled and her hair was still yellowed and sparse. Inside she was eighteen, but her body was still seventy and rushing toward death. She couldn't die inside this ugly old woman, she had to get out. She told Henry what they had to do, and he refused.

"We can't sell the house," he went on. "The house is all we have left. It's us, Sarah, and we can't live anywhere else."

"It's killing us," she said flatly. Failure and age closed in around her and she suddenly felt very tired. "It's going to kill us both soon. I tried. I tried."

He came closer until he was leaning over her, talking rapidly.

"Sarah. I don't want to lose you. I can't put you away, I can't do it, but I'm going to have to if you don't stop this. I let you have your way and it didn't help, and now you're just going to have to quit it."

He was breathing hard, and she could feel the warm, sour breath on her face. It felt like the currents of age that were poisoning the house. His breath was age, and he was age. They had grown old together, and he was killing her with his memories.

"Go to sleep," she said. "I'll be better. I've been carrying on like a crazy woman. I don't know what came over me. Go to sleep."

She waited until he had been asleep a long time before she slipped out of bed, felt her way to the closet, and retrieved the plastic cleaning bag. He didn't wake up. She had known he wouldn't. For a moment she wondered, sadly, how he could be so willing to die. She would have to find someone, she thought, who needed to live as badly

as she did. She crossed the room and drew back the curtain so that a little pale light fell across the bed. And then, straddling him, she watched her arms grow firmer and her skin grow smoother as she held him down.

Frozen Assets

by

Robert Wissner

Bob Wissner is a recent graduate of Tulane who is setting about to become a free-lance writer. Jim Sallis writes: "Wissner is getting so good that I fear for my life." So do we all.

Of "Frozen Assets" Bob writes: "It has something to do with a fantasy I once had about a man who lived in a Westinghouse deep freeze. It was nice in there and he lived quite comfortably until one day he was taken out to make room for hamburger patties. He melted and passed the rest of his days as a puddle and nobody noticed. Not even the people who came to eat the hamburgers."

13 March

Johnson is playing with the bodies again. He knows it bothers me, but still he persists.

Things were better four months ago when we began working together down here. In the evenings sometimes we would sit around and drink beer and play cards. It was nice then.

But he's playing with the bodies again. I wish he would stop doing that.

14 March

He is at it again. Johnson's activities are difficult to ignore. He always plays with the bodies directly behind the window. It is a large window, filling most of the wall

between the control room and the refrigeration unit; I cannot help noticing. I can see him in there now, bundled in his thermal suit, moving with the ponderous self-assurance of a five-and-a-half-foot, quilted polar bear.

If one could imagine a short, quilted polar bear with a penchant for artistic expression, the picture of Johnson would be complete. From a humble beginning, Johnson's attempts at artistry have blossomed to unsettling proportions. It began one day when he stepped into the refrigeration unit, maneuvered three bodies before the window, and then twisted their arms and hands into a familiar arrangement. After returning to the control room, he paced back and forth in front of the window to view the tableau from different perspectives.

"Get it?" he said. "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Pretty good, eh?"

Johnson is not well. One must make an effort to understand him. One must really strain to understand Johnson. It is not that he has no respect for the dead. He simply has no respect for the frozen.

But, of course, the bodies are not really dead.

16 March

I regret ever having taken this job. Actually, there would be no job if I did not belong to a strong union. The machinery does not need me. The entire operation is automated. When a shipment of clients arrives, they are automatically processed. The natural fluids are extracted and the body is saturated with a viscous electrolytic liquid that stiffens at low temperature, but will not crystallize or damage cellular structure. The tissues never freeze hard, much to Johnson's delight, but remain pliable. The effect is rather analogous to replacing flesh with taffy.

When the process has been completed, robot carriers deposit the bodies in neat rows inside the vast, ninety-thousand-square-foot freezer. Ostensibly, Johnson and I double-check the refrigeration unit's controls to ensure that the temperature never fluctuates more than two degrees from minus fifteen degrees Fahrenheit.

But the thermostats do that better than we can. The machinery has absolutely no use for us, and the company has less.

In one final, vindictive effort, Perpetual Tomorrows Incorporated tried to thwart the union by insisting that the need to maintain a sealed environment, combined

with the problem of high personnel turnover, made human employees impractical. The company offered to hire two people per installation, but only if they agreed to be sealed in the control section for one year. To everyone's surprise, the union accepted on the condition that the employees then receive one year off. At full salary.

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

The company chuckled up its corporate sleeve, agreed to the union's demand, and promptly forgot about us until next year.

Johnson and I have eight months to go before our contracts run out. We have bunks and sanitary facilities. Our meals are automatically prepared and delivered. All we have to do is watch the thermometers.

Johnson plays with the bodies. I write on the backs of invoice slips.

20 March

I spend a lot of time thinking about the bodies. I can understand why someone suffering from old age or an incurable disease would welcome suspended animation. Medical science may yet come up with all the answers. Oddly, though, an increasing number of clients are young and healthy. I cannot understand it.

23 March

Johnson's artistic ambition seems to increase in proportion to the amount of raw material he has to choose from. Three days ago he recreated the nativity scene. The infant Jesus was a birth-defect case. Today he is laboring over a reproduction of Michelangelo's *The Last Supper*. He's in his religious period.

I am holding this invoice pad in my lap because Johnson insisted on moving the table into the refrigeration unit.

28 March

Twenty newly processed arrivals came down the chute today. Johnson is overjoyed. Two of the females are excellent madonna material.

14 April

I am amazed at the rate at which bodies are arriving. The machinery above our underground chamber hums with near-constant activity. Already the freezer is one-

quarter filled. I wonder if the company's other locations are doing as well?

I am deeply puzzled by the popularity of suspending one's animation. Whole families occasionally appear now *en masse,* and I find myself wondering about it more and more. The reasons given on the invoices often seem superficial, ultimately unenlightening. Poor people, barely able to scrape together the required fee, say they are waiting for a better, more prosperous era. Some of the richer clients let their capital collect interest while they wait for a different administration and larger loopholes. Others say they simply want to see the future; scheduling resuscitation for every twenty or thirty years.

I do not believe these stated reasons. I *feel* that they are not true, or only partially true, but I cannot explain that feeling. I must think more about it. I have lots of time to think.

Johnson refuses to speak to me. He is angry because I criticized his latest work, *Columbus Discovering America.* It is too static; totally lacking in tension.

28 April

I have been unable to write recently. Johnson is in his political period now. He recreated *The Signing of the Declaration of Independence* and was so pleased with it he left it behind the window for two weeks. I liked it too, so he is speaking to me now.

I refuse to speak to him, though. He used my pen in the tableau and would not let me remove it to write with. He says he demands perfection in his art.

4 May

For some reason I cannot think about the frozen bodies without visualizing Johnson bustling about the freezer; twisting an arm this way or that, changing the tilt of a head, adding or subtracting an element from the work in progress. Maybe I should think about that. On the other hand, maybe I should just beat the hell out of Johnson.

He has been impossible to live with the past few days. He is between works, and so fidgets around the control room, grunting monosyllabic replies to my questions. If he does not have an inspiration soon, I will surely bludgeon him to death. Besides, he ignores all my suggestions, and they are good suggestions. The man's ego is insufferable.

5 May

Of all the bodies received this week, only two suffer from a definable, organic problem.

6 May

Thank God! Johnson's eyes are once again bloodshot with the image of a new creation. He has been working continuously for eighteen hours, preparing the refrigeration unit for a reproduction of *The Battle of Waterloo*. He plans to use every available body. He says it will be his masterpiece.

10 May

I had an inspiration of my own today.

I think I understand now; understand why people are lining up to become Popsicles, and why Johnson plays with the bodies. The frozen clients and Johnson's artistic efforts are merely two manifestations of a single factor; they go hand in hand, so to speak.

Fear.

The reason for it all is fear. Fear of death; of dying without seeing the future. Without knowing what will become of one's family, of one's world. Fear of dying and being left behind, never to learn if man will finally squirm and sizzle on a skewer of his own design, or finally reach the stars.

Fear of facing the Great Perhaps.

But most of all, fear of leaving nothing behind but an empty, meaningless life; soon forgotten, unloved, and forgotten.

Johnson is just as afraid, but he has more balls than all of the cold meat in the freezer. At least he is doing something other than standing around. His art is impermanent now, but who knows? Maybe he will try sculpture when his contract runs out. He may die sooner than others, but perhaps his creations will outlive us all.

But I doubt it. Johnson has absolutely no aesthetic appreciation of spatial relationships or visual balance.

11 May

Johnson caught a cold. I wish he would blow his nose instead of sniffling all the time. And he should stay out of the refrigeration unit for a while. His masterpiece can wait.

19 May

Johnson is dead. Pneumonia.

1 June

6 June

Over fifty arrivals today. Grandparents, parents, children. Standing quietly in cold, precise rows.

27 June

If I can just staple these invoices into some sort of flag, perhaps I can finish the Iwo Jima scene by the Fourth.

Crayola

by

Dave Skal

One of the pleasures of combining editing with pedagogy is the opportunity it affords the teacher to continue to monitor the growth of former students. Dave Skal has afforded me a great deal of that pleasure over the past two years; his maturation as an artist has been spectacular. Last year's "Chains" was a very good story; this year's contribution is a superb one. And watch for another Skal story, "They Cope," which is soon to appear in one of Damon Knight's Orbit *volumes.*

The room is octagonal, though irregularly so—there is a convexity in one corner that houses the bathroom. (Which, if included, would increase the number of my walls to twelve. But eight will do for now. At least for them.)

White. Everywhere. Even the hardware on the suspiciously zoomorphic washbasin (elephant ivory), though not white in itself, reflects only that quality. White tile on the floor. A flawless expanse of ceiling. Even the waterpipes that pass impolitely through the room, and the electrical wires that, tacked to the plaster, snake around the upper corners of my cubicle, are coated with chalky white pigment, as if this somehow disguises their true intentions. The bed, white. My bedclothes. I am white.

(Another piece of thinly disguised electrical wire ripples down through space from the wall, terminating in

a plastic buzzer alligator-clipped to my crisp cotton pillowcase. The buzzer is ink-black. I pressed it once and got shocked. I won't press it again.)

Details (I have an eye for details, you notice). Hanging down from the center of the ceiling is a large milk-glass bulb cover. It looks like a breast, a great incandescent prominence with a slight, tasteful teat, aureole devoid of erubescence, its milk frozen.

I mentioned the bathroom. It is concealed by a solid door. I open it carefully, because it squeaks rather loudly. More white.

But wait. If I switch on the light—there!—*there is color*. Not the toilet tissue, all fibrous chalk; not the Kotex dispenser; not the porcelain commode and its adjacent bidet; but *inside* the bowl, there is blue. Like the sky. Sky-blue. The blue of my eyes—

My eyes. I almost forgot. There is no mirror, and it is quite impossible to see my reflection in the washbasin in the absence of visual contrast. But my eyes *are* blue—I do remember that—like the deep, swirling contents of this antiseptic well.

I hear the click of the main door's outside bolt and the squeak of orthopedic shoes. The nurse is bringing my breakfast. She is an albino, of course, trim, young, very efficient. A model nurse. I wonder: are albinos color-blind as well as colorless?

Good morning, she says, and then my name, which she reads from a little card taped to the tray. As long as I've been here, she still needs the card.

I say nothing, as usual, and she sets the tray down on the utility table next to my bed. She tries to be professional, but her eyes betray her. The silver contact lenses do nothing to hide her obvious nausea in my presence. Her uniform is crisp and clean. I notice something strange about it, though—a curious line of white stitchery runs across the front, tracing exactly the outline of a daring *décolletage*. Her uniform has no *décolletage*, of course, but the clothing is designed to give that impression. Or something.

As I eat my breakfast, she sits down and thumbs through a magazine she has brought in tucked under her arm. At least I think it is a magazine; I can see nothing but blank pages, but apparently she is digesting it eagerly. I continue eating. Perhaps there is a compensation effect between the page and her contact lenses. Perhaps—

I find something. *Something*, like a Cracker Jack prize,

has been concealed in my little box of pale shredded wheat. It is a . . . crayon. A very red, very new, very sharp little stick of wax wrapped in a cigarette-like paper jacket that says CRAYOLA. Expensive.

I snap my eyes at the nurse, but she is still engrossed in her magazine. I handle the newfound object gingerly, and finally slip it into the pocket of my white terrycloth robe. Has she noticed?

The next morning the process is repeated, and I find another crayon in my little unmarked box of cereal, this time blue.

She knows. She must. But she seems not to notice at all.

It happens again, and again, almost endlessly, until I have amassed a huge store of crayons; reds, blues, yellows, purples, siennas, and on an on. I keep them carefully concealed under a flap I have ripped in the mattress, and there they are securely hidden by the soft cotton stuffing.

Now the waiting. I'm not quite sure what I'll do yet, but I have some ideas. Tomorrow, though.

The nurse suspects nothing. I know it. She couldn't possibly keep a secret of this magnitude without any outward signs. No one could. She goes about her stupid little business as if nothing is amiss. She has no idea, none whatsoever.

It has been an hour since her last visit, and I think it is safe to begin. The bulbous white breast glows relentlessly above me. (If ever this light is turned off, if ever my cubicle is plunged into blackness, it is when I am asleep, and no other time. Perhaps the light is somehow linked to my metabolism, dimming and brightening with the ebb and tide of my consciousness. No matter.)

Silently, the breast glows. It will be my first objective.

Dragging over the vinyl chair the nurse had warmed with her buttocks, I climb up, armed with the first crayon. I reach up to the white prominence and begin slowly, circularly, to color in the aureole—a brilliant, shocking red. My effort has a dual effect—not only have I colored the teat, but I have tinted the room as well. A circular pink shadow is cast down over the bed, instilling a quality of rich vitality to its ordinarily ashy pallor. Interesting.

Boldly, I keep on in this vein, now using a black crayon, inscribing a crazy spiderweb pattern over the entire ventral surface of the globe. The room is transformed

into a bizarre *art nouveau* continuum, black lines sweeping across the snowy walls like Stygian comets, their intersections parsing the room into eccentric, asymmetrical canvases of different sizes and exciting possibilities. My pulse quickens, and I can almost feel the potent surge of adrenalin pushing me forward in creation.

I attack the walls next, tracing over the shadows, then filling in the spaces with colors and patterns of new invention. My fingers are cramped and sore from the prolonged clutching of the crayons, which are rapidly wearing down, forcing me to peel down their paper jackets in order to continue.

And I do continue, relentlessly, building up a brilliant mosaic of rainbows and kaleidoscopic starbursts. Sweat runs down my face, trickles off my chin to the floor, which is flecked with little chips of wax.

I have no idea of when I finish, but the environment is completely altered, like the interior of a Persian tent—sumptuous, paislied—or the swirling frescoed walls of a Roman chapel. But mostly it is *me;* I have spread myself thin over every surface of the chamber and now I fall back, exhausted.

Presently, I hear the click of the outside bolt. The nurse comes in carrying her tray with the little name card, pristine and fresh in her starched white uniform.

I smile at her, weakly, and indicate the room, my creation, with a limp gesture of my right arm.

She opens her mouth as if to scream, but there emerges only a strange, reptilian hiss. The tray, released from her grasp, falls slowly to the tile. She pirouettes toward the door, saying something, but there is only the run-down noise of an old phonograph record played at too slow a speed. . . .

She is gone. I stand in the center of my crayon universe, numb and spent amid the wreckage of my breakfast. The light goes out. There is only blackness.

Behind me, quite distinctly, I hear the flushing of a toilet.

Afterward, the room is light again, the walls peeled down to a clean new layer. The new nurse has come and gone. The door is locked, the room silent.

Before me, sitting precisely on the bed, is a box of crayons, cellophane-wrapped and new, obviously imported at great expense. Paper. Wax. And sixty-four colors.

I guess I've been promoted.

Why Is It So Hard?

by

Kate Wilhelm

Recently a young friend of mine asked in all seriousness: *Why write? Does it serve any social need?* She is very young, idealistic, talented, trying already in her early teens to decide which of the arts to pursue, and whether or not she can become a writer, or painter, or composer, and still serve society. Her father answered her, and I must confess I have forgotten his answer. I was off thinking my own thoughts that were set astir by her question. Now, months later, I would like to try to answer her.

The title above is "Why Is It So Hard?" I think both questions are wound about each other inseparably.

A piece of good writing is much more than the sum of its parts. It is like a symbol in that there is just so much that is demonstrable: No matter how deeply one explores, there is still something not yet touched, not definable, but definitely effective. There are many good craftsmen working today whose work is exactly the sum of the parts. The plot can be dissected, the prose style examined and judged, the subject matter extracted, the theme explicated. And so on. At the end of what is purely a mechanical examination, the whole of the story has been bared. There is nothing left over to ponder. There is no real disagreement about these works among critics except concerning trivia, or where matters of taste clash. Good writing cannot be dismissed this easily. When all that has been done, and it should be done if one wishes to look critically at a piece of work, there is still more to it, the bit left over that can't be pinned down to any of the usual categories. This is the core, the heart of the work.

Whether or not fiction should have a heart might be debated, but if it is accepted that without this core there is a

falseness, that without it fiction is all too soon forgettable, or unreadable, or unrewarding, then what is at the heart should be examined and an attempt made to understand what is missing when the work is hollow.

It might be said that the function of fiction is to make reality believable. Few of us doubt the reality of trees, water, sky, earth, people. It may be chic to dismiss them as unreal, but our Western philosophy has imbued us with a firm belief in this level of reality. Only in philosophical writing does anyone try to prove or disprove the existence of this basic real world. So what is left must deal with the inner reality, or the interpretation of the sensory data that we all receive. Jung said that a true artist prepares the way for the future; he is necessarily ahead of his time. He is not a seer in the Biblical prophet sense, but rather a person who makes connections between bits of information that other people will also make eventually. The clues, the obvious connections, are there for all to see, but a particular kind of mental arrangement forces the artist to see them and examine them where the nonartist simply accepts.

This puts the artist, quite often, out of step with his contemporaries. For many people this is an untenable position. They find it impossible to submit to the inner voice and so become failed artists, or those who perennially show promise that is never realized. Sometimes the public catches up very quickly and the artist is honored in his own time, but more often the honors are a little, or a lot, too late. Fifty years later, a hundred years, his message seems clear enough. The rediscovery of Blake, who is as modern as Nabokov, is a case in point. One wonders: if communication is the purpose of writing, or painting, then obviously Blake must have felt himself a failure during his lifetime because he didn't communicate. Why didn't he turn to something else? Why did he keep doing what was not succeeding? And the answer is that although it must have hurt, must always hurt, the artist's need to explore and give expression to his inner reality is greater than his need to comunicate, and to succeed, in the sense of receiving wealth and/or fame. This is not an easy choice.

To yield to this inner voice demands a bravado that often fails in the middle of a dark night, an arrogance that shrugs off criticism, a willingness to face the nightmares of one's own making. And most writers cannot, dare not, let this process continue to its inevitable conclusion. It is said that Dostoevsky was so bothered by the idea that all his fictional good and evil came from his own

mind that he, in later life, turned to religion with the same passion that he had given to his fiction in happier days.

This inner voice comes from the deep well of the unconscious. And for this reason the inner voice speaks with oracular ambiguities in symbols. It presents a mood or a feeling or emotion, a scene, a glimpse of something. It is a dream interrupted, with its own urgency that presses and presses. The meaning of the symbols that this inner voice uses are inexhaustible, as all symbols must be. A symbol understood is no longer a symbol, but has become a sign. So it is this very ambiguity that lies in the center of the work that we must somehow translate into words and present to the reader.

The attempt of the unconscious to communicate with the unconscious of another, or many others, is what writing is all about finally. And the unconscious communicates in symbols. The reason that other peoples' dreams are boring is that the meaning of the symbols is usually not clear to the outsider. We dream in shorthand, with ellipses, with hints and clues, and seldom is the real message revealed. This is why the unconscious has such a hard time communicating. It uses what is primarily a nonverbal medium; and the conscious writer is stuck with a verbal medium. The dreamer has to be the one to make the final interpretation of his own symbols. Almost always, when the interpretation is the correct one finally, there is a feeling of vast relief. We so often don't know what we are looking for until we find it, with a feeling of recognition.

The beginning point of a story, then, is the urge to translate the untranslatable into words. Probably it isn't even clear at this time just exactly what that something is. A feeling, a mood, something even less definable than that. But it is urgent. It interferes with living, with thinking, with everything. If the writer manages to bring off a story that expresses the symbolic content given by the unconscious, there often is the same feeling of relief, or recognition, as in the successful interpretation of a dream. The Aha! reaction. The work of selecting what stays and what goes, what gets changed, what is good as written, and so on, begins. This is the work of the conscious. Too often the conscious control destroys the unconscious production. Sometimes it helps it. When the ratio of times that it is helping to the times that it is hindering the process increases sufficiently, the writer is accepted as an accomplished, talented writer. Maybe even an artist. Sometimes

the writer, perhaps missing something in his own work, or trying to be better than he is, or trying to achieve art deliberately, adds symbols. And he wonders why the story hasn't worked for his readers. Simply, it is because he is using symbols as signs: He knows exactly what he wants them to do, what they mean to him. And the consciously worked-out parts of the story are the very parts that are forgettable.

The reason is that signs don't stir the unconscious of the reader. They are too fully understood, and it is ambiguity that must be presented again to the unconscious; from the symbolic ambiguities experienced by the writer through the translation that is the story, back into the symbolic world of the mind of the reader. That is the route that a successful, well-done story follows. The writer must be able to accept what his mind offers up; he may find it frightening, or disgusting, but that is his material, and if he is honest with it, it will be accepted by the reader, because despite any number of superficial differences in the physical reality of mankind, in that deep well there are more similarities than differences. We share the burdens and the joys of being human.

> There are several examples of the sort of thing I am talking about here. When has a very good, successful novel been followed by an equally good, successful sequel? The sequels may have all the mechanical ingredients: characters, location, same sort of actions and so on, but they don't work. The writer's unconscious wasn't engaged; the reader's won't be either.
>
> Every very good work of art is trailed by countless imitators who are eminently forgettable. They can't bring to their hollow papier-mâché works the same psychological drive that is experienced in the original.
>
> Sometimes the very power of the underlying symbolism overcomes countless faults that might otherwise have killed a work. David Lindsey's novel *A Voyage to Arcturus* is a case in point. Clumsy, awkwardly written, never finished in any real sense, it remains a powerful reading experience.

Unfortunately there are many writers who never learn to trust this unconscious material, or who are too disturbed

by it, who deny it or refuse to use it without such heavy manipulation that it becomes distorted and false. They can be excellent craftsmen, expert technicians, but their work is too intellectual or too simplistic; it is cold, without heart. It is forgotten almost instantly. Often this kind of writing is quite enjoyable while it is being read, but afterward the reader feels that he has been cheated. If something strong remains after you leave the work, and is still there in the years to come, then the writer has spoken to your unconscious. Perhaps what is retained in a scene, a feeling, or a character, but not much of the plot or the situation. That is the message that somehow got through.

What you have may be no more than a new reassurance that life is shared; loneliness is assuaged for a time; someone else has been there, too. That is a lot. How eagerly we all seek new stories, new novels, new movies just for that one message: life is shared, after all.

It is relatively simple to help someone become a better craftsman. You point out his mechanical mistakes often enough for him to learn how to do it himself. Point him in the direction of good writing. Encourage, or even force, him to learn to criticize intelligently. He'll learn. But teaching him to rely on his own unconscious? That is harder. You catechize him with: "Trust yourself. Be yourself. All you have to offer is yourself, your observations, your feelings, your emotions, your values, the vision of your inner reality. You can't use secondhand reactions. You can't use secondhand emotions. Give yourself." This is really what the reader wants from the writer. And it is the hardest thing in the world for the writer to give. He has to learn to express in words that which is primarily nonverbal, the whole inner world of compressed experience revealed in symbolic shorthand.

What makes it even harder is that the writer often cannot grasp the full meaning of his own material. The trust is then necessarily blind. For a new writer, working and developing in a near vacuum of no feedback, this can be agonizing. New writers don't dare trust themselves, although they must, and there is no guarantee that they will ever have any real assurance of the validity of their material. Many people begin to write, and most drop out at various points along the way; a few become good writers; fewer become great writers; and once in a while there is an artist. Reading biographies of great writers, talking to writers, one hears and sees again and again the same expressions of despair, the same self-doubts, the same

fears. So although the technical act of writing does become easier with experience, there is no guarantee that the act of magic, the translation of the nonverbal into verbal terms, will ever be easy, or certain.

To the question that girl asked, why write? I can finally say: Because this is one of the ways in which evolution of the race proceeds. To the extent that I can be honest and deal with the material of my own unconscious, then I can speak to your unconscious and we must both be enriched for this contact. I have been there; I have feared your fears; I have shared the same joys; I have acted with the same perfidy. You aren't alone. Neither am I. For now. For this brief instant of touch. And if the writer will let it happen, perhaps he can even point the way to a better future. At the very least he can make it easier to understand and accept the present that we all share.

To the Mountains

by

Laura Haney

Laura Haney is a quiet young woman from Maryland who treats of witches and magical powers and unicorns. But not in this story. Here she writes of a trek of the damned, a story which quite clearly "arose from a feeling of chilling loneliness. The girl in the story accepts her aloneness, her alienation even from the other exiles, but part of her doesn't, and it reaches out. We all reach out."

The plain is chilly. When we were first left here, a huddle of people bound together by our exile, we wondered at the chill brightness. It is not a happy brightness. So much emptiness. The sun glares on the bare spots between clumps of scrub grass. Dun and green and a faded sky with a blinding whiteness above, a cold and dreariness binding us to the earth.

This morning I, the youngest of the group, awoke before the other women. The sky was still gray, and there was no wind. I gave birth, I think. To what, I was not sure. It was tiny, all hunched like one of the see-no-evil monkeys. When I had washed away from it the slime of semi-clotted blood, I touched its plasticlike raspberry skin and marveled at its ugliness. It would not relax; I was unable to straighten its limbs; that is why

I could not tell if it was a baby. I had never seen one so tiny, so red, so hunched and soundless. I left it by the sticks laid for a fire and went across the wagon ruts to the men's side to ask George for water to bathe the object. Somehow, when we were still a group, George became our leader.

He still manages our supplies now that we only stay together for convenience. He does not want to give me water. "What have you done with the rest? It was almost a quart you had among you, last night." He says it harshly, with irritation in his voice, because George does not like waste.

I told him I was ill, to come see, come see, and he snapped at me that he knew that *already but came anyway. He would not walk by me but moved across the road ahead of me. When he found my object he straightened in surprise.*

Our clothing is faded and limp. His blue jeans and dun-colored bush jacket seem to belong to the desert.

"Good God, woman!" he roared at me. "Don't you know better than to leave it?" For him the object had unhunched and lay in his hands with its tiny limbs waving. It was a baby, I thought numbly. I kneeled to light the fire; I knew he stood behind me but his voice boomed around me in tangible waves. "It's not yours, is it?" In scanning the inert sleeping forms of the other women, women old enough to have been my mother, he missed my nod. "Is it?" he said, finally returning to me. The fire flared. Its warmth sharpened the cold and I was the one who hunched. Then his fingers, strong fingers of a warm, weather-browned hand, encircled my arm like hard tongs, piercing my shell of cold with pain. How could he cradle the child so tenderly in one hand as he bent over me and shook me so cruelly with the other? He knelt beside me on the packed sand and placed the child in my arms. "It cannot live," I said. The fire that had opened the doors to awareness of pain had thinned pain to a trickle. "You did not grow," he said, agreeing, still beside me.

The other women have gone across the road to prepare breakfast for the men. There is a bustle of life across the road, a subdued bustle to conserve energy, for we have just enough food to permit us to stay alive, and no more.

"We have been walking four months." He invited me to tell him how I had produced the uncrying child that I did not try to feed. I was silent, but he waited for an answer. "George," I pleaded, "what was your crime?" Then he was the silent one, staring into the mountains that we moved toward day by day. I searched his face trying to penetrate the cold inward look. He nodded and left me. I watched him as he crossed the road, saw people move away from the fire as if he had given orders. Then I turned my back on them and tried to feed the child and could not. I walked across the road to George. "I cannot feed it. Kill it, please." I held it out to him. The angry raspberry of its skin was beginning to fade, its features to relax. How cruel to let it live to unfold like a flower and to be snapped in a dry wind, I thought, but said nothing.

A few of the men sit on rocks around George, eating their watery bits of mashed root. They look up in dull interest as I approach him.

George handed me a small white packet. "Dried milk. If I had known . . ."

The women leave the fire when I go to it for water and a can to warm the water in. The wall between us has not dissolved in the least, and George says we will do no walking today.

The child could not swallow the milk made from rainwater and stale powder, but George would not kill it. Finally one of the women came over to me and took it from me. Her child had come stillborn a week before, and milk still oozed through the faded blue of her dress. My object became her child and walking resumed.

She still does not speak to me—but none of the women do. If we last to the mountain we can live there, supplies will

be brought us: our crimes will have burned themselves out in the bleakness and hardship of five months of walking.

> *They told us, when they left us at the edge, that it would take that long. They said that we would have a better chance of surviving if we walked together. They said that so far no group had survived intact, and we took it as a challenge, as we were meant to. The women spoke to me then, before they discovered that I could not be depended upon to give the conventional responses consistently. Still, at the beginning, they had tended to mother me, believing that I could not carry as heavy a pack as they.*

We seem to get no nearer to the mountains; our community spirit breaks and is replaced by determination. We stick together only because of the taunt we have been given: no one has survived alone. We become exhausted with walking, learn that to argue wastes energy, to talk looses our private memories and their anguish wastes energy as well. They wait for me to die because each day is harder for them; one who was ill at the beginning could not heal as they are beaten down. I grow no worse. They are drawn to my level of exhaustion and resent having been dragged down. I am further excluded from their few shared words and from their company. But George has changed toward me.

> *From mere tolerance he went to protectiveness, as if he regretted that I had not been able to keep the child and as if he blamed himself for my inability to have done so. He said he had given powdered milk to the other woman so that she could feed her own child, but he had known that she was pregnant. "You did not tell anyone. Do you want to die?"*

He has learned not to expect answers to his questions. Answers involve thinking, thinking awakes the past which dies in a month when we reach the mountains and are considered to have no pasts. Can they take away memories? The grass clumps are getting closer together, the blinding stretches of sand smaller, the dew heavy enough to be collected and drunk. By George's timetable we have a

week before we reach the mountains, and we are still together. People are stirring out of their apathy, talking again, so George and I are no longer the odd ones. George now talks as if something were insisting that he confess. He talks of everything to me, everything that has no meaning to him, and he wants to know why I am here with the exiles. He is driven, more tormented now than any of us were at the beginning, with experience still raw on our consciousness. His torment is seeping from his eyes and from between his fingers when he holds his head in his hands at rest stops.

Why does he drag me from my shell of apathy! If you do not interact with people, you do not think. If you don't think, you don't remember and you don't feel. Now, seeing him suffer recalls to me the days before this death trip when I could feel. George! Won't you tell me, give me a clue as to what torments you so! You are making me remember my own torment and I had it safely quelled. George!

But of course I said nothing.

I keep remembering. The memory wants out. If I tell George—no! He wants my memories to block his own. He cannot take away a memory. All he can do is to keep us together, keep us alive, until we reach the mountains. What will we have, when we have no pasts? George, do we have to go to the mountains? The others can see the way now, it's only a day to the entry gates. Don't make me go.

But I say nothing.

Their Thousandth Season

by

Ed Bryant

Ed Bryant is perhaps the most prolific of Clarion alumni: a first-order star in a growing galaxy of talent. Since his first sale three years ago, his work has appeared so widely that his name is now known to the most casual reader of science fiction.

Of "Their Thousandth Season" he writes: "This is the fourth story I've written about the strange city called Cinnebar and its varied and unusual inhabitants. The theme came to me as I lay on my back on July grass in Wyoming and wondered how much fun it would be to be immortal. Most of us know how much fun it wouldn't be, but each has to map it out in his own mind. This is my map."

The city. Forever the city. Within it rots the tissue of dreams.

Tourmaline Hayes—"the bright and sensual, sometimes cynical Tourmaline Hayes" according to *The Guide to the Stars*—muses along the thin border between sleep and wakefulness. By choice she lies alone.

She allows the characters to press their noses against her interface with fantasy. The most affecting face is that of Francie, enduring ingenue.

Tourmaline and Francie face each other across a gray, damp beach. Francie approaches with slow, deliberate steps. Tourmaline opens her arms in welcome.

She looks at Francie's face. Through the openings

where Francie's eyes should be, she can see the night sky. Tourmaline stares, strains, searches the constellations for *Speculum*, the mirror.

It's a party like all other parties, and by any other name a *Walpurgisnacht*. Yet dull. So much sin, too often, breeds ennui. Everybody knows that. Everyone . . .

"—who is anybody," says Francie, completing an unconscious syllogism. She smiles up at Sternig the critic of gay drama. She slightly sucks in her cheeks, hoping to emphasize the high cheekbones everyone says will be beautiful later in life when the skin of her face begins to tauten. It's a harmless deceit.

The gesture doesn't benefit Sternig. Two affinity groups beyond them lounges Francie's prospective lover. Kandelman bestows largess upon three literary sycophants, who giggle shrilly. He leans back against a walnut bookcase, thumbs hooked in his belt, hips cantilevered forward. Kandelman's neglected his codpiece. It looks as though he's storing tennis balls behind the buttoned fly.

"Peanuts," says Sternig.

Francie's chin jerks up. "What?"

"Or pretzels. Whatever. You know, troll food." Sternig shrugs.

"I thought you said—"

"Party food progressively deteriorates," he says. "The second law of gastrodynamics."

Francie's little catamount tongue strokes nervously between lips.

"I need a drink," says Sternig. Apparently disinterested, "You want?"

"No." She smiles mechanically. "You'll excuse me? I have to use my spray."

He watches the back of her head blur in the aphrodisiac haze. Her diminishing skull takes all too long to vanish. Sternig brushes long brown hair back from his eyes. He mumbles his self-pity and yearns for beer, dark and draft.

The bathroom is decorated in a style the catalogue calls modern erotic. Surfaces gleam cold, opaque, and hard. Francie's face explodes back at her from prismed mirrors. In her peripheral vision the white-on-white tiles fade to Arctic vagueness.

She takes the tube from her purse and hikes her skirt. The hiss echoes softly. Francie relaxes and enjoys a brief labial coolness. Scented excitement, no longer bland, she

adjusts her panties. No hunter ever more carefully lubricated the action of his weapon.

Francie examines her reflection in the faceted medicine chest. Why is the flesh around her eyes so puffy? Her dark eyes had once snapped—a former lover told her that one passionate afternoon in a motel room in Tondelaya Beach. Francie's heart-shaped face creases in a frown. Her eyes have the puckered sheen of day-old ripe olives.

The door bangs open and shut; a ghost has passed.

"Got a spare douche?" says the newcomer.

"Need what I've got, Marlene."

Marlene removes a hairbrush from her purse. "Do you ever. Give me a shot."

"For Tourmaline?" She lazily proffers the jeweled tube. "Love to."

Marlene giggles and bares feral teeth. "Jealous, Francie? I wasn't."

Francie snaps shut the purse, barely missing Marlene's fingertips. "Shut up!"

"You're very sensitive, darling. Are *they* still sensitive?"

Francie says again, "Shut up."

The brush hisses through Marlene's light lank hair. The strokes are cadenced with her words. "I don't care, honey. Just because most guys have milk fetishes. . . . I hope it's worth it."

"It will be."

"Kandelman's big on nipples." Marlene is laughing. She drops the hairbrush and it clatters across the tile counter. "*Extremely* big."

"Too big for you?"

"Hardly," says Marlene. "He's such a complete bastard."

Francie smiles. "I can take it." She stands up.

"Want to hear a riddle?" says Marlene maliciously. "What's eight inches long and glows in the dark?"

"Glows?"

"Sorry," says Marlene. "I meant grows."

Francie looks back from the doorway. "I love it."

Sternig is talking with Tourmaline Hayes, the sex star. Half a head taller, she slouches against the piano to make him feel at ease. Sternig smiles, aware of her charity.

"I caught all your last performances."

"Not exactly your sort of thing, I'd think."

"Don't confuse the work with the man," says Sternig.

Tourmaline's eyes are matched to her name. Their corners crinkle slightly as she smiles. Sternig smiles in

return, relaxing. "I know, Sternig. You love everyone, but mainly women. Do you love me?"

Smiling. "Of course."

Laughing. "Liar. You love one person. Only one."

He stiffens. "Tourmaline—"

"Apart from yourself, of course."

"Tourmaline, don't—"

"It's not as though I hate her," says Tourmaline.

"Let's talk about you," says Sternig.

"You never learn, do you?"

"I'm only trying—"

"—to divert the conversation," finishes Tourmaline. "Do you know how many times we've gone through this?"

"Christ," says Sternig. "I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to think about it."

Tourmaline touches his cheek, silk to sandpaper. "The one's easy enough."

He lightly kisses her fingertips. "I'm beginning to forget the other."

"Doubly a liar." She snatches away her hand. "Sternig, Sternig, you stupid ass."

"I need another drink," Sternig says quickly. "Do you?"

"I'm not finished," she says, sloshing the glass. "And I'm not done with you either."

"Why me?" he asks.

"You're my good deed for the millennium." She tosses back her long green hair. "I can't save you from yourself, but maybe I can keep—" The rest is blotted by laughter. The life of the party has arrived.

"So that's exactly what I said. The bastard couldn't believe it." Secondary chuckles run through the party people. It's Jack Burton, star of the popular series "Jack Burton—Immortal." His show has just been renewed for its one-thousandth season and this party is the celebration.

Tourmaline smiles and speaks softly, as though reporting a sporting event: "Jack Burton grins at his friends, pumps hands, kisses lips, but there's a forced quality to the gaiety. He moves across the room well attended, but the congratulations verge on the perfunctory. His eyes—and how I envy that piercing blue—sparkle with intelligence, but I see the vagueness flicker now and again. Jack Burton is like a ripe red tomato and inside him are worms."

"What?" says Sternig.

"Worms. They've begun eating through to his eyes."

Sternig grimaces. "You're morbid."

"Watch his eyes, Sternig. You'll see. Suddenly nothing there but blank holes."

"That drink," says Sternig. "I'm going to get it. Stay here. I'll bring two."

When he returns, Tourmaline Hayes still leans with her head against the piano. She accepts her new drink silently.

Sternig sips thoughtfully. "After the party—"

She looks at him. He cannot decipher her expression.

"After the party, I want you to go home with me."

Tourmaline smiles, more to herself than to Sternig. "I'm sorry, I can't."

Sternig would like to ask why not, but—

"Maybe another time," she says. "We're not ready for that. I'm going home with Marlene."

"I—"

She overrides him. "And your Francie will go home with Kandelman. And Jack Burton will go home with his agent. Sternig, who will take you home? Who?"

Instantly alone and lonely, Sternig would like to cry. But he can't. He's a big boy now. Has been for longer than he cares to remember. Longer than he can remember.

"Who?" Tourmaline repeats.

Sternig has to dream it, because the memory is too ancient and scoured to recall in his consciousness:

They determined to live happily ever after. Through a friend, Francie obtained the lease on a beach cottage on an isolated stretch of the coast. Sternig moved in his things from the cramped city apartment. The first few evenings they spent on the open porch watching the ocean, listening, feeling the last tailings of spray. They observed the rhythm of the waves sucking at the beach sand in millimeter portions. The house was set a hundred meters back from the water. They wouldn't have to worry for a long time.

Days, they swam in the early-morning sunshine before breakfast. Mornings were for work. Several times each week, Sternig flew the windhover into the city to see to the disposition of his column. Francie spent her mornings writing poetry and scanning tapes of her latest obsession, political history. She wrote essays which Sternig told her would be well received, had she ever bothered to submit them somewhere.

The air was heavy and sweet in the afternoon. The previous tenant had cultivated an extensive flower garden in back of the cottage. Lush beds sprawled among grassy blocks in a patchwork effect. Nothing exotic: scarlet tiger lilies, purple iris, brilliant yellow daisies. Flowers that bloomed repeatedly with a minimum of care.

Francie and Sternig made love in the grass. They lay quietly and smelled their own scent mingle with the heavy floral aroma.

"I want this to go on forever," said Francie. She looked up at her lover. "Can't it?"

"Yes," said Sternig, not then understanding the deceit of time.

Like all Sternig's dreams, it fades with awakening, leaving no specific words or images; only feelings.

Kandelman admires her breasts. He would touch them already, but etiquette demands a delay. Still, fifty percent of his eye contact is below her collar bone. Under his gaze, erectile tissue stiffens and her nipples poke against soft fabric. She loves it.

"What are you writing now?" Francie asks.

"I'm well into the new novel," says Kandelman. "It's a psychosexual thing."

"That's very interesting." Francie angles her chin, knowing her cheekbones appear to advantage. "What's it about?"

"Brothers and sisters. That's about all I can tell you at this point. The book's writing itself. I've got very little to do with the process, aside from feeding in the paper."

"Have you picked a title?"

"*Brothers and Sisters,* I think."

"Oh." Francie is losing interest in the novel. Unless, of course, Kandelman should volunteer a précis of a titillating passage.

"It's not really erotica," he says, "though it might sound like it from the title."

"Oh," she says vaguely. "I thought it might be, from the title."

"It may turn out that way," he hastens to say. "But for now it's a very serious book."

She says seriously, "Erotica *can* be serious."

He stares at her chest. Francie's breasts have assumed an orogenic significance in his mind. They are large, yet possess no hint of sag. They project without visible sup-

port. Kandelman wonders silently that he has not noticed them before this party.

"I think it can," Francie continues.

"What?" Kandelman breaks free of his preoccupation. "Oh yes. Of course it can."

"I'd like to see you write a really erotic book."

"Well," says Kandelman.

"I'd like to help you with it."

Kandelman realizes he could have predicted the entire sequence of conversation and is glad that he didn't.

The party is so brittle, thinks Sternig, at any moment it will shatter like hard candy. The great marble hall is festooned with streamers of candy-stripe crepe. Lighter-than-air balloons, fashioned in the image of extinct beasts, float from tethers. Sternig sips his drink in the shadow of a hippogriff.

With displeasure he stares across the swirling mass of the party at Francie and Kandelman, animatedly talking. They sit close together on a low foam couch, beneath the spread-antlered shelter of an inflated elk.

"Bitch," says Sternig.

"Who?" says Tourmaline. "Kandelman or your Francie?"

"Stop it." Sternig frowns. "She's not mine."

"Wasn't she?"

When did she go home with me? Sternig wonders. There was a time . . . Jack Burton was celebrating one of his renewals. She didn't go home with me, but we went to the beach from the party. Together . . .

They drove out of the city on the Klein Expressway. He drove Francie's car, a low and powerful convertible. At speed he drifted it around the tight curves of each cloverleaf as the expressway redoubled upon itself. Francie cuddled against him, laughing, whispering in his ear. They exited at Tondelaya Beach, and between the towering red bluffs and the flat sea found a motel.

Light, reflecting from the water, rippled across the ceiling. He gently lowered her to the bed and began to undo her hooks and eyes and buttons. She smiled up at him and he told Francie how her dark eyes were snapping with excitement.

Soon, as he lay beside her, his own excitement

became too great and he turned away, uncertain and apologetic.

"No," she said. "Don't go soft on me."

But— "I'm sorry." He could repeat that, but there was little else to say.

What she said then was too cruel for remembering.

"I remember once," says Sternig. "When . . . when . . ."

"Yes?" Tourmaline prompts.

"I can't remember," he says finally. "And I need another drink."

"Can't remember? Or won't?"

"Can't," he says. "I think it's can't. I'm not really sure. I have my mind sponged periodically. Don't you?"

Tourmaline nods. "Occasionally. As seldom as I can. I prefer to keep as many memories as possible. Otherwise I tend to repeat my mistakes."

"In time," says Sternig, "we all repeat."

"Some of us more often than others." She gestures across the hall. "Francie goes to the sponge once a year, maybe more. I suspect her of monthly visits, even weekly."

"I suppose she doesn't like her memories," he says.

"She overdoes the forgetting. Her mind is always fresh for the next party. All washed, whirled, fluffed, tumbled, and spun dry. It could make me sad."

"It doesn't."

"No," Tourmaline says.

"You shouldn't hate her—" Sternig starts to say.

"Shut up," but her voice is still soft. "I know. Now get yourself that drink."

Periodically, but never so often as to compromise the privacy of the place, Tourmaline came to visit at the beach cottage. More than almost anything else, she loved to swim naked in the sea. Late in the afternoon, she lay with Francie on the swimming platform while Sternig fixed supper on the shore. She massaged the taut muscles of Francie's neck with strong, gentle fingers.

"Tell me why you're upset."

Francie denied it.

"No," Tourmaline said. "I've known you too long and too well."

Francie was silent for a while, allowing her

head to roll with the kneading of Tourmaline's fingers. "Are you afraid of dying?"

Tourmaline's voice was surprised. "Not any more."

"Not your body," said Francie. "I mean you."

"My mind?" Francie didn't answer. Tourmaline continued, "I'll think about it eventually."

"I've thought," said Francie, "and I'm afraid."

"Then for now, forget it."

"My father, did you know him?"

"No."

"He was too old for the treatments," said Francie, "but he lived well into his second century. As he grew older, something happened with his mind."

"Senility."

"That's it. He stayed with us and I watched him every day. I had to be extraordinarily quiet, or he would become upset. At times he didn't know me."

Tourmaline stroked Francie's hair soothingly. "Wasn't it a peaceful and gentle decline?"

"It was decay," said Francie, beginning to weep and muffling her voice in the plush towel. "He was buried when he was a hundred and thirty. My father died long before that."

Tourmaline kissed Francie gently. "Don't think about it," she said again. "Don't think."

Jack Burton intimidates. More than two meters tall, the Network star is proportionately muscled, and that muscle tissue is in exquisite tone. He does all his own stunt work. Only his flame-red hair is fake. Burton has backed Francie and Kandelman into a corner. Drunkenly, gait unsteady, he perorates:

"So I told them at the Network, 'Goddammit, guys, this is the best script we've picked up in the century. It's got drama, it's got meaning, it's got—goddammit—true seriousness.' You know what those bastards said?"

"No," Francie says, bored.

"Mannie!" Kandelman yells. "Get over here."

"They said," Burton continues. "They said . . . you won't believe what they said. The bastards."

Kandelman peeks past Burton's shoulder. "Goddammit, Mannie!"

"The bastards said it'd hurt my image."

Francie giggles. "We love your image, Jack."

"After all the shit melodrama. This was going to be *something*. A complete turning point for me—I mean, for the character. But the Network—"

Mannie arrives, agent, manager, keeper, lover. He puts his manicured hand on Burton's arm. "Party's over, Jack. Time to go home."

Burton's eyes widen maniacally, staring at the pair in the corner. He ignores Mannie. "The realization, you know? All cells in the body can regenerate. Anything can be renewed. Anything but brain cells."

Mannie's grip tightens. "Come on, Jack."

"An epiphany: when they die, they die. Forever, goddammit."

"Forget it," says Mannie. "Now come on."

"Forever." Burton's chin drops, the animation leaves his face. He begins to weep softly. Mannie, short and burly, leads Jack Burton away like a draft animal. They disappear in the crowd.

"Cortex," says Francie. "Gray matter." She dredges the shibboleths from some vagrant memory, then looks brightly up at Kandelman for approval.

"Cerebrum," says Kandelman sourly.

Francie doesn't really understand the game. "What?"

"Forget it." He stares speculatively at her breasts. "Come on. Let's go for a drive."

The party pavilion smolders with the muted colors of a thousand simulated tropical birds. Over the crowd-mutter sounds the whir of wings. Francie and Kandelman exit between twin columns of whirling doves. Feather-light touches brush against clothing.

Sternig watches. His jealousy is deeply embedded. The pair disappears beyond the pavilion and Sternig turns back to Tourmaline and his ever-present drink. Aware of her eyes, he frowns self-consciously. Her face betrays no judgment.

Yes, there was a time. . . . When was it, he wonders, or when will it be. A time, together. . . .

They hired a room, not on the water this time, but at an inn near the desert. They spent an hour wandering among the dunes. Francie wore her sunsuit, narrow yellow bands across the mahogany of her flesh, dark wood-stain skin that took on an added sheen of sweat.

She laughed and rolled down a slope, coming up at the dune's base with her skin lightly dusted with sand. She brushed the grit away from her eyes. "Let's go back to the room," she said. "I want a shower."

Out of the languorous heat, bodies clean and oiled, they made love. Francie shrieked and thrashed and bit and moaned and sucked and scratched. Eventually, during a quietus, he asked her if it had been good, and she, hesitating a long minute, finally answered, no, not exactly. He asked why not and she replied that she was never quite satisfied. He prodded for details. She attempted to explain.

"Sisyphic orgasm," he mused aloud.

She wanted to know what that meant so he began to explain the legena. She grew bored and touched his body, again hungry. He stopped talking and tried to kiss each inch of her skin.

Finally—again—she drew back shuddering from the brink.

As he was about to drift into sleep, Francie asked him to tell her something beautiful.

"There is no greater sorrow than to recall, in misery, the time when we were happy," he said.

"That's pretty."

"It's Dante," he said.

"Poor Sternig," says Tourmaline.

"Don't pity me."

"I don't. I hate pity. I'm only concerned."

Sternig scowls and says, "Don't be concerned about me."

She ruffles his hair slightly, as though he were a child, then runs an index finger along the underline of his jaw. "I like you, Sternig. You remind me of an ancient friend. I hate to see you hurting yourself, replaying old mistakes again and again."

"What happened to your friend?"

"Metaphorically dead," says Tourmaline flatly. "I think. Maybe he's mad and locked away somewhere. Or mad and running loose."

Sternig says, "I know what I'm doing."

"No," she says, "you don't. You may think you do."

"You think I should forget about Francie."

"Yes," she says patiently. "Yes. That's it."

"And if I don't?"

"You'll lose your mind, your soul; whatever, you'll lose it."

Sternig says thoughtfully, "I don't know."

Her brow creases with exasperation and anger. "Sternig, get off the carousel!"

Backseat sex, adolescence recollected in senility. Kandelman wheels Francie's car onto an eroded bluff overlooking the sea. Tonight the water is glassy. For a brief time they stare at the reflected stars extending out to the horizon.

Francie's gambit: "It's awfully beautiful."

Kandelman inwardly winces. "No more so than you."

"No talking," says Francie. "Please love me." She lies across the seat so her head settles in Kandelman's lap. She wonders when she last used the spray and how she smells.

Kandelman touches her hair, lifts her face toward him, kisses her tenderly at first, then harder. She lies back and he begins to massage her body, starting with her thighs. Tiny animal cries come from Francie's throat; she shivers as though with a chill. Kandelman's fingers stroke and stroke. He will save those wondrous breasts for the last, a gourmet dessert.

But when he does touch those breasts, naked to his eyes for the first time, his hands freeze in mid-motion. He again tentatively touches the breasts. And again stops.

Eyes closed, Francie says, "What's wrong?"

"They don't feel right," says Kandelman.

Francie opens her eyes. "Don't you like them?"

"They look great. But there's something—"

"I had them fixed just for you," cries Francie.

"Such a strange feel." Kandelman gingerly touches her with a finger.

Francie says angrily, "They're fine. They're nonallergenic. They're the best alloplastics I could—"

Kandelman interrupts. "They're not right. Something unnatural—"

"The nipples are electrostimulating. They're wired to—"

"I want a woman," says Kandelman.

Francie resorts to tears and Kandelman strokes her hair. She stops crying abruptly, raises her head, and extends an investigatory hand. "No," she says. "Don't go soft on me."

He tries to pass it off wittily, but fumbles. While the

silence lengthens, he stares out at the ocean. After a minute or two, he says, "How about a little game of stiff 'n' whiff?"

"Fuck you," she says.

Silence resumes until Kandelman, uncomfortable, shifts his position. Francie sighs, sits erect, and gazes out the window.

"Let's go back to the party."

The dance floor seems suspended in night. Tourmaline and Sternig sit at a table on the periphery. Couples drift past; groups, an occasional single.

"Sponge and renewal," says Tourmaline. They've been talking of the past again. "But time wears deeply. We tend to keep our lives in endless repetitions. The grooves are too deeply etched. It takes a supreme act of will to break free."

"I don't have that will," Sternig says. "I know that now."

"You knew that before. I can remember. Can't you?"

He looks at her mutely.

"How can you know," she asks, "but still not act on it?"

Sternig sees Francie waiting on the opposite side of the dance floor. She waves to him. He stands and looks bleakly down at Tourmaline. "Next time around, help me? Please?" He stammers slightly.

"Next time around," she says. "We can try."

Sternig leaves her. Halfway across the floor, he stops among the whirling dancers and smiles briefly and sadly back at Tourmaline.

She watches Francie and Sternig disappear in the dark. What she says is, "People receive the kind of lovers they deserve," but she knows she doesn't feel that. Tourmaline sighs; then scans the party crowd, seeking out the clean beauty of Marlene's bright hair.

Get FDR!

by
Robert Thurston

"When I wrote this story," comments Bob Thurston, "we were in the midst of a wave of nostalgia in which the 1920s had been replaced by the '30s as the decade of loving memory. It seemed strange to me that an era of depression, dust bowls, growing fascism, Huey Long, and the Townsend Plan could be so romanticized. I did not suspect that the craving for the past would creep further toward the present with so many offerings glorifying the '40s and '50s (remember the gay, carefree years of World War II, the spirit of fun at the McCarthy hearings?). Our need for nostalgia seems too desperate; we are using up the past much too fast. Yet perhaps the certainty of the past is a handy replacement for our wavering optimism, and the suavity of an FDR as a political figure is more appealing than those present-day leaders who are so adept at the sidestep (follow the Arthur Murray floor diagram), and No, No, Nanette *is a more honest and invigorating musical frolic than* Jesus Christ Superstar. *So—the contest question is: what are the* precise *differences between Howdy Doody and Martha Mitchell, the Andrews Sisters and the Burger Court, Donald Duck's nephews and the Buckley brothers, 79 Wistful Vista and 1600 Pennsylvania*

Avenue? All answers must be fifty words or less (unless you want to write more), illegible, and mailed by penny postcard. To be eligible for prizes, all entries must be postmarked no later than December 7, 1941."

I started the day with my normal exercise period. My philosophy of exercise is very simple. Try it. I run around my cold-water flat and, hard as I can, stomp on all the cockroaches I can find. Today I got a few ants, though where the hell they came from I don't know. But the novelty was exhilarating.

After exercise, a good breakfast. All I found in the cupboard not in a state of absolute decay was a package of Ritz crackers, about one-fifth full. I crammed them into my mouth by twos and threes. Around here nothing tastes as good as a Ritz cracker when your stomach is making grinding noises. I finished off the box, down to the broken pieces, which I balanced on my fingers before ingesting, down to the salty crumbs, which I licked off my fingertips.

Then Clarmonte barged in. (Clarmonte, what a phony name, especially the *e* at the end—the bastard is about as French as an iron flamingo.) It's lecture time, I found out. He sat me down and pulled on his stern face. It was *worn*, and nothing like a natural expression; you could almost see the elastic fitting under the jaw. He said I should keep my nose clean. I knew he meant Butch and Spanky, but I played innocent.

"You three are going to lose me my job yet," he said.

"Fuck your job," I said. "You don't belong here any more than we do."

"A sense of belonging is not required. All that's *required* is for you three to stay out of trouble."

I promised him I would try. What's one more lie when you're dealing with a dummy like Clarmonte? I knew I could run rings around him any day. He left, with more baleful warnings on how I would profit more if I co-operated. I said I would.

Too early to go meet Butch and Spanky, I just hung around the flat for the next hour or so. I flipped through a couple of the magazines Clarmonte had provided, a *Saturday Evening Post* and a wornout aged *Vanity Fair*,

dating back to 1926—a lot of sophisticated shit is all it was, full of tuxedos and smart fiction and profiles of mindless flappers and faddish philosophers. Clarmonte's prize mag was something called the *Literary Digest*, which had predicted a big victory for someone called Alf Landon over FDR. In case you didn't know, FDR won in a landslide and sent the *Literary Digest* to the wastepaper dump. I finally settled down with a *Liberty* and read a stupid piece envisioning how the sky of the future would be clouded with rocket-powered dirigibles (reading time: thirteen minutes, twenty seconds—hell, I could read it five times in 13:20).

I switched on the radio, another generous gift from the magnanimous Clarmonte. It crackled a lot and spit fire, but I managed to find some music, some Hit Parade selections, not too swingy but listenable. Anything to avoid the soapers and other housewifely drivel. I liked radio best for the adventure shows—Jack Armstrong, Dick Tracy, Hap Harrigan, all the other redbloods. But schmaltz music is okay, too. *Soon, These Foolish Things, Night and Day*, that type of shit.

I lay on the bed and moved at regular intervals just to hear the springs creak. Creaking springs is one of the few things I like in this whole place. I don't know why. I guess because the sound is not quite predictable.

I kept sneaking looks at the old clock on the wall. Time seemed stalled by the thick stiff hands of that ancient clock. What good was all this, what did I really get out of it, if all there was to do was bounce on a bed and listen to the dopey radio? Butch and Spanky felt the same way. We just couldn't see the point of it all. Last week I told Clarmonte that. He said something about existential nonsense.

From a drawer I took out my Mickey Mouse watch (which I never wear any more due to sneering from Butch and Spanky, assholes) and turned my back on the wall clock. Time passed better on old Mickey. It rushed by his grinning face. He liked it. He looked graceful at 1:50, awkward at 1:25. "Someday you're going to be a big deal," I said to the watch, patting its crystal.

Finally, God be praised, Allah be damned, it was time. Thanking Mickey, I put the watch back in the drawer. I had difficulty choosing a hat. Butch usually wore a fedora, Spanky a beanie, so I decided on a floppy golf cap, and went down to the vacant lot. Butch and Spanky were already there, Butch drawing pictures in the ground with

a stick, Spanky holding onto an old tire strung from a tree branch. He embraced it as if it were a long-lost love. Obscene.

"Hi, Satch," Butch said without looking up from his dust-art.

"Satch-o, old crumb," Spanky said in his Mortimer Snerd voice. Spanky liked to play the dummy, a role for which he had top qualifications.

We farted around the lot for a while, doing idle-deprived-youth-type things, then we went across the street to Shorty's Soda Shop, having the same argument all the way. Butch wanted to crack the monotony—go on a rampage, hold up a liquor store, beat up breadline rummies, vandalize private property, rape Shorty's daughter, hold a fund-raising musical show with the whole neighborhood chipping in (I could do my Russ Columbo imitation), crash out altogether, anything, anything to stop the interminable hanging around. Something to make everything worthwhile. Something to get Clarmonte *really* on our backs.

In front of Shorty's a guy with a boxful of apples stopped us. He said he had a family of thirteen to support. We told him to screw off. He said to be nice fellows, remember the suffering of the poor in this hated Great Depression. We all sighed at once. Anyone worth his salt can get in there and pitch without begging or living off welfare, we said, and went into the soda shop. Spanky gave the guy a kick in the shin as he passed him. The guy lost his balance and fell backward against an NRA sign. Always clowning, Spanky. The guy seemed pleased.

We sat down in a booth. I got to sit alone on the bad side where we'd slashed the leather near the wall. Shorty came charging out from behind the counter, wiping his hands on his already well-smudged white apron.

"How come you guys keep coming in here after when I tell you to stay out?"

"Pipe down, Shorty," I said. "This a free country, ain't it?"

"Not for bums like you, shouldn't be."

"You'd rather have Hitler for president, huh?" Spanky said. "Shorty, you really are a little fascist bastard."

That stopped him. Shorty didn't like his patriotism maligned. He'd wear the flag for an apron if that was the democratic way. We could always shut him up. Anyway, the only reason he was pissed at us was that he

knew we were all laying his daughter regular. Best head in the neighborhood, worth the price.

"Well," he said, weakly, "you guys shouldn't come in here less you got the money to pay. I'm no Rockefeller. I give you credit enough. Go work."

"Fuck off, Shorty," I said. "Get us a couple of Statues of Liberty, the three of us'll split 'em. And heavy on the whip cream and nuts, you little fairy."

"This time you paying?"

"Of course."

"Promise?"

"Cross my heart."

He always believed my promises. Cross my heart—anything endorsed by sacred ritual was okay with Shorty. Spanky offered to play something peppy on the juke, but Butch and I gave him dirty looks. Peggy, Shorty's daughter, came out of the back room. She lighted up when she saw us, but I stood up and turned my pockets inside out. She said everybody was stony lately, and left the store on her regular rounds. Spanky wanted to follow her, crowd her into an alley, and take turns for freebies, but Butch said no go.

"A couple minutes apiece," he said. "Then what? Six okay minutes, with monotony on both sides. No, we need somethin' better'n'at."

Shorty brought us the Statues of Liberty. The torch arm was dripping in chocolate. Whipped cream lay like a wilted cloud across the top. Nothing like it. I devoured my portion in record time. Shorty looked down at us, pleased. No matter how often we chiseled him, he always got a big kick out of the way we enjoyed his creations. It was a little spooky, eating under his stare, but, well, a Statue of Liberty almost makes you believe all that guff about the American Way. Spanky, always garrulous, talked with Shorty.

"You guys going to William Henry Harrison Avenue today?" Shorty asked.

"Why should we?"

"You don't know? Where you guys keep yourself, heads under a bushel?"

"Sounds like he is dealing with Current Events," Butch muttered.

"Current events?" Short hollered. "I should say so. Spit on Satan's grave, I should say so. You don't know what's happening at William Henry Harrison Avenue today?"

"Shirley Temple is accepting the Good Ship Lollipop

Award from the Association of American Child Molesters," I said.

"Caramel pussy," Butch muttered. Nobody understood that, which is not unusual with Butch, but since it seemed dirty we snickered.

"You ignorant loudmouths," Shorty said, "you don't read the papers!"

"Papers is for suckers," Spanky said. He knew his comebacks pretty well.

"I tell you slobs what you're too stupid to read for yourselves." He struck a pose, elocutionary. "Your president, Mr. FDR, will be at William Henry Harrison Avenue today."

He smirked. I shrugged my shoulders. Butch gave out with one of his theatrical, so-what-else-is-new yawns.

"Hey," said Spanky, "maybe we could crowd Eleanor into an alley and . . ."

"Imbeciles," screamed Shorty, and he stormed out of the room. Part of our prodding Shorty was calculated—we always got him in a huff so he'd walk out on us, then we slipped out without paying.

Out on the street again, there was still an hour of morning and all of afternoon to get through. We went to the tobacco shop and, while Spanky told the owner a dirty story, copped some smokes. On the way out, Spanky grabbed at the crotch area of the wooden Indian. Back to the vacant lot, we had trouble getting the butts lit in the wind that whipped across and stirred up tin cans. Bits of tobacco on my tongue, nothing like a good loose-packed Camel. I inhaled deeply and really dug the feeling of smoke tearing at the inside of my lungs.

"What a life," Butch sighed. "What a fucking life."

"You know it," I said. "Whattaya want to do?"

"I don't know. Seems like I've done everything I ever really want to do around here. Clarmonte give you any idea how much longer?"

"He never says."

"He's got lips like clamshells."

"You know it."

Long pause. Spanky improvised some scat-singing.

"Ah, I'm just sick of it," Butch finally said. "I need some movement, some action. You think Clarmonte'd let us join up with the Nazis? I mean, go to Hitler and all?"

"You kidding?"

"Yeah, I guess. Ah, hell, little toady underarm shit."

Spanky and I looked at each other, shrugged. Another of Butch's private remarks. He got angry if you asked.

But something in Butch's eyes set me off. He had that way about him—when he was desperate, he inspired you. If he needed a solution to a problem, you racked your brain for it.

"Why not go over to William Henry Harrison Avenue and cheer at the old prez?" Spanky said.

"God," Butch said, nodding toward Spanky, "the plumber's friend."

But in my mind pictures were flashing by at high speed. Almost too fast, I nearly missed the message. I made tight fists, shut my eyes, and put myself under control. I slowed down the pictures until I had the idea set into one still frame of beautiful violence. Then I let out a yowl, danced around, grabbed Spanky, danced him around with me. He stuck his hand into my crotch and said he always knew I was that way. Butch just stared.

"Tell me!" he shouted.

I separated myself from Spanky and went into Shorty's elocution pose.

"I have devised something to do," I said in my British voice. "We shall go to William Henry Harrison Avenue and there, in the light of the sun, in full view of the crowd, with sabers gleaming, we shall assassinate the President of these United States."

Pretty hammy, but necessary to punch home the point. Butch just went on staring. Spanky laughed, thought it was a big joke.

"I mean it. We've got the knowhow, the guts, we can do it." Open mouth from Butch, strange eyes from Spanky. "C'mon, we can show the old liberal phony what's what."

Silence, then they both started shooting words at me, rapid-fire.

"We can't—"

"Sure we can."

"It's im—"

"Au contraire, chums. Easy."

"It's against the—"

"Where does it say it? Where?"

"Clarmɔnte'll—"

"You bet he will. You *bet* he *will!*"

More silence, then Butch began to nod his head.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah. Talk about bursting the bubble . . ."

Spanky hesitated, then smiled.

"I'm in," he said.

Followed by a long talk on how. That was the real hitch, how. Explosives were out; not enough time to gather materials and put them together. We could lay our hands on a couple of guns but, with our reputation, somebody would be immediately suspicious, and besides, the kind of artillery available to us, the rust'd give you lockjaw. Poison would be difficult to administer under the circumstances. No, there was only one way, one risky way, and we knew it from the start. The long knives.

This really excited Butch. Danger, the real McCoy. I could see joy grow in his eyes, the long knives seemed already reflected there, flashing. In minutes he had it all worked out. (I had to let him plan the operation; he loses interest if I lead too much. I have to pretend to be second in command.)

Using the stick, he showed us the plan in the dust. I was amazed at how easily he understood my intentions. Somehow he knew that everything must be worked out simply. Elaborate plots, with too many parts, afford too many risks. With Butch it was just conceal, take position, move together, bull forward, leap, scream, and slice. Exactly what I had in mind.

We got the knives from our cache, taped to the upper inside wall of the coal bin in Shorty's basement. We hid everything there. Shorty never looked up, the coal deliveryman never looked down.

After we spent the best part of an hour polishing, the knives gleamed; moving on the surface of the metal were wonderland versions of Butch, Spanky, and me against backgrounds whose lines reached to infinity.

"Satch, you're beautiful," Butch said. "A sixth-form paragon."

I felt proud. Butch could always puff me up. When we were kids, before we got sent up, he saw my shyness and brought me out of it. If not for him, I'd probably have been wandering around the whole place like a mute, doing nothing, learning nothing. Instead I had his narrow eyes on me, a gaze that made me do my best. Especially here, especially during this stupid Great Depression.

Concealing the knives was the tough part, the one area where we could screw up. I mentioned that one presidential assassin—was it McKinley's or Garfield's or somebody else's?—hid a gun in a sling for a broken arm. This started Butch's brain working. We couldn't tape them to our bodies or hide them in our clothes, he said, they

might be looking for that. No, the best idea was to get to the scene early and hide the knives near our positions. Then, just before time, we could get them and go into action. If by chance somebody discovered a knife before the assassination, well, no skin off our ass; whoever's it was, was scrubbed from the operation. The best part of the plan was that there was no risk beforehand of getting picked up by a cop for carrying a weapon.

Spanky and I agreed, and we all set out for William Henry Harrison Avenue. The wind had picked up in velocity. It whipped in and around us. Shivers went up and down my back, I don't know whether from the wind or our plan. Garbage cans rolled along the sidewalk. Papers from out of them slapped against our arms.

"Who ordered this little breeze?" Spanky said, making conversation.

"Not me. Too impractical."

"That's what's wrong around here, too impractical."

"I guess that's what it's all about, isn't it?"

He looked at me funny.

"Well, yeah, I guess. If it was practical, that'd be too good, right?"

"Right, Spanky. Methods for madness and all that."

"Bullshit," Butch said. "Cotton-candy breadline hand-outs."

Involuntarily, I started to ask what he meant this time, but I checked myself in time.

"Just another block," Spanky said. "Hey, Satch."

"What?"

"You sure this is a good idea? I mean, *sure?*"

"Positive. It's the only way."

"I don't know."

"Think about it. Think of yourself plunging your knife into FDR. FDR, man! Put an end to the ultra-politician, give it right to the fucker in his wheeling-dealing fat middle."

"I don't know. Something's wrong. I mean, he's a cripple, ain't he?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"A *real* cripple."

"How do I know if it's real or not? Might be fake. You never know about politicians."

"But if Clarmonte—"

"Fuck Clarmonte."

We got to William Henry Harrison Avenue. Just in time, as it turned out. Crowds were already forming,

pockets of people holding their positions. A few minutes later and our plan would have been shot to hell. As it was, we had to rush to our places and, acting as casual as possible, dispose of the knives. I put mine, in its bag, in an open trash can. Butch wedged his in the joint of an awning pole at a fruit stand. It couldn't be seen from the street because the stand was so overcrowded with products (no doubt set out for the presidential visit—good old Depression spirit, maintain a cheerful front and all that). Spanky, as nonchalant as you please, not looking to right or left, climbed onto a windowsill and put his knife on the upper ledge. Then there was nothing to do but wander around and once in a while look up the street, craning our necks as if we were eager for the old prez's visit. In a way we were more eager than anyone else on the street. We split up in order to stay, like sentries, near our chosen positions.

People kept oozing out of sidestreets and jumping out of old jalopies. Gradually they staked claims on every square inch of the curb, in places became two, three, and four deep. I began to worry. How could our timing possibly work out? But Butch had said, the more people the better. We would stand out less as we made our move. Sliding our way through the crowd, we'd be that much more inconspicuous. Then—all they'd see would be flashes of light from attacking steel and it'd be over before a Secret Service man could reach into his jacket. Watching the crowd gather, feeling the assault of the severe wind, not seeing the plan as clearly as I did in the vacant lot, I was no longer so sure this was the right thing to do. I thought of Clarmonte this morning, warning me to keep my nose clean as if he had had a clairvoyant vision. I had lost the sense of game, which had made the plan so exciting in the first place.

I felt a double-tap in my back, against the lower-rib area. My God, I thought, have they found me out already, has a special agent doped it out and nuzzled his automatic against my rib cage? Turning around, I readied several protests, several excuses. No cheap Fed was going to ballyhoo me. But it wasn't a Fed, it was just Shorty reaching up to nudge me.

"Smart kid," he said. "You lied. Again you lied. What are you, you a Red or something? Next time you pay or you bruise your keister raw on my front sidewalk."

"Hi, Shorty," I said.

He gave me one of his who-you-kidding looks. Relieved at seeing him, I laughed.

"What are you anyway doing here?" he said. "This morning you're too good to come see President Mr. FDR. You make like you're ignorant, like who's he, this president? You, a guy who orders two Statue of Liberties and then expects to get 'em for free. The privileged Mr. Satch!"

"How come you don't allow Negroes in your establishment, Shorty?"

"You know why. Ask your Mr. Clarmonte. That man, you could learn from him. But, no, you guys are too smart. You guys say fuck the system, don't go along. You know what? Everything was going okay around here, everything working like a charm, until you three showed up from—"

"You're pretty shrewd for a shrimp, I didn't think—"

"You didn't think. Of course not. Mr. Clarmonte, he talks to me about you guys all the time, comes in the place and orders a Grant's Tomb with a cherry on top, and he tells me all about you guys. I'm not supposed to tell you, but you're all so stupid I—"

"Good show, Shorty. I bow to your moral superiority. How come you cheat on your change, how come you cut corners on your materials?"

"Imbecile. How can I cut corners? Cut the head off the Statue, take pillars off Grant's Tomb?"

"I can tell by the whipped cream."

"I have no choice on that."

"You'd make a good German, Shorty. What're you doing here?"

"You sonuvabitch. You'll learn."

"Ah, stow it. I'll see you later. I'll come by and cheat you out of another Statue."

"Step on the cracks, sonuvabitch. You'll learn or you'll never make it out."

"Who cares? I like this Depression, Shorty. Anything that keeps you and me together."

I left him wiping his hands furiously on his apron (he never took off that goddam apron), his flat little face pinched in anger.

I had to rotate my shoulders often to get through the crowd, which was now getting impatient, shifting weight nervously, getting as much movement in as possible in the little territory they possessed. Men moved through the crowd, selling apples, selling pencils, anything. Women,

selling. I felt a sharp pain in the pit of my stomach. The crowd looked so terrible, so sad, so wrong. I didn't know what was the matter with me. Some sort of Depression blues. I had it, or they had it, one or the other. I looked at faces—tired, almost bored, most of them constricting their facial muscles to hold their expressions steady. Or were they really faceless, wearing masks they had chosen long ago? It was the faces that were really wrong. The crowd did not seem diverse enough—not enough young faces, too many old ones. Maybe too many Depression faces, how the fuck should I know? Who cares about these dumb bastards? Who cares about the suffering that brought them to this street in the first place to cheer a man, or their conception of a man, so remote from them?

Somebody grabbed my upper arm and pulled. I nearly went crashing into a brick wall. I wrenched myself free, ready to fight, ready to avoid capture. But again it wasn't necessary, again my apprehension clouded my logic. It was just Clarmonte.

"Strange place to find you," he said.

"Just doing a field-study on patriotism, civics."

"I saw Butch and Spanky. Why aren't you guys together like usual? You're not very convincing spectators, any of you. You look like you're here on business. What's up—pickpocketing, dope, knocking over a fruitstand?"

You see what you want to see, I guess. Suddenly I felt safe from Clarmonte—and, for that matter, anyone.

"Why do you keep figuring we're going to do some cheap, crooked thing?" I asked.

"What else?"

"You've never caught us at anything, have you? Aside from chiseling Shorty, which is part of the accepted style of life around here, what've we done wrong? Since we came to your district, you've had nothing but your own bias to go on."

"Sure, that and the past. I have it on file. You three are never to be trusted and should be kept under surveillance wherever you're sent. It's there in black and white."

This seemed to be the day for revealing confidential information. Nothing like a big event to set mouths flapping. Among them, mine:

"Okay, *Mr.* Clarmonte, I take it back. I lied when I said we've done nothing wrong. We've been working against you all the time. You should *watch* us. You'll have to if you want to put us down. It's a historical fact, maybe a historical imperative. You guys that defend the

fort, keep the peace, support the corruption that supports you, you've all got to keep on your toes. That's your attitude, isn't it? Keep your eye on the radicals. Give 'em a little line, then rein in when they're landed. Maybe you'll do all right. But you've got to keep watching, Clarmonte, keep that old eye peeled."

I walked away from him without looking back. I felt that if I turned around I'd see him wiping his hands on his apron, and leaving bloodstains.

The crowd hushed and a strange, almost mechanical rumble began to surge from them. From away down the street, a cheer. He was coming, you could hear hundreds of voices say it. Three or four blocks away.

My heart pounded; I could look down and see its throbbing in shirt-pocket tremors. Get moving, I told myself, but somebody had dumped cement into my legs. I moved slowly. The mummy walks. I lost my bearings. Where the hell did I stash the knife? How many goddam trash cans were there on this block? Then I remembered a window with a long, incredibly fruitful flower bed above the trash can. I located that quickly and took up my position by the can. Trying to be at ease about it, I leaned down slightly and felt for the bag with knife. Lifting it up, I glanced inside as if I were checking that my peanut-butter sandwich was safe. Even in the darkness of the bag, the knife caught light from somewhere and flickered in one spot brightly. I closed the bag quickly, afraid that somebody might see, that someone at the right angle would be blinded and scream out.

The crowd excitement increased. Their anticipation could be felt. I tried to see Butch and Spanky, but there were too many people in between us. What if they're not at their positions? I thought. What if they've cooked up this plot between them—they're not going to rush forward at all, they're going to stay back and watch me fly out of the crowd alone. But of course I knew I could trust them. I tried to steady my nerves.

Behind me, through the open window, the faint sound of a radio playing. As the crowd became quieter I could hear the program—"Easy Aces." To clear my mind I concentrated on listening. I could hear only phrases. Something about the Aces' aunt going on a hunger strike. It seemed to me I'd heard that one more than once, but I couldn't be sure. I could never quite listen to the radio with the avid enthusiasm that others showed.

I jiggled the bag a couple of times to make sure the knife was still there. The cheering was nearer now.

"Whatcha got in there, Satch?"

It was Peggy and she was beside me and she was pointing at the bag.

"Uh, nothing, Peg."

"You say so. I certainly don't care."

She stared at me in that funny hangdog way of hers.

"He's coming. You won't see him very well from back here."

"I'll see him all right."

"He looks good. I've seen him twice, once two blocks ago, once the block before that. I didn't think he'd look so good. You know?"

"Sure, they always surprise you up close."

"That, yeah. But this is more, this is—"

"Peggy, shut up."

"He's still on the last block, you can tell. He's got some guy with him, some Oriental guy. Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat Sen, Charlie Chan, somebody important. I don't know who."

"You better get set up if you want to see him a third time."

"I don't care. That sure don't look like a lunch bag, Satch."

"Never said it was."

"You don't hold it like a lunch bag. You hold it like it's your life's fortune."

"It is, in a way."

Another cheer, down the block. You could see those in our sector set their feet, ready to lean forward.

"Satch?"

"Peg, I don't feel like talking now. I, uh, I want to see the man."

"Satch, can I come to your room tonight?"

"I'm stone broke."

"Honey, no money necessary. Tipping is un-American. We can forget about that pretense, I'm tired of it. I just want to be with you for a while."

Although I was afraid to look at her, I could tell by her voice that she was on the verge of crying.

"I can't stand the doing it in shacks, back alleys, standing up in doorways. It's so stupid to play that game just because—just because, I don't know, just because of the stupid Great Big Depression or whatever it is. I need a place of my own, a room with a bed that I can come

back to anytime. I need a guy of my own. I sound like the pictures, I should stay away from them."

My face must have gone through several contortions. I felt like an absolute idiot. The cheers were practically next door, I could hear the car motors, and here I was listening to a muddleheaded broad. And the *trouble* was, at that moment when I should have been planning how I was going to draw the knife and slip through the crowd in front of me, at that moment I was thinking about Peggy, past times, and how much I liked her. I knew I couldn't stop for her now, that we wouldn't be rendezvousing in my room tonight, but I heard a sadness in her voice that found some matching sorrow of my own, and I felt regret.

"You're always tender to me," she was saying, "and that's damn hard to find around here. Everybody's too mean, too old, or too soft. Only logical, I guess. But the punishment—"

I had to move right then. I chanced one look as I went sideways and forward. Stopped in midsentence, she had that astounded look that receivers of rudeness usually have. And, in spite of the Shorty features she'd inherited, she looked quite pretty.

How I got through that crowd, and with such perfect timing, I'll never know. It's amazing how soft and pliable human bodies are when you take them by surprise, push and shove them aside. I popped through the front rank with such force that I almost fell to the cobblestones. Regaining equilibrium, I saw that the president's limousine was right in front of me. At the same moment I also saw Butch and Spanky sprinting toward me from the other side of the street. The bag was falling away from Butch's knife, Spanky's was already drawn. My hand had been on my knife's handle as I plunged through the crowd. I drew it out of the bag like a cavalier withdrawing his sword from the scabbard. In the flash of the blade I seemed to see the face of the nameless ornately dressed soldier who'd given us the knives in the first place.

There were men walking beside the car and standing on its running boards, but we caught them by surprise. Why not, they were just a bunch of Clarmonte-type finks, anyway. I leaped forward, onto the running board, at the same time nudging the guard, who then lost balance and swung away from me.

The Chinese guy was on my side, standing up, holding onto a rail attached to the front seat and waving at upper

windows. He didn't see me. FDR—sitting down, of course—was obscured from me. Although I could not allow myself to be conscious of it, I could hear some gasps of shock behind me mingled with the loud cheers. I also had to block from awareness somebody shouting to somebody else to go get that bastard.

As I landed on the leather seat, I stumbled forward and practically onto the president's lap robe. I wound up on my knees beside him, almost leaning on his shoulder like a tired-out child. He looked at me quizzically, his pince-nez perched at a slight angle. I could almost hear his thoughts, hear that elegant fireside-chat diction, saying what in the world is happening here. Wasn't he prepared for an assassination attempt, hasn't he been taught to expect one? I thought. I was really mixed up, taken in for a moment. Of course he wasn't prepared. Anyway, wasn't he supposed to think there was nothing to fear but fear itself?

While my mind got trapped in these stupid questions, my arms had ignored the muddle in my head. Without thinking about it, I tossed the knife from my right hand to my left, to take advantage of the better angle. Not taking the chance of a long arc, I tightened my grip on the handle and thrust the knife forward, and at the same time my body leaned toward my victim to give greater leverage to the blow. His face, so fatherly and filled with apparent kindness, became distorted with fear. He seemed to try to twist his crippled body away from me. As the knife touched the cloth of his suit, about breast-pocket level, I pushed even harder, with all my strength. A fraction of a second after me, another knife plunged in his right side. I looked up. Spanky. As I pulled out my knife, I backed away, and saw Spanky pulling at the handle of his weapon; somehow he had lost leverage. I looked for Butch. He was toward the front of the car, his neck being twisted by a cop. Poor Butch, I thought, one way or another he always misses out.

Behind me I could hear screams of agony from the crowd. Bastards, trying to shut out reality, they deserved this. As I started another knife thrust I could hear, perhaps with some sort of selective tuning in my head, Clarmonte shouting, seemingly very close to me:

"Stupid bastards! I should've seen it, seen it coming! You ought to be happy this time, bastards! This time you did it, you stupid fuckers. You got what you wanted, complete ruin, you stupid heartless fuckers."

Maybe I didn't hear Clarmonte's voice rising above the

crowd. Maybe I heard myself taking his guise for protection.

Anyway, you never saw hell break loose or anything bust up quicker than it did right then. We were stupid in a way. We never took into account what might have happened if the crowd had decided our crime was punishable by trampling or lynching. I guess we instinctively realized the incapacity for action of that type of enclaver, nostalgia and all that.

Lights, concealed cleverly, were set ablazing, making everybody's hand go to his forehead to shade his eyes. The wind was shut off, clouds froze in position, TV screens dropped down like manna. Loudspeakers clicked on and orders came out faster than it took to make sense out of them. Finally order was restored. People filed away, their shoulders slumped as if they'd lost something besides the Great Depression. The repair squad took FDR away.

Clarmonte, as you might imagine, just wouldn't stop haranguing us. He came up with some good new epithets. We tried to banter with him, but bantering seemed kind of puny, so we just listened. Clarmonte gave us the big lecture on the System and How It Was Trying to Work with Us.

I was lucky enough to get a phone call in the midst of this. My father. He was very disconsolate in his quiet, left-of-middle way. He said he guessed as how learning the trials and tribulations of the past was not possible, at least in one of the enclaves. Enclaves were for people who *needed* the past, he said, for people who could live better then. Come home for a while, Stephen, he said. I said I would.

Clarmonte was about talked-out when I returned. He reminded me of a professor long ago, who sat in a corner and stared vacant-eyed at us as we destroyed his laboratory and his research files. As we left Clarmonte, he mumbled:

"Remember all the people whose minds you guys've blown, the people who came to the Depression for therapy or escape. Many of 'em won't go anywhere else now, afraid you guys'll show up."

Outside his office a little man was waiting for us. He smiled crookedly and congratulated us. He said he was very stimulated by our act and had had a big laugh out of it when he heard. People like you are rare, he said,

and invited us to come to his enclave. He stood stiffly. I recognized him from a photograph in one of the Depression newspapers, by his hair combed over his forehead and his comic little square mustache. Like FDR, he was a good facsimile. He said he thought we were good boys and awarded each of us the Iron Cross.

At the Second Solstice

by

James Sutherland

Jim Sutherland is a product of the Rochester Institute of Technology and was my chief cook, bottle washer, and general honcho at the second running of the Clarion workshop. In this subtle story, he brings into conjunction two prevalent science-fiction themes: human metamorphosis for adaptability and—the Amchitka test is something I don't want to think about.

He writes: "The idea began with a picture of a man standing atop a broken headland somewhere, waiting for some event to take place in the sea below. This little scene haunted me for about three years, and the story which incorporates it went through at least a dozen versions. It began as a projected novel, shrank to novella length, was cut to a novelette, and compressed to a short story. Thank God you bought it before the poor thing dwindled away to a one-liner . . ."

Before he returned to the house, Raveson inspected the alarm system on the island's south side. The departed sea-rain left it damp but workable, so he followed the path to his door and pulled it open. A wet wind, full of salt, gusted up, and Mrs. Raveson told him to hurry inside and close the door.

"You always forget," she said to him. "There's no way to keep the drafts out when you do that."

He returned a neutral grunt and began to unlace his sodden parka.

"It's only a temporary dome," he finally said as he hung his boots to dry.

She looked up at him.

"This one's too damn temporary. There was another tremor."

"I know."

"It was like someone scraping his fingernails on a blackboard." She shivered and nervously stroked a brass mandala that hung around her neck on a silver chain. "It broke that"—one of her crystal zodiacal figurines lay smashed on the vinyl parquetry. She sighed deeply.

Some books had toppled on the shelf, Raveson noticed, and she had hastily propped them up against one another, her books and his. A row of astrology paperbacks, and *Limits of Oceanography* by D. L. Raveson. His and hers.

Very suddenly he felt his middle age.

Nobody in his graduating class had ever given the occult more than an amused, lofty smile in passing, if they noticed it at all. It was something for the proles, it was escapism. He still remembered the shock when he began teaching a few years later, and found the situation reversed. In the end he came to tolerate it, as he tolerated the Protocin experiments, the steady interference by congressional sub-committees.

Raveson watched the mandala hanging above her breasts, and asked her if she would feel safer leaving the island.

"No," she decided. "It's just temporary, anyway." She started the cleaner, and the broken glass was swept into the rubbish. Rain began to splatter against the windows. "If only there were something to *see*," she said in the tone of a bored tourist.

They sat in silence, listening to the rain-wind outside.

"It might have been a sign," said Mrs. Raveson at last.

"What?"

"That tremor this morning, it could have been a sign."

Raveson had long ago given up replies of any sort to his wife's pronouncements; he nodded his head slightly.

"I realize you don't care about that," she said, "but this is the first time in *months* . . ." Her voice rose excitedly.

The rain ended and the dome was filled with red winter sunlight that changed the pastels within to shades of amber

and brown. "I'm going out," said Raveson awkwardly, as if he were sounding a retreat for himself. He put on his parka, dropped a fresh fuel cell into the stem of his binoculars, and glanced at the barometer by the door. It was steady. When he turned around, he saw that his wife was in her coat and boots.

They went by the worn trail that skirted several mounds of rotting wood and masonry and a rusting truck and trailer. Pools of rainwater filled the hollows. At the cliff edge, the trail ended at a lean-to grown around with feathery yellow seagrass. She looked quickly away from the fifty-foot drop down to the rocky estuary.

The Pacific extended south and east in a wide curve, its surface dotted by myriad other islands, cays and reefs: the wreckage of the Second Quake. Over the open ocean, clouds the color of pewter loomed like massifs. A hawk flew a transit of the sun. Mrs. Raveson reclined against the side wall of the lean-to, talking occasionally and finally sleeping.

Raveson's eyes tired of the glare on the ocean, and he lowered the binoculars and closed his eyes tightly against the familiar panorama of sea and sky and islands. How many prophets and seers had anticipated this desolation? he wondered. And how many had been secretly pleased when their seismic prediction shook itself into violent existence one sunny morning? Most of them, Raveson guessed. Prophecy and compassion rarely were combined in a person's being. He wiped the lenses clean of salt and began searching again.

His wife woke and slept again.

The afternoon sun arced down from zenith.

Near dusk, he saw them. An albino dolphin leading a pack of common grays swung to windward of a foggy islet. Raveson left the shelter without disturbing his wife's sleep, scrambled down the cliffside path to the dock, and triggered the alarms.

A siren wailed.

One by one, sodium-vapor lamps flickered on in the estuary until the sea glowed in the thickening night.

The dolphins responded, turning sharply in the surf toward Raveson's island. As soon as he was satisfied they were approaching the estuary properly, he cut power to the siren and listened to the sound falling through the octaves before it faded into the noise made by the waves drumming along the shore. The dolphins edged by a sand-bar and continued on into still water. There, the albino

herded the others into the deep center of the bay, well away from the jutting dock and the cliff walls.

From the crown of rock above, Mrs. Raveson saw the silhouette of her husband walk the length of the dock and heard him whistle forcefully. The albino turned its head toward him, chattering. The grays floated together in the luminous pool, aloof.

With a graceful undulation, the albino curved alongside the dock. It looked up at the man with ferociously intelligent eyes, then it slowly rolled over in the water, tail flukes drooping. The man leaned over the passive animal and touched the ice-white flesh, gently probing the curved surface.

Mrs. Raveson trembled in her coat.

He separated a narrow flap of skin, and quickly extracted a gleaming metal cylinder. The dolphin thrashed, twisting itself upright and sinking back in the water until only its broad head remained above the surface. Raveson slowly stood, all the while looking steadily at the dolphin and speaking to it in a low murmuring voice.

Its dorsal fin cleaving the water, the albino moved from the dock before it dived. It passed along the channel, like smoke in the water, and vanished. The gray dolphins followed, slipping away, past the sandbar and the reefs. Raveson turned the lights down and extinguished them after a while, and ascended the path.

His wife was waiting, still in her heavy coat, when he entered the house.

"That was an affectionate little scene."

"I wasn't aware I had an audience," he replied, evading her eyes.

"Well, it's what you waited for."

He held the cylinder, his bare hand feeling the vague electronic warmths suffusing the machine.

"I suppose now we can go home?"

"Yes, I'll give Denver a call tonight," said Raveson. He placed the shining cylinder on the table and deactivated it. Gradually the metal shell cooled.

"I can't imagine you're that anxious to leave this place," she said carefully.

"Why?"

"Those dolphins might be returning."

"No," he said firmly. "They won't."

She persisted to know.

"The work is done. The project is finished." He glanced at his wife, then at the recorder. "All nine years of

migratory tracks, feeding patterns, currents, and temperatures: all taped." The cylinder sat on the table between them.

"Whatever use can it be?" Raveson sensed in her some half-remembered resentment that was surfacing. "So we just pick up and leave for the university, where you write another book about what's inside that?" she said in a rush. "That's all? That's all?"

"There's nothing else."

"Nothing?" She was incredulous. "That white dolphin there in the bay, that was a Protocin case, wasn't it?"

"Of course she was," Raveson answered dully. He felt pinned to his chair, immobile.

"And she is going to stay—out *there*—after we vacate?"

"She stays." Raveson pushed himself up in his chair and put the cylinder in a lined case. "Protocin is like that," he said quietly. "She knew that it was only one way. One can't go switching around, like something out of Ovid."

"It's like suicide," his wife replied, shaken.

"She wasn't suicidal." Raveson tried to continue, but the lie must have shown on his face, and he gave up pretense. "Something must compensate for it."

He recalled something of what he had seen from trips on the oceanographic survey subs. Beyond the windows green light flooded down from a silver-film sky; fish streaked, weightless, through infinite stretches of water. Color, light, limitless motion. There were compensations.

Mrs. Raveson went to the cabinet and filled two tumblers with a mauve liqueur and ice.

"Celebration?"

"Of course," she told him happily. "We're going home."

Raveson drank and got up to fill his glass again. The floor moved, and Raveson heard the groaning island shifting its roots. Mrs. Raveson reached for him, terrified. Just before he grasped her arm, Raveson thought of the Pacific churning in violence outside, of Protocin, of all the lives to come dissolving into the emptiness; it came down upon him like a furious rain, and he wondered how the new world coming could ever compensate for the one he so clearly knew he was losing.

You Are What You Write

by
Harlan Ellison

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec once ventured, "One should never meet a man whose work one admires; the man is always so much less than the work."

More likely a truism when applied to writers than any other breed of creator. Ibsen, for instance, was a choleric, flint-hearted man seemingly incapable of warmth or openness in his personal life who, when advised by his sister of his mother's death, didn't even bother to answer the letter for four months. Poe was a drug addict, drunk, bankrupt, a thorough inept in handling his day-to-day existence, a man so unable to thread his way through the skein of life that even after he had collected and edited his complete works, he entrusted them before his death to his bitterest, most implacable enemy. Dostoevsky was a self-destructive machine who gambled, lied, stole, borrowed from his friends and never repaid them, deserted his family, and spent most of his life fascinated by violence. Céline was an anti-Semite. Coleridge was so much a slave to laudanum that, being interrupted in the writing of "Kubla Khan," he was unable for some time to remember what his inspiration next commanded to be done. Wilde, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Baldwin, Mailer, all supported or support lives of incredible time-wasting and confusion, at odds with themselves and their natures.

Wilde, in fact, wrote, "To reject one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development. To deny one's own experience is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. It is no less than a denial of the Soul." Yet that writer's soul was more often in torment than peace; one can only conjecture as to what benefits and roadblocks his surrender to his "experiences" brought to his work.

The writer lives a schizoid life. Man or woman, the writer exists in dreams set down on paper or trapped in thought, while at the same time struggling through the real world, trying desperately to gain sufficient peace of mind and economic stability to spend those endless, introspective hours actually *working*. The dichotomies between what a writer writes and who he *is* produce in all but the most integrated, best-oriented individuals fractures of the personality, confusions of motivation, barriers to the imagination. The writer seems always to be struggling with the Mr. Hyde of his real self.

And if it was always an occupational hazard for the sensitive who make their way with words, how much more pressing a problem it must be for young writers today, living in the most complex time the human race has ever known? A generation obsessed with establishing its own order, forming its own morality, finding answers to the great problems of our time. Granted, the search for truth and peace and glory is hardly a discovery of today's youth, but there has never been a time like this, never been a tenor of revolution that threatens (happily) to alter the course of life as we know it. And so, though they face the same problems every man and woman has faced since the first clan cultures came into being, they do it in a time of machines, computerization, incredible pressures, the full realization that the universe is open to them, and bearing a weight of massed knowledge the ancients would have thought impossible. It seems to me their row is a much tougher one to hoe.

For a professional sf writer coming to the teaching/learning situation of a Clarion workshop (whether at Clarion State College in backwater Pennsylvania, or Tulane in cockroach-ridden New Orleans, or the vacuum of Seattle and the University of Washington's workshop), the core nature of the schizoid dichotomy becomes more than apparent: it becomes pivotally frightening.

At the workshops, a "guest instructor" deals not only with manuscripts, he deals with souls.

Bodies that are masses of exposed nerve ends, bundled muscle fiber, eyes as big as some deranged Keane abomination, jigsaw intellects with pieces lying around somewhere waiting to be fitted in. They feel safe only with their typewriters, and most of them don't even feel safe *there*. They've been all alone in their little towns, in their Tolono, Illinois', their Garfield Heights, Ohios, their Taze-

well, Virginias. They've had these wild, frenzied dreams and story-visions. And for the most part their teachers and parents have stood back a little awed and scared by them. Obviously *some*thing is going on with those mutant children, but what the hell *is* it? They've been either certifiable misfits, outcasts, laughed at and driven into their own skulls . . . or they've been the talented teacher's pets, winning what dumb little awards there were to be won, and doing it with their left hands, hardly straining.

But that was another world. Now they're in with other winners, other introverted losers with win in them, and the gods. That's us. The "guest instructors." Gods. Oh, wow.

It is to laugh.

(Now I can tell you, kids, all of you. I've learned more from you than I *ever* taught you. I wouldn't trade a day of the weeks over the past four years I've come to you, to "teach" you, for all the years of school that were supposed to have taught me how to write. Here's the secret, troops: *you* are the teachers. Not us. We just pack around the credentials, all that historical bullshit you'll realize was mustard and waterfalls. Just wait, you'll see.)

But they *think* we're the big time. And that accounts for paralysis. So whatever they are in Tolono or Tazewell solidifies into amber, and their facades are impenetrable. How do you get through the fear and the pride and the suspicion? How do the other kids get through? To each other, to me, to Damon and Kate, or Robin, or Joanna or Fred or Fritz or Chip, or Ursula? They want out, we want in, and it's like the Kurt Weill song about the bird of passage—we look at each other "across tens of thousands, thousands of miles."

Two years ago, I found a way. And it worked. I didn't expect it to work, but it did, and I want to tell you about it, and them—about those lovely souls—and about how teachers learn.

It begins with a concept that came out of Synanon, the used-to-be drug rehabilitation center that now calls itself a social movement. The concept is not a new one, but as codified in the Synanon "game" it seems to me to be at its most valid, viable, workable.

It equates with one of the basic tenets of behavioral psychology, the idea that it doesn't matter *why* you do what you do—dope till you can't remember what century you're working, drink till you stink of sour sweat, beat

your wife, constantly exist in the doldrums, overeat, alienate the opposite sex, get no work done, lie pathologically, see everything around you in cynical negative terms—it doesn't matter *what* caused it, whether it was because your mommy locked you in a closet when you were two years old or you were raped at the age of thirteen or your father ran off with a topless macramé artisan last year. It simply, flat-out *doesn't matter*. Whatever you're doing to yourself that's destroying you, that makes you unhappy, that makes you hide behind a false face and exist in a world of nameless fears with no ego-strength and no fulfillment . . . whatever it is, *stop doing it*. Just stop. Later, when you're not doing it any more, when you feel better about yourself, we can figure out what adolescent trauma caused it.

So, to the end that we are able to *recognize* what it is in our manner, in our life-style, in our facade, that alienates others, that makes us unhappy, a situation must be created in which *what we seem to be* gets discussed by others. Not who we are really, or what we are really, or what we believe in, but *what we seem to be*. It is a matter of appearance.

Such a situational framework was devised as the core of the Synanon method of rehabilitating junkies, and it was called, quite simply and appropriately, the "game."

A Synanon "game" is not therapy, it is not sensitivity training, it is not an encounter session, it is not lay psychiatry, it is purely and simply a game situation that involves words; verbal attacks on a person's manner, not the persons themselves. It is rough and it cuts through much of the mickeymouse politeness of most such devices; it is, in flat fact, verbal street warfare. It sounds deadly, and it can be, but amazingly enough, *no one gets hurt*.

In playing the Synanon game for two and a half years at the organization's Santa Monica house (no friends, I was not a junkie; I was one of many thousands of "square" game players who came in from the surrounding areas because they'd been turned on by the concept), I saw the most hidebound and terrified people attacked frontwards, backwards, and heretofore, by experts, by game players who'd perfected the techniques (and there are many) to a degree that was phenomenal to behold . . . and *no one* was destroyed. Not even vaguely distorted. Bent, beaten, laughed-at, ridiculed, and forced to examine themselves—yes. I saw a lot of that. But not once, in hundreds of games I played, with people from all strata of society, of all age

and sex and racial and ethnic backgrounds, did I once see anyone flip, or get toted out on a stretcher, or suffer anything more than the kind of often necessary pain one receives when one is rejected, as a matter of course.

(When I hear some casual observer say such encounters are "potentially dangerous"—and that's the phrase invariably used—I know I'm dealing with someone who is *a,* scared out of his wits at the possibility of revealing himself as he truly is, *b,* has never been anwhere *near* a game, and *c,* undervalues the resilience or nobility of the human animal. Because *getting into it* is half the battle. Saying to oneself, "I'm doing something wrong." Admitting that he is not all he would wish others to think him. And once in a game, the tensile strength of an individual's facade is tested, tested, and tested again. And only those parts that are genuinely healthy, workable, self-sustaining, continue to hold up. The outdated aspects of our manner, the things we do to cover up, to "protect" ourselves . . . those get torn away. Leaving, every time, a stronger, healthier individual.)

I've gone into the "game" psychology at length here not so much to justify it as to provide background. In terms of what it takes to *play* the game, be advised it takes no more special skills than an ability to verbalize, an absolutely indispensable in-touchedness with one's own gut and feelings, a healthy determination to tell the truth, and a playful adoration of creative lying and word ploys. There are techniques, of course—engrossment, ridicule, exaggeration, carom shots, flattery, naked insult, a cat's bag full—but mostly it's humor and openness and honesty that serve a game player best.

Games are played in groups of ten to fifteen people, hopefully total strangers, without benefit of psychologists, psychiatrists, leaders, steerers, or gurus. The worst thing that happens in games—and a thing the players fight to keep from happening—is intellectualizing. The more you rationalize and "clean up" your image, the less likely you are to get to the heart of what's troubling you. So there are no leaders in a game. Strength emerges from the game itself: first one person leads, then another, then someone else grabs it and runs with it, and whoever is most in control in terms of agility or purpose—that one runs the game for as long as he or she can hold onto it.

That is the concept of the game.

Now I'll tell you how the game came to Clarion/Tulane.

In 1969, I'd been into the games at Synanon for about a year, and was very high on them. (Since then I've become disenchanted with Synanon itself; not with the games, but with the social structure in which they're hopelessly imbedded; it has been some time since I've been anywhere near either the organization or a formal game.) During one of the many evening-long rap sessions with the workshoppers I'd gotten into talking about the games and an article I'd written for a national magazine on them, an article that had just been published around the time of the Clarion sessions. The young writers were fascinated by the idea of the games, and asked me if I'd lead such a session in the "off-duty" hours. I said I'd have to consider it.

I had my reservations.

These, after all, were not sick or disturbed individuals; they weren't righteous street junkies or culture-weary seekers after answers to their psychiatric problems. These were struggling young writers, many of them hardly formed in their personality sets. I knew the games could be beneficial, and had even audited teen-aged games at the Santa Monica Synanon house. But I'd never "led" a game outside Synanon, and wasn't sure it was an appropriate adjunct to what the workshop was set up to do. So I took the problem to Robin Scott Wilson, the director of the workshop.

I don't know whether any of my brother or sister lecturers have mentioned Robin Wilson in detail in their essays. But I must, here. Apart from the fact that Clarion/Tulane literally leaped from the febrile imagination of Robin, and he wet-nursed it through its infancy, and he patted it on its ass and sent it on its way when it had reached puberty, quite apart from his creative and administrative talents—which are prodigious—Robin served as Father Figure, Patient Grammarian, Stabilizing Influence, and all-around Trouble Shooter. And for that batch of maniac fantasists, it meant trouble that never came in the same shape twice. Whenever there was a liaison needed with the administration, Robin was there. When sheets or Xeroxing or paregoric was needed at four in the morning, Robin was there. When Dave Skal or Mel Gilden or Jim Sutherland was having an identity crisis, there was Robin. So, naturally, I took my problem to the Man.

Robin, even as I, was wary. We discussed the matter at some length, Robin probed for areas of uncertainty in my own evaluation of the games, and finally, even though

he personally doubted their value, he suggested we throw it open to the kids, and let those who wished to participate do so, making *absolutely* certain there was no peer-group pressure on those who opted out of the encounter.

The next morning in the workshop session, during the midpoint break, I announced that there would be a game in my room at eight o'clock that night, for anyone who might care to participate. Several of the workshoppers flinched and shook their heads. No chance. Several more nodded they'd be there. I had no idea what the turnout would be, and I was half hoping we'd all decide to go into Clarion itself and catch a movie, or play grab-ass with the pretty ladies from the archaelogy digs or order that awful pizza by the traysful and eat and laugh and sing out on the front porch of moldering Becht Hall, where we were all billeted.

But at eight o'clock, there were a dozen eager (yet trepidatious) potential game players, each with a chair, congregated outside the door to my tiny staff room. I gulped and unlocked the door and we all went in.

It's now almost three years later, and I can't remember everyone who was in that game, but I do recall Joan Bernott and Ed Bryant and Grant Carrington and Evelyn Lief and Russell Bates as being there.

I gave them a very brief idea of what a game was supposed to do—summed up simply as, "It's a *game,* it's to have *fun* with, rough fun, sometimes brutal fun, but it's a game, remember that"—and we launched into it.

It all blurs now, mostly because any given game will have gobs of waste time in it, but I do recall one girl was beaten mercilessly because she had no feelings of self-esteem and demonstrated it by chain-smoking, overating till she looked like a miniature of the Graf Zeppelin, and not being able to tell a guy she fancied that she had eyes for him. Another girl was attacked for playing with guy's heads, pitting them against each other for her attentions. One of the guys—who was admired and loved by *every-*one—was castigated for being locked inside himself and not returning the affection everyone showed him. A second guy was brought up short for thinking of himself as ineffectual and worthless, even though he'd been invested with authority by Robin. One dude got his lumps for being too ordered, too precise, too cold and inhuman . . . as if he were a living computer.

One young man broke down and cried because he wasn't a kid any more but still acted like one, pretending

that he could be a wayfaring minstrel till he was sixty.

Another copped to being involved in a relationship with a female that he knew was destructive, and which was tearing his gut out, and making him incapable of getting it on with any other female.

An older woman confessed she had bought the middle-class housewife myth and was now locked into it, and despised it.

Love was expressed by one player for another. A third expressed love for the same person. A kid who hadn't said a short story's worth of words to his compatriots all that week opened up and ran a long story about his miserable home life. A guy in his twenties was attacked by the women in the group for his rough treatment of females, treatment that had gone to the limits of his actually shoving them around physically. He'd been unaware he was doing it. They discussed what it meant in terms of his needs to prove himself as a man. Another was upbraided for his shyness.

And they attacked me.

Of course.

They picked up the techniques so damned fast, and were so good at it, that they realized midway in the game that I wasn't, in fact, a god, but just another slob sitting there with a gutful of hostilities and insecurities and feelings that made me act the ways I did. And they jumped me. All of them.

They were good, really good at it. They wiped up the floor with me and accused me of playing little tin deity, of hiding behind false faces in my dealings with them, of trying to perpetuate myths about myself, of rudeness and a frequently callous attitude toward them. They told me what they needed me to hear. And I listened.

When the game was over, at midnight, everyone embraced. Then they went back to their typewriters, adrenalin pumping.

The next day's stories were *very* good.

I am torn now, whether to segue directly to 1971 and Tulane and the game played there, or to pause and try to codify what benefits came from the first Clarion game I've just described. Perhaps I can do both. Before I could attempt to lay out the really amazing aftermaths of these games, you should hear about what happened at Tulane, which was a game situation as different and startling from its 1969 predecessor as a 747 is from the Spirit of St.

Louis. But first, you should know what effect the small game in 1969, at Clarion, had on its players.

To keep you fascinated.

So I'll call in one of those players, James Sutherland, twenty-three, graduate of Rochester Institute of Technology, degree in journalism, attendee at the 1968 and 1969 Clarion workshops, author of "At the Second Solstice" in this volume and "The Amazonas Link" in *The Last Dangerous Visions* (Doubleday, 1972).

Mr. Sutherland, would you kindly tell the nice people how you felt about that 1969 game, what effect it had on you and the other workshoppers, and what it did for their writing? Thank you.

"Young beginning writers, shy and uncertain of their own work, are usually hesitant to thoroughly dissect and judge the products of other equally young beginners. A kind of camaraderie quickly develops at the Clarion workshops among the students who—often for the first time—find themselves in a friendly, understanding peer group; they're not about to alienate themselves from the group, if they can help it, by speaking out harshly about the work of their fellow students when harshness is necessary. It often is.

"In 1969, the Gestalt feeling among the Clarion students budded early and strong. Most everyone was indulging everyone else's work to the extent that a good deal of illiterate junk was slipping through with only the mildest comments. The mutual backslapping had become nearly audible when Harlan showed up for his week. He was properly disgusted at the great morass of bad prose that had already been submitted in the workshop, and was horrified when the same quality fiction began surfacing during his tenure. Right from the beginning he had our number: we simply were too scared to be tough on one another's work. It was as simple—and as complex—as that.

"Most of us were dubious of his proposed remedy, a kind of game that looked as though it could be pretty vicious, but we allowed ourselves to be talked into it for one evening, right after dinner. Some four hours later the game broke up, and we staggered out into the night a little dazed.

"Immediately the quality of the fiction began to pick up, as well as the long-overdue strengthening of individual criticism. We became a tougher, meaner lot, and better writers, too, I think. I'm not exactly sure why, but I imagine it happened during the game when each of our

psyches was held close to the light and roundly scrutinized. The game circle discovered that although the writer and his work are very nearly two distinct entities, they are linked by a common thread of the unconscious mind. When the aggregate fears and trepidations of the game players were brought into the open and dispelled, it brought a corresponding brightening to the manuscripts turned in a little later. The business of learning to write went forward again with a degree of truth—and compassion—that it had not possessed before."

Mmm. Thanks, Jim.

Now, let's get to Clarion at Tulane, 1971.

First the background: Robin Scott Wilson, who had created the Clarion concept, had moved from Clarion, Pennsylvania, and his professorship in Clarion College's English department, to a new job—Associate Director of the consortium of the Big Ten universities—headquartered outside Chicago. In selecting a replacement site for the 1971 Workshop, Robin had wisely chosen—from among the many bids—Tulane University in New Orleans and brilliant young sf writer James Sallis to head up the project. With renowned Poe scholar Dr. Joseph Roppolo as administrative liaison, the workshop seemed to have been passed into most able hands.

However, a series of unforeseen circumstances caused problems that snarled the usually smoothly run Workshop operation. Jim Sallis took sick the second week after the workshop began. He had worked hard and well to set the wheels in motion during the months preceding the start date, but with Jim in the hospital, organizational snafus began to crop up. Dr. Joe—as everyone affectionately came to refer to Dr. Roppolo—struggled valiantly with the million minor problems, but despite his herculean efforts it was virtually impossible for him to unsnarl the minutiae of housing for thirty-odd students and faculty, finances, Xerography every day, classroom space, personality conflicts . . . plus getting his university work done on time.

Thus, when I arrived—after Robin had done his week, and Joanna Russ and Chip Delany had done theirs—I found a tense and terribly uptight situation.

Old Clarion returnees had settled into an in-group that seemed to feel itself more credential-heavy than the first-time Tulaners; newcomers distrusted the "old timers"; unlike years past, the rooming arrangements were such that male workshoppers had been clumped together on

one floor of a dorm, and the females on the floor above, making for a "besieged citadel" effect upstairs and a locker-room effect downstairs, with little communication between the two; Xeroxes of manuscripts were coming back from the repro shop not a day after being handed in, but often as uselessly as a week later; some students were not writing very much; others weren't writing at all; none was writing very well. One workshopper spent most of his time hustling street chicks in the French Quarter; another had apparently been bitten by a tsetse fly, for he took twelve-hour naps through the day so he could be rested up to go to bed at night; cliques had formed that variously *a,* boycotted one or another guest instructor because they disapproved of the thrust of that instructor's concepts anent writing, *b,* used all available hours for extracurricular screwing-off, *c,* celebrated the wonders of *canabis sativa,* or *d,* clumped together in musty, fetid corners discussing the awfullnesses of groups *a, b,* and *c.*

There were no villains in this snakepit situation, I hasten to add. Understandably, with Sallis seriously ill and receiving no calls and few visitors, with Joe Roppolo trying to do the work of a full office staff, with thirty-some special personalities trying to cope with one another and the unfamiliar scene . . . it *had* to go wonky.

I arrived late on a Friday. My stint as guest guru was not to begin officially till the following Monday. During the ride in from the New Orleans airport before I'd even *met* the people with whom I'd be dealing, I had all of this laid on me by the students who'd volunteered to pick me up.

It was a kind of crunch I'd never encountered with Clarion workshops. Traditionally, upon arrival, everything was purring sweetly, and I could spend the weekend getting to know the students. But this was as like past Clarions as Auschwitz was like Grossinger's.

It was genuinely scary. And what was worse, they all kept saying, "You can pull it together, Harlan; thank goodness you're here." Now *that's* ugly!

But here I pause, and I confess to a sickness of ego for which I was roundly pounded in the Tulane game:

I dug it.

Somewhere in the darkest crevices of my polluted soul, I *dig* playing sheriff of Cochise. Coming into a bedlam situation and bringing forth sweet reason, order, wonder, and productivity. Hereafter referred to as the Fastest Gun Syndrome.

I'd like to be able to say that it was the wonderfulness of my charisma that accomplished such a feat, but at the bottom line, honesty hammerlocks me into admitting that it was—pure and simple—the game that did it.

Except this time, unlike Clarion 1969, it was not a matter of setting up a social situation for after-hours joy, it was a matter of dire necessity. I made the firm and no-exception pronouncement that the next evening, Saturday, there would be a Synanon game and everyone *would* be there. No AWOLs.

One workshopper asked what he was to do with the two tickets he'd purchased from a scalper for that night's big rock concert by Grand Funk Railroad (or Creedence Clearwater, or Mountain, or some group, I don't remember which). I was tempted to suggest a relocation site for the tickets, but opted for sweetness & lovability, at least pre-game, and advised him to try scalping himself. His was the least of the grumbling and trepidation.

But the next night everyone was there. Everyone, that is, with the exception of Mel Gilden, who flat-out said he was frightened of the game situation and would *not* attend. The unspoken part of his position was that I could jam bamboo shoots under his fingernails if I chose, but he'd rather die than face an arena filled with mad animals lusting for his psychic and spiritual blood. I felt he was being a bit extreme about it, but I shrugged and said it was his choice. After all, there really was no way I could have forced people to attend, short of peer-group pressure, insult, intimidation, and vicious verbal attacks. So Mel (author of the excellent "What About Us Grils?" in the first Clarion anthology) was the only absentee. Remember him. He reappears later, to special point.

The game began with a ploy. A standard gambit for games, used to open up the players most anxious to spill their guts. "Y'know," I said, almost offhandedly, "there's one of your people who hates all the rest of you. I'm not sure you know that. But one of you despises the rest of the group so much it shows in this person's utter withdrawal from the group. Because, you see, the opposite of love isn't hate, it's disinterest. But a manifestation of hate is utter withdrawal. Now whaddaya think about a swine like that?"

(Students of Freud will kindly refrain from commenting on the logic of my statements. It wasn't intended to be logical, it was intended to throw a little free-floating guilt out, to see who would be most threatened by it. My quarry

might have been the student who'd been peddling grass and cutting it up in one of the dorm rooms, or it might have been the student called Vegetable because he never came out of his room, or it might have been the high-verbal student who put everyone else down. I had no one specifically in mind, but game experience had taught me that opening things that way, nondirectionally, usually made *everyone* feel guilty about something, he or she had done, some personality flaw, and the first subject on whom we could "turn the game" would rush to a blurted rationalization or exoneration of himself.)

Justin Zitler, a student with amazing charisma and that take-charge manner that makes others look to him as a leader, rushed in behind my words. I thought he was going to be the first hotseat victim, but quite the contrary. He was almost cellularly attuned to the game, and knew how to play well, without ever having played before. He served the invaluable purpose of reinforcing my gambits. He proceeded to attack—in precisely the vague manner I'd employed—the nonspecific culprit. Denounced him!

But it was a her.

One of the few women in the game suddenly shoved forward in her seat, hands tight across her stomach (the "protecting your gut" posture), and began babbling that she had withdrawn from the rest of them because she was afraid, she didn't really hate anyone, she was sorry she'd said this about that one and that about this one, and what right did I have, did *any* of us have to castigate her for the way she was. . . .

The game was started.

In the first twenty-five minutes the game dwelled with ruthless accuracy on the girl and her fears of inadequacy. A few who had played the game before—or been into other encounter groups of other kinds—"ran" her. And when she'd been run out, she had lost her fear. She fought back and won their respect. Then, before they knew what was happening, I turned the game on another player.

He was a guy who lied. Pathologically. He had told innumerable stories about himself, the life he led, the status he held, and because of his manner, he was roundly disliked. The first one to pin him to the wall was the girl who had been withdrawn and sullen, the one on whom we'd opened the game. She ran *him*. He tried to wiggle. He tried to obfuscate. We gave him no room, pinned him to the wall, and finally, forty minutes later, we made it

clear to him that we knew ninety percent of what he'd told us was bullshit. And when he could no longer hide behind his facade of tough, dangerous secret agent 007, when he had subsided into a bludgeoned silence, we "put him together," one of the most important aspects of the game. We told him we liked him *despite* himself, that given the opportunity to see him without his false faces, we would like him even more.

(Amazingly, even after forty minutes of brutal attacks, all it took to reassemble him, to return some dignity to him, was one minute of honest approbation. But he knew he had to be a real person from then on.)

It went that way all through the night.

One young man copped to feeling he was a failure.

Another expressed doubts about his masculinity.

A girl admitted she hated the materialistic bag into which her family had thrust her.

We told an old-timer he had to grow up and could not be allowed to play adolescent any longer.

We chewed up the kid who'd been doing dope, telling him if he ever brought it into the dorm again, jeopardizing the enitre workshop, he'd be out on his ass.

One girl told another she didn't trust her and why.

The second girl admitted she had eyes for the first one's boy friend.

One kid wept as he copped to being able to live only in his fantasies, but not outside them in the real world.

And they got on me. Ran me like a team of good precinct-house sweatroom cops. They told me what they wanted from me during the week about to begin, and what they would not tolerate.

The game broke up at four the next morning. By the fourth or fifth hour everyone was so tired the defenses were easily thrust aside and all the hostilities expended themselves, and true things were said.

When the game ended they looked around at each other, and they were no longer a fragmented group of little cliques and loners. They were a workshop class. They were intimates. They knew too much about one another ever to play that deadly social game of half-truth, tolerance of sham, and no-communication.

They stumbled up to their beds, but few slept. Most of them went right to their typewriters.

The next day they wrote furiously, slept when they could, and on Monday morning the classes started with critiques that were sharp, incisive, and struck directly to

the heart of what was wrong with the stories submitted.

Mel Gilden, the one student who had steadfastly refused to get in the game, heard so much about what had happened, felt so left out, that he came to me and insisted I put on another game. That was the way he put it: "You put on another game." I tried to explain to him that *I* didn't put on the game, that it grew organically from the group's *need* to have a game, and that need seemed to me to be dead. He said he felt alienated from the others. I understood. They had been through a Gestalt experience and were linked to one another by their insights. Mel had been denied that experience, that shared expansion, and so had put himself outside his peer group. Finally, I agreed to put it up to the workshop, and if they desired another game, late in the week, I was willing to work it with them, though I was frankly more than happy to let it lie.

As it turned out, the students themselves called the game, held it on the final night of my week, and I was not even there. Nor was I needed. But Mel sat in, and the next day he told me it had been a rewarding experience.

Earlier in this essay, I called on Jim Sutherland to say a few words about his game feelings. Now I call on Mel Gilden to express *himself* about the experience. Mel differs from Jim primarily in that he was dead against the game, thought it was dangerous, and went to it reluctantly, while Jim was anxious to get it on.

Mel, how was it for you? And what effect did the game have on you and/or your writing thereafter?

"I was dead afraid of the game. I won't tell you why, that's my business, but those who played the game with me that night at Tulane also know, and that's all that counts. But this I will say: I'd always thought—along with Plato—that creative people are divine madmen and that a Synanon game, properly applied, would cure me of all my carefully constructed schizophrenic monkey-bars, and my creativity would die for lack of neuroses. I was also afraid to let people see who I really was. I thought they'd hate that hidden me.

"For that reason, mine was the only dissenting voice. Sunday evening, everyone but me left for the fifth-floor lounge where the game was to be held. I chuckled as I watched them trail off, and reaffirmed my stand to those well-wishers who continued to beg me to come along.

"When they were gone, it was very quiet.

"My feeling, that night, was one of superiority. I'd

withstood Ellison's autocratic tactics. I felt very smug.

"But at four a.m. when they came back, dog-weary but filled with talk, my friends were different. When they'd left, their laughter and joking had been nervous and self-conscious. Now it was without pretense. They were, as it's said, *together*. As Harlan had promised, the workshop was now a brother/sisterhood, instead of just a collection of people. And I was odd man out. Hardly smug.

"Nobody put me down; people in the workshop still talked to me, were no less friendly than before, but I *felt* they pitied me in some small way. Maybe the word 'pity' is too strong. It was more a feeling of *distance* than pity. I was finally the alien I'd been reading and writing about for so long.

"By the next day *I* wanted a game. *I* wanted to share what they'd known. At the end of that week we had another game. And I was the most anxious one of the bunch to get into it. I was the first one down to the lounge. Because of the rules of the game that say you can't carry what you've heard during that privileged communication outside the circle, I can't and won't tell you what I learned about myself, but I will say that the only thing in a game that's frightening is what a person fears in himself. It was a good and helpful experience, coming to understand that other people *see* those frightening things and mostly don't find them so awful. Then it becomes easy to face them oneself, and if they need to be killed, to kill them. As for my writing, I don't know if just one game changed it any, but I'd like to play another game some day, with heavyweight game players, and see what comes of it."

Thanks, Mel. Now come the conclusions. Robin has asked me to cover this particular Clarion/Tulane phenomenon, and when I began, I had no idea it would run to this length, but the very length forces me to conclude that there is something very potent and useful in the games and their effect on both individuals and the group. A conclusion that impells me to recommend the encounter as a staple item of any serious fiction workshop.

Because . . .

During my week at Tulane, we found—the students and I—the things that were wrong with the fictions were the things wrong with the writer. A student who unconsciously hungered to break out of his fantasy life wrote unrealistic fantasies that never quite came off; they kept lurching over into reality, and they simply didn't hold together. He had to grasp who he was and what his place was in

the universe before he could write convincingly about *other* universes. A girl who refused to give up her high-school adolescence wrote mawkish cheap sentimentality. The guy who had doubts about his maculinity wrote stories in which male/female images careened through the plot, and he was compelled to face the simple truth that whether one is bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, or asexual, it's okay, no points lost: just decide for yourself and deal with it. The fellow who had taken clichéd elements from spy thriller movies as parts of his own personality came to know that these same cardboard dimensions were crippling his stories' characters.

They *were* what they *wrote*.

And by finding out what they were, they were able to see where their work went wrong. And discover ways to remedy the ills. In themselves and their fiction.

But more, it was the one group activity that brought people out from behind their masks, helped them dispel many of their fears and insecurities, gave them ego strength and the reassurance that no one was out to get them, that they were all equals, all struggling toward the same goals, and built friendships that will probably last lifetimes.

If I have given the impression that the games were oracular or messianic in tone, it is probably because I saw what wonders they brought about. But the games are not psychiatric sessions. They are situational devices intended to eliminate peer-group hostilities and suspicions; they are a forum for students who tend to be withdrawn; they are a getting-to-know-you situation at which fellow students become more than just names and faces and an occasional manuscript. They also serve eminently to bring the guest instructor out from behind the credentials he or she uses to play deity. And if they did nothing *but* that, they would be invaluable as teaching aids.

I would like to close this piece by recommending two books. They are books I've edited, but that isn't the reason for my touting them. They include the work of many Clarion/Tulane workshoppers. And if you like what they did here and in the first Clarion anthology, I do not think you will pillory me overmuch for noting that *Again, Dangerous Visions* and *The Last Dangerous Visions* include some of the finest work of Ed Bryant, James Sutherland, Joan Bernott, Evelyn Lief, Grant Carrington, Gustav Hasford, Steve Herbst, Vonda McIntyre, Russell Bates, George Alec Effinger, Octavia Estelle Butler, Arthur Byron Cover, and Robert Thurston.

Which list puts the final rationale to what the games were all about. To produce stories. To get the talent flowing. Because, at core, I'm a selfish man, whose sole interest at Clarion/Tulane was to help writers to write. I care very little whether or not these fine people clean up their lives: that's *their* problem. But sf needs new blood constantly, and from the workshops have come an incredible number of donors.

The stories are eloquent testimony to the value of the games, and in a much larger way, to the validity of the Clarion concept Robin devised.

Read this book, read the books noted above, and then you may understand, at least intellectually, why it is that the Clarion/Tulane kids are considered by sf fans and the conventions where they've appeared, as a very special, very loving, and very talented group of writers.

I rest my case.

Notes on a Restless Urge

by

Robert Wissner

I have agreed with Ellen Asher, NAL's very competent and helpful editor for this series, to disagree. And out of our confrontations have come a good deal of mutual education and some compromises that have—I believe—made this a better book. But we could not come to terms on this story by Bob Wissner: Ellen sees it as not science fiction, not fantasy, but the ramblings of an eccentric, a chronical of dementia. I see it as fantasy. We both agree that it is funny and we ask the reader to make his own choice of its generic identity.

The following, therefore, may or may not be Wissner's comment on the story. "Humor is a funny thing. You find it in the strangest places. Have you looked into the musty clutter of a dark closet lately? That's always good for a chuckle. Other people's closets are even funnier because everything in them is so familiar. One of the few places better than an old closet is a bathroom with a green ashtray. I smoke a lot."

Those bastards, how do they do it? I can't read books any more. They depress me. It seems so simple, the words and thoughts flowing together perfectly in prose so clear and precise it makes me sick. I fumble with the type-

writer all day and nothing happens. The trite writer types tipity tat tat tipity tat.

My wife waits impatiently on the bed.

What great theme should I explore today? I sit in the bedroom composing Chapter One for the seventy-fourth time. Oh Christ, where is inspiration? For that matter, where the hell is my new typewriter ribbon, answer me that? I suspect my wife has stolen it to gag the children again. She tiptoes to my chair and lightly scratches my back. She wants to make love. I seize her by the hair and cram her into the typewriter. Narrowing the margins to conform to the limits of her forehead, I type: "Dear Joan, I love you dearly but kindly buzz off. Signed: your husband, lover, and sometime mealticket."

"We should travel," she tells me.

"We can't afford it."

"As a matter of fact," she says, "my parents have offered to finance a little vacation."

I am evasive. "Matters of fact can neither be created nor destroyed, but only transformed."

"But honey, if we accept their offer just this one time, just think of the exotic locales and local color you could throw into your writing. Then your stories would sell and we could afford to travel."

Feminine logic can be devastating.

"We have no money," I insist.

"Now dear," she says while reaching into the closet for our suitcases, "you know Momsie and Popsie would be positively overjoyed to finance a trip to Europe."

I reluctantly agree to the trip on the condition that she wear black leather to bed that night. Searching, always searching. We leave the children in an orphanage and off we go, seeking exotic locales and local color to, as she says, throw into my writing.

The European Experience at last! I am skeptical at first but every American we meet assures me this is in fact Europe. I carry Twain's *Innocents Abroad* inconspicuously in my pocket. Joan and I begin roaming the continent on her parents' money, comparing American Express offices in every major capital. In every minor capital as well, if there is such a thing.

Our hotel in Paris overlooks the Place du Panthéon and a police station squatting on the corner. Each morning the gendarmes anxiously board dilapidated blue and white buses. The air is charged with the tension one encounters in high-school locker rooms before the team

departs for a football game with a suburban adversary. Students and other enemies of the people return on the buses in the afternoon. I stand on the sixth-floor balcony enjoying the sun and expecting scores to be announced.

While Joan shops along the Champs-Elysées I sit in a laundromat on Rue St. Jacques wondering if Sartre ever does his laundry here. A bearded face sits next to me and explains the finer points of *I Ching* in relation to United States' foreign policy.

"It is absurd," he says between trips to the malfunctioning detergent dispenser, one franc, "to consider the hexagrams in any linear sense without taking into consideration a basic comprehension of the substrata of their intersubjective meanings. Your president only continues the war because he consulted the *Ching* on inauguration day and was told:

"There is food in the ting.
My comrades are envious,
But they cannot harm me.
Good fortune.

"Obviously," he says, "he failed to plumb the depths of meaning inherent in the ting."

"The ting?"

"The ting!"

"What ting?" my package-laden wife asks as she walks in.

"Why *the* ting of course," I reply.

"Whose ting?" she snarls suspiciously. "If you so much as look at another . . ."

"Never mind!" I cut her short and escape in a beret.

My wife loves France. She speaks French. I speak Spanish.

"I hate Spain," my wife says in Barcelona. "There are too many spics. On the other hand," she adds thoughtfully, "it is a marvelous example of a functional dictatorship. Everyone is so independently dependent."

At Joan's first bullfight she throws up during the first kill. I am overjoyed, ecstatic. I drag her from one glorious end of Spain to the other, catching every scheduled corrida in the country. Cervantes would have been proud.

"You beast!" she screams. "How can you force me to go through these awful butcherings again and again and again? Me, your wife, whose only joy is making you happy and comfortable so you can write!"

"Toro! Ha toro!" I reply, advancing menacingly with two salad forks held high. I plant them beautifully in her lovely shoulders. A series of superb veronicas ended with a brilliant rebolera and I plunge a steak knife into the tiny spot between her shoulder blades, just below the neck.

I search for Keats' grave outside of Rome while my wife rests in the hotel, recuperating from mild amoebic dysentery. Each hour on the hour she sips from a bottle of clear liquid she believes to be distilled water, paregoric, and emetine. In truth it is water from an abandoned well in Seville. Angered at being unable to find Keats, I enter the Colosseum and scream for the blood of Christians. I am persuaded to leave under heavy police escort. We nimbly dodge the hordes of Fiats racing in all directions throughout Rome.

Joan ran off in Geneva. Mont Blanc (local color: white) towers in the distance, just over the French border. We walk through the rolling narrow streets in the old section and cross the long bridge leading back to our hotel. The hotel boasts that Voltaire once lived there. At first I considered this a variation of the "Washington Slept Here" theme, but have since concluded that the familiar Washington motif may in fact be a rank imitation of "Voltaire Slept Here." In any case, it's a cinch he never slept in our tiny attic room. Did he write *Zadig* in the garden? Perhaps *Candide* was born in the lobby over rolls and coffee. Was he cursed with rich and friendly in-laws? Was he troubled by a Nationalist Chinese in the next room, who calmly explained his recent release from institutional shock therapy and then ran off with his wife? Was he?

My ancestry is German and Choctaw, yet I travel alone through Germany feeling no more at home than I would on a reservation. Reading Günter Grass, I grow progressively paranoid. There is something sinister about the conductor. In his severe uniform and black peaked cap he bears a striking resemblance to Martin Bormann. What better hiding place than an anonymous train obviously filled with former SS men disguised as commuters? I have an urge to run through the train, screaming "Sieg Heil!" while taking random scalps.

Joan reappeared in Amsterdam. Amster, Amster, dam, dam, dam. Who can forget this watery canal city filled with such a wide variety of hookers promising all manner of sensual delights for a mere thirty guilders? I am turned down by a creamy little Indonesian honey because of

the curiously matted hanks of hair dangling suggestively from the front of my belt. Seized by a fit of despondency I cut off one of my ears in the Rijksmuseum and mail it to Jacqueline Susanne.

At the airport, I prepare to return home, making faces at the paperbacks in the duty-free shop. There is a familiar voice calling my name. Joan comes running down the long white tile-and-glass corridor. I fling aside a copy of *Portnoy's Complaint* and run to her. We meet. We embrace. Several people around us smile; one vomits. Mixed reviews. Innocent love triumphant. Dammit, how would Mailer deal with a scene such as this?

Arm in arm we board the plane.

"Oh darling," Joan says once we are in the air. "I've spent hours on the phone talking with my folks. We discussed everything and decided that you and I should move in with them. After all, there's so much room in that big old house. And once we're there you can be nice and comfortable and write a great novel."

At forty thousand feet I push her from the airplane's emergency exit. I continue the flight home, brimming with, as even now Joan reminds me, exotic locales and local color to throw into my writing.

And Dragons in the Sky

by

Glen Cook

It has been a good year for Glen Cook. He won an Honorable Mention in last year's NAL prize contest; he has increased his magazine sales; he has just sold a fine novel to New American Library; he has married a lovely girl (whom he met at Clarion); and he has written a gripping account of a future civilization in which loyalties—to lovers, friends, and nations—conflict very much as they do today.

Of "And Dragons in the Sky" Glen writes: "Sometimes the world sweeps over my dikes and I just have to get alone, with my typewriter, where I can drain off the emotions in a long, hot draught. Sometimes—sometimes I'm lucky and a story appears on the paper. This is one of those."

In this frenetic, quick-shift, go, drop-your-friends -possessions -roots -loyalties like throwaway containers age, heroes, legends, archetypal figures are disposable: as brilliant and ephemeral as the butterflies of Old Earth. One day some researcher may wrest from Nature a golden, universe-changing secret, some brave ship's commander may shatter the moment's enemy, be a hero, legend for a fleeting hour —and fade to dust with Sumer and Akkad. Who remembers on the seventh day? Who remembers Jupp von Drachau finding those Sangaree? Mention his name. Blank

stares reply. Or someone may say, "He's too old," meaning, too long gone. A whole year, Confederation.

I think of heroes and legends as, toolcase in hand, I wander toward the gate of Carson's Blake City spaceport, wearing a name a size too small—latest in a list of dozens—the clothing of a liquids transfer systems tech—which work I loathe—and, within me, the nerves of an instel radio. A small, dying pain surrounds a knot behind my right ear. Each slow step drives spikes of agony into the bones of my legs. They've been lengthened three inches, hastily. My stomach itches where twenty pounds have been taken off, hastily again. This is a hurry-up job.

But, then, aren't they all? There's no time, these days, for carefully executed operations. Everything is rushed. Nothing is permanent, there are no fixed points on which to anchor. Life is like the flash floods of Sierran rivers in thaw time, roaring and cascading past too swiftly for any part to be seized and intimately known. But wait! In the river of life apassing, there *are* a few fixed rocks, two long-lived legends that're heavy on my mind. Like boulders in Sierran streams, they're all but hidden in the turbulence of our times, but they endure, go forever on.

There has to be something for me. *I want!* I cry, but what I don't know. I've been trying to find it through all my years with the Bureau.

Ahead, I spot my small, brown, mustached Oriental partner, Mouse. Making no sign, I turn in the gate behind him. We don't know each other this time.

I wish there were something solid to grasp, to *know*. Everything moves so fast. . . . Only in legends. . . .

There is Star's End; there are the High Seiners. Sheer mystery is Star's End, fortress planet beyond the galactic rim, with automatic, invincible weapons to kill anyone foolish enough to go near—without a shred of why. In the lulls, the deep, fearful lulls when there's nothing to say, nothing being said, we moderns seize Star's End as strange country to explore, explain, to extinguish the dreadful silence—we're intrigued, perhaps, by the godlike power there, destructive as that of ancient, Earth-time deities. Or we turn to the High Seiners, the Starfishers.

We should know them. They're human. Star's End is just a dead metal machine's voice babbling unknown tongues. Yet, in their humanness, the High Seiners are the greater, more frightening mystery. Destruction is familiar, though to encompass its purpose is sometimes impossible. The quiet, fixed culture of the Seiners we

comprehend not at all, though we yearn for it, hate them for their blissful stasis: their changelessness oddly twists our souls.

But such thoughts fade. Work comes first. I enter the terminal, great plastic, glass, and steel cavern with doors opening on other worlds. Light crowds it. We need light these days, fearful as we are of entropic night. (I wanted to be a poet once. An instructor assigned me a paean to Night. I lost my want then. Too many dark images crowded my mind.) People are here in their multitudes, about the familiar business of terminals. Several men in odd, plain High Seiners' garb wait behind a distant table. My new employers.

Mouse passes small and brownly with a wink—why that name I don't know. He looks more like a weasel.

I study faces in the crowd, mostly see bewilderment, determination, malaise. I'm after the nonchalant ones. The competition is here somewhere. The Bureau has no copyright on interest in Starfish. "Uhn!"

"Excuse me?"

I turn. A small blue nun has paused, thinking I've spoken. "Pardon. Just thinking out loud." The Ulantonid wobbles off, leaving me wondering why all modern Christians are aliens. But it fades. I return to that face.

Yes, Marya Strehltsweiter—one name I remember—though she has changed too. Darker: skin, hair, eyes, darker, and heavier. But she can't disguise her ways of moving, speaking, listening. A poor actress, unusual in her race. She's Sangaree, who have passed as human for ages—who, also, are almost always murdered on discovery. Marya has talent. She stays alive.

She sees me looking. Eyebrows raise a millimeter, questioningly, then consternation briefly, before a smile. She knows me, remembers the last time we crossed swords—I think of a place in Angel City on the Broken Wings, of lifting the papers Von Drachau needed to nail the Sangaree. Perhaps, she's thinking, this'll be *her* game. She nods ever so slightly.

Other faces tease my memory, though I think they serve no governments. Corporation agents, perhaps, or McGraws. Considering what we're after, I'll not be surprised if there are more agents than job-hungry techs here.

The crowd. I now see it as a whole, much smaller than expected. Maybe two hundred. The Seiners advertised for a thousand. Hard to find techs romantic, or hungry,

enough to plunge into an alien human society for a year. . . .

Speculation dissolves. The Starfishers are checking us in. I shuffle into line four places behind Mouse, wondering why he's so shaky. He's always shaky.

"Mr. Niven." A whisper, warm rubbing my arm. I look down into eyes dark as Sangaree gunmetal coins.

"Pardon, ma'am? BenRabi. Moyshe benRabi."

"How quaint." She smiles a gunmetal smile. My bed she has shared, and would share, I know—and, in the end, she'd drink my blood. "And the Rat, eh?" Meaning Mouse. "So many people want to bleed for a little Seiner money. Orbit in an hour. See you." More gunmetal smiling as she takes her gunmetal-hard body toward the *Ladies*.

The nervousness begins, as it always does before I jump in the lion's den. Or dragon's lair. They say, to the uninitiated, the Starfish appear as dragons a hundred miles long. . . .

Before liftoff, a briefing. The officer-in-charge is brutally honest. "We don't want you," he says, "we need you. You'll mock us as anachronisms. Oh, yes," to a lone head-shake. "You're here hunting the myth of the Starfishers, or to spy, but you'll find neither romance nor information —just hard work and strangeness. We won't ease you into our culture. You're here only so we can meet our harvest contracts." I suffer a premonition, a feeling this man has more than harvests on his mind. Plainly, through his words, I sense disappointment, a touch of hatred for landsmen. They have a wounded ship out there, badly mauled—I'm not sure I believe that—which needs a thousand techs to salvage, and they are only getting two hundred.

He pauses, fumbles in pockets—a *pocketed, cloth* jacket —produces an odd little instrument. Only after it's lit and belching noxious clouds do I recognize it. A pipe! I shudder. Romantic techs, I see, are wondering what greater horrors lurk ahead. Good psychology, the pipe. The Seiner is easing us in after all, preparing us for bigger shocks to come.

"Among you," he says after his pause grows squirming long, "are spies. So many interests want a Starfish herd." He smiles, but it quickly fades to grimness. "You'll learn nothing. Till your contracts end, you'll see nothing but the guts of ships—and only when you work. You'll not come in contact with those who have the information you're after. You, who'd steal our livelihood and culture,

be warned. We're a nation, a law unto ourselves. We hold to old ways, still execute for espionage and treason." While the pause for effect lasts, I think of the many times Confederation has tried to bring the Seiners into the fold, to impress upon them "enlightened" justice. They always fail, yet annexation remains a major government goal.

A nervous stir runs through the room. The briefing officer meets pairs of eyes one by one. The romantics are finding their legend toothed and clawed. The disquiet grows. Executions. You don't *execute* people any more. . . .

Soon we're herded aboard a shuttle—first landsmen for the fleets in generations—that is obviously no commercial lighter, just stark functionalism and steel painted gray. We're lifting blind, I see. Weedlike clumps of wiring hang where viewscreens have been removed—no chances are they taking.

The knot behind my ear, the nondispersable parts of the tracer, seizes me with iron, spiked fingers. I've been "switched on" by the Bureau. I stagger. The thin, pale Starfisher girl seating us asks, "Are you ill?" On her face, shocking me more than talk of execution, is a look of true concern, not bland, commercially dispensed stewardess's care.

I want fires across my mind, as it so often does. "Yes." Dropping into my seat, "A touch of migraine." But I can never discover what I need.

Her eyes widen a fraction. She'll report this. But, somewhere in my medical file, a tendency toward migraine is noted to cover the pain of the tracer. I am susceptible, though it hasn't bothered me in years. There are pills. Why, I ask myself again, do they have to use an imperfect device? Of course, it's all we've got, the only way to track them to the herd. Completely nonmetal, the tracer is the only undetectable device available.

I want is in my mind. The Bureau has supported my years of search, knowing I'm searching (Psych doesn't miss much), knows it's showing a good return on investment (the sane make poor agents, axmen, or whatever). Years, and I still have no intimation of the absence in my soul.

The vessel shivers. We're on the way to the orbiting Starfisher. Three rows ahead, Mouse shakes. He's terrified by space travel.

"The Rat's chicken." She's beside me. I didn't see her sit down. "Sorry to startle you. Maria Elana Gonzalez, atmosphere systems, distribution." Gunmetal smile.

I want. What? "Moyshe benRabi." In case she has forgotten. We exchange nothings all the way to the Starfisher, too wary to probe for clues to one another's missions.

I'm forgetting she's Sangaree, that once I used her to find and kill a lot of her people. I don't feel guilty, either —not that I hate Sangaree, as is common. In my mood of the moment she doesn't count. Nothing does. I'm the uninvolved, uncommitted, unemotional modern man. I'm concerned more with Mouse than the steel-souled death beside me.

According to our pasts on file, our paths have never crossed. But this is our fourth team job and, though he's always afraid, he's a good partner—especially when the roughhouse begins. He's the only person I know who has killed a man (except the Sangaree lady who, being Sangaree, doesn't qualify as a person). Killing isn't uncommon these days, but the personal touch has been eliminated—ergo, the shock of "execution." Anyone can punch a button, hurl a missile to obliterate a ship of a thousand souls. There is no lack of nice remote space battles (against Sangaree, McGraw pirates, in the marque-and-reprisal antics of governments, in raids and overnight wars), but to do in a man face-to-face, with knife or gun . . . it's just too personal. We don't like to get close to people, even to kill.

I'm afraid. I'm getting close to, growing fond of, Mouse. We work together too much. Bad for our detachment. The Bureau promised no more jobs together last time, but then came this hurry-up, top-men job. Always the rush. Somehow, sometime, one of us will get hurt. We're so much safer as islands in motion (Brownian), pausing for interaction, moving on before roots can take, be ripped up, leave painful wounds.

There's a clang through the shuttle, rousing me. We've nosed into the mother ship like piglet to sow's belly. The pale, helpful girl leads us into the starship, to a common room where notables wait.

They're unceremonious. One says, "I'm Eduard Chouteau, Ship's Commander. You're aboard Number Three Service Ship from *Danion,* a harvestship of Payne's fleet. You're to replace people *Danion* lost in a shark attack. We don't like outsiders, but we'll try to make your stay comfortable. We've got to keep *Danion* alive until we receive replacements from our schools . . ." I have the feeling he isn't telling all Starfisher motives.

Most everyone, via the romantic entertainment media, knows of the Seiner schools, the crèches within asteroids of deep space where Starfishers hide their children. They are nursery schools, boarding schools, military academies, technical colleges, safehouses where children can grow up unexposed to disasters of *Danion*'s sort. Unlike landsmen, though, Seiners send their children to professional parents out of love. We do so to be rid of cargo that may slow us in shooting the rapids of life.

"Lights," says the Ship's Commander. They fade. Central to the common, a spatial hologram appears. "Those aren't our stars. The ship *is* ours. *Danion*." Something focuses, something like octopuses entwining—no, like a city sewage system with buildings and earth removed, vast tangles of tubing with here and there a cube, a cone, a ball, with occasional sheets of silverness, or great nets floating, between arms of piping, raggedly bearded with hundreds, thousands of antennae. In theory, a deep space ship needs not be contained, needs have no specific shape, yet this is the first such I've ever encountered. I realize I've discovered an unsuspected rigidity of human thought. The needle-shaped ship has been with us since space travel was but a dream.

My surprise is shared. A stir runs through the common. But now I'm suffering another surprise.

Mouse and I once studied the Seiner from Carson's surface. She's a typical interstellar vessel. A ship of her class approaches the harvestship in the hologram. The surprise is relative size. The starship is a needle falling into an ocean of scrap. The harvestship must be thirty miles in cross-section. . . .

Light returns, drowning the hologram. Around me are open mouths. We thought we were *aboard* a harvestship. I begin, with distress, to realize how little prepared I am to go among these people, how little the Bureau has told me. A more than usual job-beginning nervousness sets in. Until now, with change the order in my fast-paced universe, I've assumed I can handle the strange, the unknown —but this space-borne mobile, it's *too* alien. True alien handiwork suddenly seems less foreign, less frightful. It's the size. Nothing human should be so *big*.

"This's all you'll know of *Danion*," says the Ship's Commander, "of her exterior. Her guts you'll know well. We'll get our money's worth from you there."

And they will. Fifteen hours a day, teamed with Seiner technicians, we landsmen will labor to keep *Danion* alive

and harvesting. Scarce four hundred of us will manage the work of a thousand—and, in our free time, we'll repair the shark attack damage responsible for the original casualties. Daily, we'll work to exhaustion, then stagger to our bunks too weary even to think about spying. . . .

But there're problems first, a time of distress two days after departure. The ship drops from hyper. I, and everyone, assume we've arrived. We gather in the common room, a custom of travelers, somehow expecting view-screens and a look at our new home. Shortly, however, the First Lieutenant appears.

"Please return to your quarters," he says. He seems paler than the usual Starfisher. "We're ambushing Confederation Navy ships following us from Carson's."

I'm dumbstruck. The Navy shouldn't move in yet. Nor should Seiners so casually turn on pursuers—not, at least, on *my* Navy. I look around. The few angry faces I label "competition dismayed." Across the room, Mouse appears bewildered. The Sangaree woman is in a rage, face red, fists clenched.

The First Lieutenant fields a few questions before retreating, all with a single explanation. "We've entered a hydrogen stream, taken station with a fleet. Starfish noise is being broadcast from scoutships. We often do this to cover the withdrawal of our vessels forced to enter 'civilized space.'" He leaves us thinking.

We go too, Mouse and I glumly wondering if we're now expendable.

The general alarm sounds. Engagement is imminent. I hope the admiral (I'm considering my own survival, not his comfort) recognizes the trap and gets out. I'm hoping the Seiners don't do angry, rash things afterward.

I've hardly strapped in. The vessel rocks. Departing missiles. I'm amazed. She's got batteries heavier than her appearance suggests.

I took this job expecting the total boredom of unchange, nul-novelty, but find surprises come almost too fast to assimilate.

The all-clear sounds shortly, and with it a buzz from my cabin door. It opens. A crewman asks, "Mr. benRabi? Come with us, please." He's polite, oh, polite as the spider inviting the fly. His teeth seem all white sharp and pointy. Behind him are ratings with angry guns. Yes, I'll go with him.

As I join him in the passage, another door opens with a characteristic squeal. Yes. A group is collecting Mouse.

Done already, I think, and by space gypsies centuries behind the times. How?

"Ah," says the Ship's Commander as we enter his office, "Commander Igarashi, Commander McClennon." My eyebrows rise. I didn't know Mouse's name, but Igarashi it might be. He's got me nailed, though McClennon I haven't used in fifteen years. "Please be seated." I sit, glance at Mouse. He, too, is stunned.

"You're wondering about your Navy friends? Decided discretion was the better part. Admiral Beckhart must be perturbed." He chuckles. "But that's not why you're here. It's those tracers you've got built in."

This startles me. He's talking plural. I thought I was the only one with a unit, and Mouse was along for the ride. Mouse, it seems, thought the same. Wheels within wheels, and I should've guessed. It's the Bureau's way.

"All biological, eh? Interesting development. Passed our detectors easily. But we're a paranoid people—and think of everything." Smugness. "We've watched the hyper bands since liftoff, had you pegged in hours. Dr. DuMaurier. . . ."

Hands seize me. The doctor examines me quickly, numbs my neck and the side of my head with an aerosol anesthetic. He produces an antique lase-scalpel.

The Ship's Commander says, "This'll be fast and painless. We'll pull the ambergris nodes . . . and sell them back to the Navy next auction, I think." He chuckles again. I smile. There's a curious justice in it. Mouse and I, and others, are aboard in hopes of locating the great night-beasts which produce just that little item.

Ambergris, the High Seiner calls it. My studies say ambergris is a "morbid secretion" of Old Earth whales, very valuable. Others, landsmen, call the material star's amber, spacegold, skydiamond, any of many names. It's the wealth of our age. In the old tongues its name is hard, pithy. It's the solid wastes of Starfish—crap, but crap without which interstellar civilization, as it exists, could not be. There would be no fast star-to-star communication.

In a way I don't understand (having no knowledge of the physics), a tachyon flow is generated in a gap between as ambergris node and a Bilao crystal anode. These are the only materials that will do. Neither can be synthesized. Bilao crystal, mined on Sierra, is many times cheaper than ambergris. The tachyon stream is formed into a coherent beam which computers impress and aim at a receiver. Each tachyon carries an impressed hologramatic

portrait of the whole message. The receiver need catch but a few. Thus distance, diffusion, beam spread, small aiming errors are overcome.

Every planet in The Arm, of six races and countless governments (the Sangaree not included) is part of an instel net: military, government, or commercial. The demand for ambergris far exceeds the supply. Such a vast market can never be saturated.

Communication is the foundation of civilization. There are trillions of beings in The Arm, thousands of planets, millions of ships, all wanting instel—and all the Seiner fleets produce less than a hundred thousand nodes each year. No wonder the vultures gather.

Vultures. Mouse and I are vultures—no, rapacious birds, falcons hurled aloft to bring down game information. We're to locate a herd, tell Navy where, let it be seized for Confederation. A better ownership than the Seiners', who sell to anyone meeting their price. They're too democratic, from Confederation's viewpoint. Often, under their system, the stones go to belligerent, imperialistic governments, or unscrupulous corporations. We're here to stop that. Uh-huh. Sometimes you tell yourself tall ones, else you ask questions, worrying no-matters like *right* and *wrong*.

My soul, slithering past morality shyly, merely mumbles *I want*. There is pain in it I can't withstand. I must find my Grail, and soon, or abandon this secret quest. I've seen men so, in grim places on beautiful worlds, zombies with humanness gone, defeated by the universe, time, and all-too-rapid change, the little ones in madhouses, the big ones masters of corporations or governments in which people are the cattle of machines. Not for me, no. . . . My soul howls at an invisible moon.

"One down." The doctor tosses the node-anode piece to the Ship's Commander. I feel no pain. I'm glad he interrupts the thoughts. I'm on the edge of a scream. He turns to Mouse.

"We don't like spies," says the Ship's Commander. *We*. Always these people say *we*. The worm within me squirms. This man touches my need. I try to seize something, to *know*, but like a wet catfish it easily wriggles from my grasp. "But *Danion*'s dying. We love her. We'll keep you alive, keep our contracts, work you till you drop, till *Danion* can live without you, then we'll send you away. Please be no more trouble than you've been. We need you desperately, but we'll not be pushed too far.

Return to your quarters. We'll get underway soon, for home."

I rise, touching the small bandage behind my ear. There is no pain, but its presence makes me think of bigger cuts on my body and soul.

Mouse is done. We walk glumly along a passage, unescorted. There is nothing to say, so we're silent. Finally, as we near my cabin, he asks, "What now?"

I shrug. We're partners, neither senior, but I've been hoping he would decide. "Go for the ride, I guess. We have a year. Can they keep their guard up forever?"

Beyond Mouse I see the Sangaree lady. She smiles and waves. There's a hint of gloating in her manner. She somehow helped betray us, probably by pointing out which men were Navy agents.

Mouse catches it too. "Should've killed her on the Broken Wings," he mutters. He's shaking. His brown face wrinkles nastily. "Maybe this time."

I shake my head. "Not here, not now. We've got enough trouble already."

Mouse has never liked her. (I shouldn't, but I haven't his singular gift of hatred. Everyone, everything is too transient for more than mild aversion.) He frequently needs restraint. "She'd better move fast when we hit dirt." I hope our year here will temper his feelings, but fear it won't. His hatred's beyond the usual. I think someone close was a Sangaree stardust addict ("the dream that burns, the joy that kills," the poet Czyzewski said as he was dying). His assignments, he says, are all counter-Sangaree. Those I've shared, he prosecuted with fanatic zeal.

The Sangaree. Who, what are they? Like the Seiners and Star's End, another legendary force, but satanic, one we seldom mention. Like the savage in the night before his fire, we withhold the name of the demon for fear of invoking his presence. After centuries of sullen, subdued conflict, we know little about them. They are humanoid, pass for human, even produce mule offspring on human women. They come from afar, planet unknown. Their numbers are limited, supposedly because their women conceive only under their native sun.

A particle from that sun, long ago, buzzed through space, atmosphere, flesh, ricocheted through a chromosome, rearranged DNA, obliquely fathered a race of brigands. All the worst characteristics of Mongol, Viking, Caribbean

pirate, Mafiosi, Chinese Tong hatchetman, name it, are stamped on Sangaree genes. For themselves they produce little. They raid, they steal, they deal in drugs and slaves and guns—anything profitable (in their own view, they do nothing wrong). They are cunning, hard to find, operate as shadow-masters of native syndicates complex as Minoan labyrinths—all as government agents. Crime is their racial industry.

They are considered a nuisance, prosecuted at opportunity—except by Man. In us the Sangaree inspire irrational hatred, deadly retaliation—I think because in them we see mirrored the demons lurking on the borders of our own benighted souls. Sangaree are what we would be if freed from social restraint. Thus Jupp von Drachau's bloody action after Mouse and I located Sangaree headquarters for their human operations. Their privateers he destroyed, their drug farms and refineries, the laboratories where they force-grew pleasure slaves to the fantasy specifications of wealthy, evil men. . . .

"I hope we find their world before I die," Mouse says.

I feel a twinge of jealousy. Mouse has his Grail. It's a cup of blood and hatred, but I envy him his wholeness. Would that hate were simple enough for me.

We reach the harvestship. In the pressure of work I forget my screaming need. It haunts me only at night, or when I encounter the Sangaree woman, inevitable because air ducts and liquids pipes follow the same service passages. Then I'm ripped from my peace for, invariably, she'll taunt Mouse (we work together for the convenience of Security Department), and the wholeness of being that permits him a predictable response reminds me of my own incompleteness.

"Well, Rat," she may say, "killed anybody lately? Lots of non-Confeds here. Why not me? Or don't you have the guts?" She knows he has, but thinks she can take him. She's sure he's a strike-from-behind man, but he's much more. Mouse wants to demonstrate, but he fiercely represses temptation. She's playing some game. We want the stakes and rules before getting in. She's no actress. Her easy confidence gives her away.

During the passing months I learn of Starfish. Once they were just a wonderful concept. Now, with my contract half complete, I know that there are many forms of "life" in the hydrogen streams, though it's life difficult to comprehend, consisting more in fields of force than in common

matter. A grandfather Starfish two hundred miles long and a million years old contains fewer atoms than a human adult, most unbound by molecular energies. They are more foci upon which forces are anchored, gravity and subtle electromagnetic forces which permeate the twists and folds of time and space surrounding a Starfish "body." Within his vacuole universe, the creature supposedly exists as solidly real as we. What the Seiners sense with their instruments is but a fraction of the beast, like a shark's fin seen cutting the surface of an Old Earth ocean.

They feed on hydrogen and the other elements in the fusion chain. Once I asked a Seiner why they don't gather at stars. He said they can't remain integrate in the field stresses about masses much greater than a harvestship, nor can they "digest" matter more complex than the water molecule.

Within a Starfish, surrounded by awesome fields and spread across all their many dimensions, is a fire violent as the heart of a sun. Atoms, primarily hydrogen, are fed in, fast-shuffled through dimensions and a fusion chain, are mixed with antimatter from another universe in which they simultaneously exist; there is annihilation. The energies they bind with dimensional shifts are truly fearsome.

Physics? I don't know. Beside this, the goings-on in a supernova are kindergarten stuff. I understand only that some wastes are evacuated as the ambergris nodes used in instel transmitters.

The greatest, most unsettling surprise to date comes when I discover this is no man-cattle relationship, it's a partnership. Starfish are intelligent and, via machinery whose sophistication we landsmen never suspected, Seiner techs maintain constant mental contact with members of the herds. Starfish produce ambergris, but demand a service in return: protection.

For they're not alone out here. Like oceans, the hydrogen streams teem with life—some "carnivorous." The Starfish have a natural enemy which, at the coming of Man, threatened to end their species. "Sharks," the Seiners call them, after habits cruel as of those sea-killers of Old Earth. They're smaller than Starfish and hunt in packs like wolves and men.

Both species hyper short distances.

Most herds are shadowed by shark packs which, at opportunity, cut a beast from the herd. The Starfish aren't defenseless—they burp up balls of gut-fire and fling them

about like granddaddy nuclear bombs, but with sharks so fast and the burping so slow, they seldom get more than a single shot. The packs recently grew tremendously, why unknown. Herds dwindled, unable to cope. Man arrived.

The Starfish touched the minds of the early Seiners, explored them, contacted them, made the Bargain. (Sometimes they touch *my* mind, I think, though my imagination may play me tricks. In my dreams I see great swimming space as if with unhuman eyes. Each time I dream, I wake with a screaming migraine.) The Starfish would produce quantities of ambergris in return for protection.

Human guns serve, and missiles. Sharks' binding forces are easily disrupted—then they are feasts for *their* attendant scavengers.

But sharks, in their slow fashion, are intelligent. They now associate high casualties with ships about the prey. An old fear became fact the day sharks turned on *Danion*. Now they hit harvestships before approaching a herd. So it's war—Seiners won't take attack stoically—a war to be lost. The Seiners are too few, the sharks too many, and the slow thought of the enemy seems the only hope.

The pale Seiner who explained this knew more, but when he was about to tell, suddenly fled. They often do. I'm the visible hand of another ancient foe: landsmen.

He was speaking of a need for more powerful weapons when he broke off, left me with a cold premonition. Something grim's happening. I've felt it since coming aboard. This is no ordinary harvest. *Danion* has been under drive for months, sometimes in hyper, which isn't ordinarily done. Near Starfish, a harvestship maneuvers only on "minddrive" (I've heard the term but once—the Seiner wouldn't explain). Other drives harm the beasts.

Seven months have passed. Yesterday the Sangaree woman almost reached Mouse. Whatever her game, it's in its final moves. She's pushing hard. Wish I could figure her, but there's no understanding a Sangaree mind.

The engines are two weeks dead. Wherever we were bound, we arrived. I know little. The Seiners are more closemouthed than ever, speak only when they must.

Nervousness and fear haunt the ship. I hear great shark packs are gathering. I sometimes see weary Seiners from our constantly busy service ships, wonder if they are fighting those packs, or are at something else. Though we landsmen are permitted little knowledge of it, there is

a great race on. In some desperate gamble, the Fishers are trying to finish something before the sharks finally throw themselves against us. My ignorance grows trying.

It's evening. Mouse and I are playing chess. Despite ourselves, we grow increasingly close. We're forced together. The Sangaree woman is one of the few who will speak. Others avoid us, fearing guilt by association.

My game's bad. I'm piqued. The *I want,* so long played down in my soul, has burst upon me again, louder than ever, mocking, saying I'm at the threshold but too dense to recognize my discovery.

"I can't hold off much longer," Mouse says, capturing a pawn. "Next time she shows, or the next, I'll bend her."

Moving to protect my queen, "We're almost in. Five months. Don't ruin it."

With a quick hand he slaughters a knight. "Platitudes coming?" I glance at his expressionless face, back to the board. I see disaster.

"Yield." Another pattern of disaster grows clear. I know what she's doing, and how. Unthinking, I stand abruptly. "We may have to!"

"Eh?"

"Bend her. Just figured how she's doing it. Assume she's got a tracer, broadcasting random bleeps. . . ."

"Got you. Easy for the Sangaree to triangulate on, but a worm in her guts *Danion* might never pin down. Let's not bend her, let's chop it out." Coldly, that, with anticipation of pain inflicted. He returns chessmen to their box, takes a wicked, homemade knife from beneath his mattress, says, "Let's go."

I have a hundred reasons for not, for his going alone, for many alternatives, but am able to articulate none. It's time she was stalemated.

We're halfway to her cabin when a notion strikes. "Suppose she's got us bugged." We assume the Seiners listen, but this is the first I think of spying by a third party.

"Then she'll expect us." He shrugs. "Better think about it." While he is at it, a squad of Seiners appears.

"Looks like the job gets done for us." They stop at her door.

"They're not thinking!" Mouse is shaking, excited and afraid.

My heart begins a flamenco beat. The Seiners push through the door. As Mouse said, they aren't thinking. Two fall before they get out of sight, dropped by what's

waiting there for Mouse and me. Loud reports (later: gunpowder pistols, homemade). Some grunts, a scream. The remaining two men are inside.

"Come on!"

I don't know what he has in mind, but I follow. In the door low he goes, pauses to lift a weapon from a dying Seiner. As I do the same, I see the Sangaree woman beyond him, back to us, struggling with the last Fisher. She disarms him. Her hand darts past his guard, smashes his windpipe.

My grunt tells her of our presence.

"Slowly," says Mouse as she turns. "I'd hate to shoot." Hope is thick in his voice.

For once she does as told, has no instant, sharp reply. As she faces us, her distress is very evident. But it fades into her oppressive smile. "Too late. The last signal's already sent. They'll be here soon. . . ."

Underlining her words, strident alarms hoot. Shortly, *Danion* shivers—service ships launching, I think. "I'll go on station," I say. "Watch her till the masters-at-arms show." I start for Damage Control Central.

How fast news travels! By the time I arrive, the duty section is abuzz about the appearance of fifty Sangaree ships. Frightened landsmen are certain these are our last hours. I don't comprehend till I overhear Seiners out-admiraling Payne himself. They're certain we'll fight.

I shudder.

The Sangaree maneuver in the darkness beyond these walls. Outnumbered service ships race toward them. I wonder if Payne will call for help from other fleets—no, he won't know where they are. Security. Unanswerable questions dash across my mind, the biggest, still: what do I want?

The attack that comes isn't Sangaree. Sharks, distressed by the new arrival, strike in all directions. News filters in from Operations, some good, some bad. The Sangaree are having a hard time. The sharks are concentrating on *Danion*.

In the sea of nothing our ships are killing, being killed by, sharks. The Sangaree fight an enemy undiscoverable while, foolishly, trying to move to a position of vantage vis-à-vis the fleet.

Danion shivers constantly, all weapons in action. In the heart of the great mobile we wait, wait, wait for a shudder and alarms to announce the sharks have scored. There is fear aplenty, and courage brewing. For once

there is no tension between landsman and Seiner. We are brothers before an unprejudiced Death.

And, though I note it not, my soul is quite content.

Danion reels. Sirens hoot. Officers shout. A damage-control team piles aboard an electric truck and hurries to aid technicians in the affected area. Behind, here, the mood turns quickly grim. Though we feel so little, the damage is tremendous there. Two thousand persons, ten percent of *Danion*'s population, perished in a moment—an oppressive weight indeed.

And here I sit, awaiting my dying turn.

Somewhere offstage, the Sangaree decide they've had enough, leave us their ghostly foe.

"Suits," says the bleak-faced Seiner directing D.C. operations. He sees the end. From lockers come space-suits one by one. I slip into mine, remembering I've never worn one except in fun, or way back during midshipman training. I think of Mouse, not yet here, and wonder what has become of him.

Danion screams. She whirls beneath me and I fall. Suit servos hum and force me to my feet. The lights pale, die, return as stored power's injected. In my heart I know we're dead. The sharks have gotten our power and drives. The end.

Someone is yelling my name. "What?" I reply. I'm too scared to listen closely, hear only that my team is going out. I jump at the truck. Seiner hands pull me aboard.

Twenty minutes later, in an odd part of the ship devoted to nuclear plant, my team captain sets me to sealing ruptured piping. Here whole passageways are open; occasionally I glimpse a starless night. I think nothing of it for a long while. Too busy am I, doing the work of a Seiner.

Only hours later, when the pipes no longer bleed, when I spy a vacuum-ruined corpse tangled in a mass of wiring dark against an outer glow, do I pause. Space. This is what I'm not supposed to see. I must look. I walk to the hole, see nothing but the tangle of harvestship.

I stand there frozen, disbelieving, I don't know how long. No stars. Where can we be that there are no stars?

The ship is revolving slowly. Something gradually appears, the source of the glow on *Danion*'s hull. I recognize it. The galaxy, edge on, as seen from outside. My premonitions return to haunt me. Far, I see another harvestship coruscating under shark attack. My own has

shuddered to several while I've worked. But my eyes hurry on, to a coin-sized brightness in the direction of spin.

Self-illuminated, no sun. Beyond the galactic rim. My heart stutters, my fear redoubles. There is only one place. . . .

Star's End.

What are the Seiners doing?

Something breaks, something blossoms across the night. Fire. Fire like a dying star. A harvestship is burning in a flame only a multidimensional shark could ignite. They're getting more cunning, hitting us with antimatter gases. My grief is like a physical blow. In the corner of my mind, a strange voice asks, as a Fisher would, if the death does good for the fleet. Are sharks there dying too?

Star's End. My eyes return. All my myths have hemmed me in. I serve the most pleasant, am trapped between the wicked and ugly—I have no doubts the Sangaree will soon return. It is not in their nature to quit when the stakes are so high.

The permanencies of my universe are here awarring, and doubtless one will fall . . . I fear it.

I comprehend why the Seiners have come. As all who seek Star's End do, they want the fortress world's fabulous guns. For centuries opportunists have tried to master this planet. Who owns its timeless weapons is dictator to The Arm. No defense of today could stand against Star's End's power. This is the salvation for which the Seiners faintly hope. What I don't see is how they hope to penetrate the planet's defenses. Battle fleets have failed.

A touch. A voice comes by conduction. "Let's go. *Danion*'s hit inboard of us." In the words I imagine great sadness, but none of the fear I feel. I follow the man, rejoin my team. We return to D.C. Central, through locks, through regions of ship ruined as by weapons of war. Hard to believe it is done by a creature I can't even see.

They've prepared a room for us to relax in, safe enough to shed our suits—nothing there, except people, that sharks can harm. I see Mouse, freshly wounded.

"Should've bent her," he says. "Waited me out. Now she's up to deviltry."

I look at his arm. It's mangled. His face is drawn, but he doesn't complain. She must have really surprised him. "Thing like a hatchet," he says.

Unless that arm is quickly tended, he'll lose it. I find an officer, ask for a doctor, get told he's on his way. I think of the Sangaree woman.

I've had a feeling for her, I realize, a strange, miscegenous desire (I've had feelings for many people, though I've long lied myself into not caring). My emotions kept me from letting Mouse do what should have been done—and now I pay. Before me, blood of a friend; in my mind, a gunmetal smile.

"I'll take care of it."

From the tool crib I draw a laser cutting torch, no questions. The attendant assumes I need it. Outside D.C. Central I open an access plate and make the adjustments taught me in Navy schools. I have an unwieldy gun. I borrow an electric scooter.

She will be somewhere where she thinks she can take out the crew without damaging the ship. To her mind, something involving air. Hydroponics? No. Central blowers. From there, by cutting off air or introducing chemicals, she can neutralize most of us.

I arrive, see I've reasoned well. Dead men guard the door. Beyond is a vast place, as it must be to serve a ship so huge. Somewhere in this mechanical jungle she waits. . . .

Time so swiftly passes. A half hour departs and still I'm creeping among Brobdingnagian machines. *Danion* still shivers, but the battle is so old it no longer forces itself on the consciousness. I'm tired. I've been up for twenty hours. Finally I spy the mighty consol from which *Danion*'s lungs are controlled.

I crawl, I climb, I find myself a perch on a high catwalk from which most all the board's visible. I see only empty seats where technicians once manipulated our air, a couple of corpses. She's well armed.

From somewhere she appears, as if spontaneously generated. My eyes have wandered. I lift my weapon and aim, but . . .

"Maria . . . Marya . . ." It rips itself from me. She has been closer to me than most women—I never met my mother.

Her head comes up in startled play, searching. Suddenly there is an explosion of that mocking smile. "Why Moyshe, what are you doing here?" She's looking for me, eyes narrow over the smile, hand on her gun a-twitching.

"You're trying to destroy us."

She steps over a dead Seiner. "Moyshe!" Accusing. "Not you. You'd be repatriated."

The lie's as tall as a mile. After the Broken Wings and Von Drachau's raid, she'll have my guts on her

morning toast. She crosses my aim repeatedly, but I won't end it. I can't. My aim falls.

In moving I give myself away. The gunmetal smile is replaced by clashing-sabers laughter. Her weapon jumps up.

To this I can react. The blast reddens metal where I crouched. I'm in the open, running. I fire wild, get behind some great machine. Her shouts mock—I catch no words —and beams lick about my covert.

I'm terrified. I've swum too deep. I've feared this since need drove me to the Bureau. Now I'll die. . . .

She's too confident of my ineptness. Something within me breaks; I realize there *is* something in which I can believe, something to grasp, to serve. I grin, laugh at my laughing soul. The Grail. We've found it. We. This ship, this I, we're part of a *We*. . . .

In all marvelous stupidity I step into the open. The woman is so startled she hesitates. Against the conditioning of my pyramid of years, I shoot first.

I'm standing over her when Fishers arrive. I have tears. I've always wondered about that—Mouse cries as though the dead one were his brother, or more, for we value brothers little these days. One takes the cutting torch. Another asks, "Moyshe benRabi?" He knows, of course. They've been watching. Ship's security doesn't fold because a battle is on. These, I discover, were coming to do what I've done. They received orders concerning me while on their way.

"Yes."

"Fellow with the headaches?"

I nod.

"Follow me, please."

I do, though looking back at Maria. Now she is dead, she isn't just "the Sangaree woman." She is Maria, Marya, a woman I may have loved some odd, unexplainable way. Perhaps I've had a deathwish.

I follow, and somewhere along the line note we're entering forbidden territory, Operations Sector, where landsmen dare not go. Nervous, I look around. It's quieter, more remote than the rest of the ship. The people we pass seem more aloof than the technicians to whom I'm accustomed. They must be. They are the men and women who will think us beyond defeat—maybe.

We enter a vast room filled with damaged machinery. Here there has been death aplenty; casualties still wait on

a dozen stretchers. My guide leads me to a man. "Ben-Rabi," he says, departs.

This room is much like a ship's bridge, though larger, and the machinery unfamiliar. I see people on reclining couches, heads hidden in great helmets. Technicians grumble over them and damaged gear. A spatial display globe lurks blackly in a corner. Centered in it are seven golden balls, harvestships. Golden needles are service ships, maneuvering against sharks portrayed as scarlet fish. Tiny golden dragons at the periphery mark what must be distant Starfish. No Sangaree are to be seen.

"Mr. benRabi!" I realize the man is after my attention.

"Why dragons?"

He stops an angry word. "Image from our minds, archetypal. You'll see."

"I don't understand."

He ignores me. "The drives are dead, except minddrive. For that we need power from the Fish. But sharks have burned out most of our mind-techs." He points to the nearest stretcher. The face of a girl, a child just out of crèche, smiles in vacant madness. "We haven't standbys to replace them, so we're drawing marginal sensitives from the crew. You're subject to migraines?"

I nod. I'm reeling. What strange thing . . .

"We want you to go into rapport with a Fish."

Fear. Memories of terrible, haunting dreams, of the pain resulting. "I can't!"

"Oh?" This man has eyes that reach for my soul—which cowers, though it knows not what to fear.

"I don't know *how*." Somehow, this feels lame.

"You don't need to. You just hook up. The Fish will push the power through to the helmet. You're just a receiver."

"But I'm tired. I've been awake for . . ."

"So is everybody." He gestures impatiently. A couple comes. "Put him in Number Three." They nod. Departing, I hear, "That the last one?" wearily.

I want to protest, but get no chance. The techs put me on the couch. Ah, well. I've undoubtedly faced worse for the Bureau.

One tech is a woman reminiscent of the professional mother of my childhood. She is gray-haired, cherry-faced, chatters comfortably while strapping my arms to the couch's. She points out grip-switches beneath my fingers, does my legs.

The other, a quiet man, efficiently prepares my head for

the helmet. He rubs me with an unscented paste, covers my hair with a thing like a hairnet. My scalp protests a thousand little stings that quickly fade. "Lift, please." I do. The helmet devours my head. I'm blind.

A green ogre with dirty claws shoves his hand into my guts, grabs, yanks. My heart plays battledrums. Words from Czyzewski's *The Old Gods:* ". . . who sang the darkful deep, and dragons in the sky." My body's sweat-wet. Surely the contacts won't work.

In my ears, a voice. "Ready, Mr. benRabi." A sweet-voiced woman, ancient trick for calming—which works. "Depress the right grip-switch one click."

I do. Fear returns. I've lost all sensation, I float, see, hear, smell, feel nothing.

"That's not bad, is it?" The voice of the professional mother again. I remember that plump old woman's lap and arms and love (but we must all depart that nest), the comfort she gave when I feared. . . . "When you're ready, depress the switch another click, then release it. To withdraw, pull *up* on the left switch."

I depress the switch.

My dreams return awake, space swimming, the galaxy wrong in color, Star's End strangely bright. Things move. I remember the display tank. This is like being at the heart of that. Service ships are glimmering needles (invisible to ordinary sight), harvestships glowing balls of wire, sharks red fish-shapes. Far, Starfish are golden Chinese dragons, drifting lazily closer.

My terror fades as if a hand is pushing it back. . . .

Gently warm, a hint of voice trickles into my soul. "I do it. Starfish, Chub." There's a wind-chimes tinkle of laughter. "Watch. I show me."

A small dragon soars from the distant herd, does a ponderous end-over-end roll. Shortly, "Old Ones don't like. Dangerous. But we winning, new friend. Sharks running. Most destroyed."

The creature's joy is obvious. He has the right. The sharks are abandoning the fleet.

My terror is still great, but the night creature holds it back, infecting me with his excitement. Time passes. He learns the ways of my mind. He could play me like a musical instrument if he wanted.

"First battle won," he says when I'm under control, "but another fight come."

"What?" I speak in return with my mind.

"Ships-that-kill, bad ones, return."

"How do you know?"

"No way to show, tell. But come, hyper now. Your people prepare."

I go silent. So does he. I take in the wonders about me, the rippling movement of sharks far out, the ponderous approach of dragons, the shimmering maneuvers of service ships, preparing for another fight. The galaxy hangs over all like a hole in the night. Nearby, Star's End sits, waiting.

"Coming," says my dragon. My attention turns. Glimmering ships appear against the galaxy. Sangaree. Down in my backbrain, behind my ears, there is a gentle tickle. "Power."

Sangaree ships radiate from the arrival zone in lines like octopus legs, form a hemisphere. They intend to englove us. Far, the sharks mill uncertainly, retreat.

A light-ball flares among the Sangaree. A Fisher mine has scored. But it makes no difference. This battle we can't win. The service ships number but ten, all wounded, and even the most hale harvestship has lost power and drives. Minddrive and stored power just aren't enough.

The Sangaree maneuver closer, but there's no firing. My dragon says they're treating with Payne for surrender—a herd's no good without a fleet.

The herd drifts closer, almost onto the Sangaree. They'll join this battle, but cautiously because sharks still watch from afar.

"Fight soon."

The Sangaree fire on the service ships, our most expendable vessels. They'll force us to submit.

The slow, stately dance of enmity ends. The Sangaree move fast, service ships evade, missiles are everywhere like hurrying wasps. Beam-fire weaves beautiful webs of death. My terror is replaced by depression. I see no way to win.

Far, a Starfish approaches a Sangaree. Dangerous. The ship's weapons can easily destroy him—the ship stops firing.

"We do shark-thing," echoes in my mind, "but more power. We stop fleet fast if no guns." Another Sangaree falls silent. A Starfish burps gut-fire. The ball hurtles through space, so slowly seeming—Sangaree burning.

The hemisphere closes about us. The open side, toward Star's End, grows rapidly smaller. The diameter shrinks, two harvestships unleash fire of fantastic magnitude, yet scarcely enough to neutralize the growing attack.

The Starfish mind-burn another Sangaree, turn to run.

They've waited too long. Their central fires are seen. Chub's sadness touches my mind as a dragon dies.

The Sangaree globe closes. Like a squeezing fist, they tighten up, pile up toward Star's End. Their attack grows terrible. They begin pushing—and I see their goal, the confused sharks milling against the galaxy. I suppose they think we'll give up before enduring that again. . . .

"It works well," my mindvoice says. "Is hard to think thoughts in bad commander. Sangaree heads twisted." The Sangaree are thickly massed now, pushing hard. The sharks are more agitated. The Starfish are cruising their way, ready to cover if we retreat.

The trickle in the root of my brain waxes, becomes a flaming torrent. It hurts, my God; it hurts! Burning, the power surges through me. I'm scarcely able to observe.

Then the harvestships surge *toward* the Sangaree, all weapons firing—I think with no aim, just to hurl all destruction possible. The Sangaree push back—but waver, waver.

In pain, I sweep the night. Sangaree ships burn, service ships the same. A harvestship stops shooting. The Sangaree begin knocking it apart—they've lost all patience. I suffer another sadness, my own, for those were my people. . . .

The Sangaree withdraw—not retreating, but pushed. We may not last long, but our ferocity is, for the moment, greater than theirs.

Something screams across my mind. It's a mad voice babbling, shrieking fear, incoherencies. I sense little sense, but warning touches me, terror. Phantoms taunt, grotesqueries as of the worst medieval imagination gather in space before me, gargoyles and gorgons, Boschian nightmares writhing, fangs and talons and fire. They shriek, "Go away, or die!" Insanity. They're not real. I'm trapped in the thoughts of a mad mind. . . . I scream.

Nightmare is after me like a drug dream (it's like descriptions of stardust deprivation), burning now, with salamanders. I must escape this haunted place. Again, I scream. The madness deeply holds my mind.

Then the warm feeling comes, gently calms my soul, soothes my fear, pushes the terror and madness away. My dragon from the stars. . . . He tells me, "We succeed. Maybe win." Then, darkly, "Fear is Star's End mind-thing. Planet is mad machine. Mad machine use madness weapons.

"See!"

Shielded by his touch, I turn to Star's End. The Sangaree

are silhouetted against the right planet. The face of the world is diseased behind them, spotted blackly, covered with sudden clouds.

I see we are no longer advancing. Indeed, the planet is receding. We're running full speed, dispersing. I know that, if we could, we'd hyper. But we can't on minddrive. Nor can the Sangaree while they're combat-locked. A hundred miles closer than we, they're scattering, breaking lock—too late! The mad machine's weapons arrive.

"Close mind! Get out!" my dragon shrieks. "Not need power now." I understand because of the earlier nightmares—Star's End's are weapons of a terrible kind, of the mind. I stop looking—though I have no eyes to close here—lift the switch beneath my left hand.

I feel the helmet now, the couch, and loss. I miss my dragon, and, in missing him, I understand Starfishers a little better, why they enjoy being so far from the worlds of men. This Fish-Fisher thing is a whole new experiential frontier. . . . My body is wet with sweat, I'm shivering cold. The room is silent. Where are my techs? Am I alone? My head is a thundering migraine. Rational thought is impossible. I want free of the straps that bind my limbs. . . .

Danion staggers, staggers, staggers. I hear screams—I'm not alone! Loose things racket around; I suffer momentary visions of beasts of hell. Terror grips me anew. The Star's End weapons have arrived, and I'm pinned here, helpless. . . .

Slowly, slowly, it fades. The screams die (some, I think, were my own), are gradually replaced by excited chatter—I can distinguish no words. My head is tearing itself apart. I was a kid the last time it was this bad. I shout. Someone finally notices me. The helmet comes off, a syringe stabs my neck. Tingles spread. The migraine begins to pass.

The room is cloaked in gloom. Stored power is almost gone, I guess. A drain, the fighting. But the faces I see are joyous—with the exception of those gruesomely vacant few of mind-techs who didn't get out in time.

"We've won!" says the motherish half of my tech-team. "Star's End killed them." Not all, I suspect, though I say nothing. Some broke lock, and will carry a grudge. . . .

"And four harvestships," says a sad-faced man passing.

A Pyrrhic victory. We won, but there is nothing to celebrate. Our joy dies.

I'm ready for collapse, yet hours pass before I rest. First, I search for Mouse, find him in D.C. Central, un-

conscious on a stretcher, his arm crudely bandaged and splinted. Then it's back to my team, patching pipes. There is so much to do, just to keep *Danion* alive. But power we eventually restore, life support we repair, drives we jury-rig. It's not too hard. The damage is more to people than plant (over half the crew is gone). The surviving service ships are recovered. A watch for sharks is set, but those nightmares have gone to places of easier hunting.

There is no time for mourning, so fierce is the battle for life. We save *Danion,* but abandon the Star's End project. The war with sharks may well be lost.

Months pass. Something dread approaches: time to return to Carson's.

It is five months since *I want* drank of the blood of my soul. Five peaceful months. I belong, finally—but I'm afraid to ask to stay. For weeks I worry asking, decide, undecide. I'm so terribly afraid of being turned down; and a little afraid of being accepted.

Even the days are gone now. We're down to the hours, and still I haven't asked, still I haven't found the courage to seize what I need. I think of crèche days, of story time, of heroes who were never undecided, never afraid—all from the past. There is no room for heroes in the kaleidoscope universe of today. (Strange. I'm suddenly certain that was one of the things I've sought: heroism, to be a hero. The Broken Wings was as close as I came. . . . But that conjures visions of Maria.)

The ship for Carson's departs in two hours. What can I do? I know what I should, but still I fear committal, rejection. I don't want to leave, but what if staying is a mistake? The questions I ask myself would fill a book.

Finally, with just an hour remaining, I seek Mouse. He never has doubts, no matter how much he fears—paranoia has its rewards. Maybe he can help.

We've seen little of one another since the battle. I've spent most of my time in Operations Sector, still forbidden him (I'm being used as a mind-tech—are they expecting I'll stay? Or is it just because they're forced by circumstances?), so he is bright when I arrive. "Hey, how about chess while we're waiting?" he asks. He is addicted. "Nobody else will play." He is still an outcast.

Maybe a game will relax me. I nod. He's very excited, shaking a little. I hardly notice. Over opening moves, I try to broach my problem. "Mouse, I want to stay. . . ."

He looks at me strangely, as if with mixed emotions, as if he expected this, but was hoping for something else. "Let's talk about it after the game. Drink? It'll unwind you."

A man about to undergo acceleration and temporary null-gravity shouldn't, but I nod. He goes to a cabinet, gets a bottle of something pre-mixed. While he's getting glasses, I look around. Everything that is Mouse is gone, except the chess set. So nice to be sure. My gear is packed, but I still haven't sent it to the service ship. . . .

A glass breaks. Mouse curses, gathers the pieces, curses again as he cuts himself. Wish he'd quit using his bad hand. . . . I see why. With his good he's pushing gooey stuff into and over Security's bug—we hunted it up one day after Star's End, when we wanted to talk. He brings the drinks, returns to the game.

It's a slow one. He studies each move so carefully. I down several drinks, grow relaxed, turn off the troublesome part of my mind. I get involved. I'm holding my own. Unusual. He's far the better player, but he seems remote, disturbed. Time swiftly passes.

Sudden, rapid moves. My queen goes, then, "Checkmate!" The alcohol no longer helps. This defeat just adds to a growing depression, a small symbol of my big-time losing. A moment later, while boxing the pieces (he fumbles with his bad hand), he says, "I kept this out, hoping we'd play on the way back. You want to stay?"

"Yes."

"That's why I'm here." He turns. I see the fumbling wasn't purposeless. In his good hand is a Fisher weapon. I groan.

"You should've figured, Moyshe. Wheels within wheels." (Maybe I did down deep, and came to Mouse for an easy answer.) "Psych figured you'd fall, figured you'd get where I couldn't. So they sent you out as a remote data-collecting device—and I'm your keeper. *That* is the worm gnawing around the core of all the rotten plans." This is a long speech for Mouse. He's doing something more than trying to explain—maybe he doesn't like what he's doing. "We're friends, so let's play it gentle, eh?"

Yes, gentle. As in chess, he outskills me here. I'm the half of the team who always does the "soft," people stuff. He does the "hard." He may like me, but he will, and easily can, kill me if I don't cooperate. I look at his face. There's pain there. There's something he wants to tell me—maybe, just maybe, he doesn't want to go

himself. I'd best not push if he's under stress. He'll overreact. My shoulders slump forward. I surrender. Back to being a chip in the stream.

Dread voice through *Danion*, godlike, calling us to the departure station for pay-off and check-out. Mouse pockets his weapon. "Sorry, Moyshe."

"I understand." But I don't, of course.

He nods at the door. We go. I give him no trouble all the way, even when opportunity occurs. I'm sure I could do something in the crowd there. But I've surrendered all. No home. Guess I'll never have one. Back to being a chip in a universe like Sierran rivers raging. Back to the beginning.

No home. . . .

"Mr. benRabi?" Here's a man coming through the press, my bags in his hands. "You left these."

I know this man. He's Security, the fellow who first took me into Operations Sector. He steps between Mouse and me. Landsmen mill excitedly around us, talking excitedly of home, rushing to the paymaster when their names are called. I don't really notice in my shock.

"The gun, please?" There are several of them now, all around. Mouse surrenders his weapon meekly. "I told Beckhart it wouldn't work." He looks shattered.

"We'll have to hold you."

There's a stir among the landsmen, a confused shout, screams. A Seiner twists past me, falling, an expression of incredible surprise on the unburned half of his face. Now there's screaming, running, Security men plunging into the crowd. . . .

"Wheels within wheels, and this was mine," Mouse says. "I thought Beckhart would have a fail-safer aboard." (Fail-safer. Trade term for a fanatic sent on a mission, unknown to the mission, to assassinate agents about to defect or be captured. Didn't know we used them any more. Sure didn't think Mouse and I were that important.) "Sorry, Moyshe. I couldn't tell you. Had to have you thinking I meant what I was doing." Did he? Or was he just bending with the breeze? "Had to spot him before we went over. Otherwise . . ." He shrugs, then smiles. So do I. I'll believe him.

There're more shots, then the Seiners catch their man —now we're home free.

Home, after all—and with a friend.

A Modest Proposal

by
Russell Bates

Russell Bates, a University of Oklahoma student, successful television scriptwriter, former Air Force missile technician, and practicing Kiowa Indian, has taken time off from the Amerindian writings that consume the bulk of his attention to write this little treatise, an application of the first law of thermodynamics to the human soul.

He writes: "The effects of overpopulation on an animal species are fourfold. Three of them are: the females go barren; the parents destroy the young; a new disease springs up to wipe out the animal, sometimes to extinction. This story is based on the fourth effect. There may be some argument; I will listen with a smile."

Ron Kermit ducked quickly into the night alley, fully aware that they had seen him. He ran blindly, tripping over a garbage can and righting himself in almost the same motion. The sounds of running feet echoed behind him; they were in the street, not far from the alley's mouth.

Kermit ran faster, his left arm flung out to keep himself away from the wall. The bricks were wet beneath his fingers. His breath came in gulps and his throat burned.

His hand met air and he instinctively turned off into a break between the buildings. He stopped, gasping, then peered out carefully down the alley. Two figures stood silhouetted at the end of the dark canyon.

Kermit moved back into his hiding place and leaned against the wall. His thin chest heaved and his bony body shook. The policemen had surprised him only moments after he had finished placing the bomb. Like a fool, he had started running when he heard their shouts. Now it was too late to pretend that he was merely an innocent insomniac out for a stroll.

He looked out again. They were moving into the alley along opposite walls. It would be only moments before a prowl car blocked the other end.

Kermit frantically explored the alcove. It ended against another building; there was no passage to the street. Desperate, he cast about for a window or a door. There was one of each. The window was barred and the door was locked.

A flicker of light spilled along the floor of the alley. *Flashlight!* Kermit thought in panic. Looking up, he made out the black shape of a fire escape along the wall. He moved beneath it as the bobbing light in the alley grew brighter.

He did not dare risk pulling down the ladder. Instead, he found and stood atop a heavy trash barrel. He leaped up and barely caught the bottom edge of the grating. Hauling himself up almost silently, he paused only a moment to catch his breath and take off his shoes.

He had run up four flights when the policemen reached his alcove. Kermit hugged the wall on the fourth landing and prayed. Two flashlight beams ran over the walls and up the fire escape. For a long moment, one beam played on Kermit's landing, then moved on upward.

The policemen left the alcove, assured that their quarry was elsewhere. Kermit reached the roof, put on his shoes, and began to hunt for another way down. On the next-to-last rooftop, he found a door ajar. He was in the street and heading south in seconds.

On May 6, 1982, three shaped charges blew out a section of supports of the bridge over Royal Gorge in Colorado. The south end of the bridge tipped, buckled, then gave way, collapsing the entire structure. State Highway 50 was heavily trafficked that afternoon and twenty-eight cars, three trucks, and a charter bus fell eleven hundred feet into the Arkansas River. One hundred and six people died.

When dawn came, Ron Kermit was sitting in an easy chair in his apartment, reading a Bible. He hadn't been

able to sleep. He checked his watch: six hours and the bomb would explode.

That was a close thing last night, he thought. Even closer than those military policemen at the Air Force Academy. And the special shoes were right here in the apartment!

He got up, took the shoes out of the closet, then showered and changed, and put them on.

Later, he left the apartment house and drove his late '70s car along a route that carefully avoided the downtown section of Denver. Morning visitor's hours at Our Lady of the Angels Hospital were from ten to twelve; he had more than an hour. Kermit pulled into a drive-in, ordered a simple breakfast, then dallied over it to kill time.

A police cruiser turned in and parked next to him. Kermit's hands shook a little, but he resisted the impulse to rush his meal and drive away. He'd simply outwait them. He ate casually, leafing through an astrology magazine on the seat. The policemen drank coffee and watched the carhop for a while. When they finally left, Kermit flashed his lights and gave the girl a large tip when she took the tray.

Minutes later, he was hurrying up the steps from the hospital parking lot. The huge lobby with green plastic walls was crowded with people; it was Monday. The nurse at the reception desk smiled when she glanced up at the thin, prematurely balding man. Kermit handed her his visitor's pass.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Kermit," said the nurse, punching up a computer display on a tiny screen. "Your wife is fine. She had a little pain last night. False labor. But it shouldn't be much longer."

Kermit crossed his arms on the counter. "Will I be able to see her today?"

"Just a moment, sir." The nurse pressed buttons below the screen. "Dr. Hobbs? Mr. Kermit is here and he'd like to see his wife. Yes, Doctor. I'll tell him."

To Kermit, she said, "Dr. Hobbs will be going up to Isolation in just a few minutes. He said that he'll arrange for your wife to be moved to an observation window. You can go right up."

In the elevator, Kermit fidgeted: the bomb would go off in two hours. If only no one found it. . . .

The door opened and Kermit hurried to the Isolation wing. He scarcely noticed the brilliant white of the plastic

walls or the crisply starched and clean medical staff. He waited impatiently at the observation window with KERMIT flickering on a TV screen above it.

At last, a door slid open in the white room beyond and a bed with a small, pale figure in it glided into view. Two men in clear plastic suits over hospital whites were close behind, trailing tail-like air tubes.

The loudspeaker over the window hissed and sputtered. "Mr. Kermit, here is your wife."

Kermit forgot about the bomb; here was the living reason behind it all.

On May 7, 1982, three jet flights out of Denver International Airport were blown out of the sky within a half hour after takeoff. Two were regularly scheduled flights; the third was an excursion flight bound for Las Vegas. Six hundred and forty-nine souls, passengers and crews, were lost.

Celia Kermit's voice was thin and tired. "Hi, hon," she said, lifting a hand in a slow wave. Her long red hair framed her face against the pillow. The delicate body beneath the sheets was very pregnant.

Softly, Kermit said, "Hi yourself, Bug. How do you feel?"

Celia smiled. "Oh, I'm so tired. And sleepy. I think they've got me on every drug they can find."

"I miss you, Bug. And I wish I could touch you, even once."

"Me, too. And *I* wish they'd let you make me a big peanut-butter sandwich. I get nothing but liquids in this place."

Kermit put a hand to the glass and nodded. Celia's hand came up and briefly touched the glass from the other side.

"Well," she said, and closed her eyes sleepily. She opened them again, halfway. "But if little Ron or Rhonda can be born and be . . . normal, it'll all be worth it."

Kermit dropped his hand. "Yeah," he said, scowling at the doctors. "*If* they're right!"

"Honey, don't start that again. They're doing all they can. And they have to be right." She turned her face away. "Our baby won't be like the others. I—I've seen some of the others, right here in this place." She looked back again and a small tear trickled down her cheek to

the pillow. "Ron, they don't open their eyes or move. They don't even cry! No, our baby just has to be normal."

Kermit said nothing for a moment. He glared at the two men with his wife and clenched his fists. The doctors looked back at him blandly.

"Well, they've failed a hundred percent up to now. And they won't listen to me. I don't have degrees and diplomas crawling up the walls."

But Celia had fallen asleep. Kermit looked at her and whispered, "I'm doing all I can for you and baby, Bug. Believe that."

The bed slid away from the window and the taller doctor stepped closer. Kermit's mouth twisted; he itched to put fists to the doctor's bushy brown mustache and red-flushed cheeks.

"Mr. Kermit," said Dr. Hobbs. "I have tried to explain this project many times. But each of those times you have never let me finish. It's important for your wife to be here. If your baby is normal, as some have been in similar projects in other cities, we may have made a breakthrough."

"And if it isn't, what do you have then? Fine project it is when you steal a man's wife while he's gone and lock her up!"

Dr. Hobbs sighed. "I've reassured you, Mr. Kermit, that the government is not keeping your wife here against her will. She agreed voluntarily. That you were not in Colorado at the time was mere mischance."

"Stuff the explanations, Doctor! If you won't listen to what I have to say, what do you expect from me?"

"I expect you to hope along with me. I expect you to want your child to be the healthiest normal baby a father could have." Then, quietly, "Do you really want a vegetable, like the thousands and millions already born that way?"

"No, dammit!" Kermit said, putting his hands to the glass. "But name me one guarantee that it won't happen!"

Hobbs shook his head. "We have none. The disease is untraceable, unclassifiable . . ."

"But you're wrong! It isn't a disease! It's . . ."

"No, Mr. Kermit!" Hobbs stalked away. "I'm all through listening!" He turned back, his red face redder. "We are fighting a *disease!* Nothing else! Overpopulation has brought it down on our heads! Babies, practically all babies—no matter the race or nationality or what—are being born with severe nervous dysfunction! They die or, if they live, are little better than husks! It's the natural

answer to any exploding population! It happens in all lower species—" Hobbs lowered his voice "—and it's happening to man."

Hobbs waved the other doctor forward. "But if you still want to harangue somebody, Dr. Tinian here is your man. He's with the Surgeon General's Office and this project is his idea."

Dr. Tinian moved uncertainly toward the window. He was a heavy, colorless man: gray hair, gray eyes, pale white skin. "Uh, yes," he said, glancing at Hobbs. "Dr. Hobbs has told me what you think. But I would prefer that you tell me yourself."

Kermit frowned, eyeing Hobbs for any sign of a trick. "All right. You're dead wrong! There's no disease and all of this setup is a big waste. It's reincarnation, Dr. Tinian. Or really the lack of it. We've overpopulated the world, sure. But the real result is that we simply have run out of souls and minds to be reincarnated!"

Dr. Tinian blinked several times. "Uh, granted that what you believe is true, what would be the solution?"

Kermit paced before the window, "I've thought it over for some time. The answer is the most simple one." He stopped pacing and watched Tinian carefully. "Kill people. Trim the population. But not by just a few. Trim it by the amount, however large, that will completely guarantee a future for the human race."

A tremor shook Tinian's shoulders; gooseflesh crept along his bare arms. "But that's . . ." He looked at Hobbs, who shrugged. "Mr. Kermit, is . . . is that all?"

Kermit nodded, eyes wary.

"Uh, I see. I'll . . . keep your information in mind."

"No, you won't. You don't believe me, either!"

"Well, I admit it's hard to take seriously on the face of it. But, perhaps in time . . ."

Kermit flung himself against the glass. "You pompous bastard! I'm right and you know it! Hobbs as much admits it in describing your 'disease!' But you can't let yourself agree! Oh, no! It's not scientific! It's . . ."

Tinian backed away and Hobbs rushed to replace him. "It's superstitious nonsense!" he shouted, waving his arms. "Wives' tales! Folklore! A tired paragraph from *Believe It or Not!* Well, I choose not to believe it!"

Kermit sputtered in rage, the cords in his neck standing out. But Hobbs turned away and motioned for Celia's bed to be taken out.

Hobbs said to Tinian, "I warned you, sir."

Kermit pressed against the glass, trying to keep Celia in sight as long as possible. Her bed glided through the door and was gone.

Tinian walked out. Hobbs stopped at the door. "You may be able to see your wife tomorrow. That is, unless her delivery begins. Good day, Mr. Kermit."

"Screw you!" Kermit said, and he walked away slowly.

On May 8, 1982, four radio-detonated bundles of dynamite splintered four buses as they approached the main gate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, near Colorado Springs. The buses were carrying three hundred and eight cadets to an athletic meet. Almost half of the Class of 1985 was wiped out in an instant.

Kermit stood on the hospital steps and consulted his watch: thirty minutes to the explosion. A small pang of regret welled in his throat. There would be a large crowd where he had planted the bomb.

The pang passed. Kermit looked at the sun and then at the busy street below the hospital's hill. It was one of those just-cool-enough, just-sunny-enough Colorado spring days. But the Rockies to the west were almost completely hidden by smog.

Too many people, Kermit thought. Denver once had had a population of just over a million, fifteen years ago. Now it has six million, and it's worse everywhere else. It's either them or my baby. But whose fault is it?

He was almost in the parking lot when he saw them. A police cruiser stood in the second aisle; two officers were walking toward his car.

Kermit turned around and went back up the steps.

On May 9, 1982, twelve gasoline bombs exploded in Red Rocks Amphitheater near Denver. A young people's concert was in progress; the audience totaled nine thousand. Three hundred and twenty-three were burned to death. Two hundred sixty-seven were trampled in the panic, and eighty-five more died in hospitals.

Kermit stopped momentarily in the busy hospital lobby, weighing his chances. Should he leave? Should he stay? If they were looking for his car, it was a cinch they knew who he was. He started out again, but he saw several more police cars in the street below. The block was surrounded.

He took a seat in the waiting area of the lobby, among

over a hundred other people. Kermit picked up a magazine and pretended to be engrossed in the week's sporting events. But he kept a cautious eye on everything else that went on in the lobby. After a few minutes, he wondered why no policemen could be seen among the dozens of people entering and leaving the hospital.

A middle-aged woman next to him was coughing; every cough was punctuated by an under-the-breath obscenity. Kermit wanted to move but there were no other empty seats nearby. At last, the woman got up and joined a young couple who came out of the elevator. A muscular, stubble-faced man in a dark suit sat down in the woman's chair. He glanced once at Kermit, then stared straight ahead.

Kermit noticed three uniformed security men moving through the crowd in separate parts of the lobby. They walked boredly among the people but were studying each face they passed. None of them seemed the slightest bit interested in the waiting area; they were content to keep eyes on those coming and going.

"Got a match?" asked the man next to Kermit. He had one eyebrow raised.

"Sure," Kermit said, digging in his pockets. "Here, keep the whole book."

"Thanks." The man lit a cigarette, read the match cover, then put them away.

Kermit located the security men again. They were farther away than before. He had his chance to go upstairs on some pretext. He folded the magazine and started to rise.

"Where's the next one planted, Kermit?"

The calmness of the words shocked Kermit as much as their unexpectedness. He sat back, stunned. The man next to him puffed on his cigarette and looked at him.

A bluff took shape quickly, too quickly. "Were you speaking to me, sir?"

"Unless you're part of that chair you're sitting in, I am. No, Kermit. Stay right there. There's no way out."

The man dropped his cigarette on the floor and took out a small leather wallet. "Agent Whitcomb. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Like I said, where's the next one planted?"

Kermit edged forward in his seat, but a strong hand closed on his wrist.

"Okay," Kermit said, sliding back. "I'm Kermit. Ronald Kermit. What's this all about?"

"Mr. Kermit, you've decided to go to the men's room." The hand tightened on his wrist, squeezing the bones painfully. "Haven't you?"

"Whatever you say, Mr. Whitcomb."

Two other agents came out of the crowd and went into the restroom with them. The security men blocked the door and directed people to another restroom.

Inside, Whitcomb lost his calm and pushed Kermit roughly against a wall. "Where is it? You've hit every day as regular as the mail. Where's today's?"

"That would be telling, Mr. Whitcomb," Kermit said, and the agent hit him. Kermit slumped but was pinned up again more roughly than before.

Whitcomb raised his fist again. "We'll go through it once more, Kermit. Where's the bomb?"

One of the other agents grabbed Whitcomb's arm. "Hey, come on," he said as Whitcomb jerked loose. "He won't tell us anything out cold."

A policeman came in and interrupted what would have been a violent argument. "It went off already. Just came in over our radio."

On May 10, 1982, a charge of twelve sticks of dynamite destroyed the chapel of St. Matthew's Church in Denver. Two hundred and ten people were attending a special service for young people killed in the Red Rocks explosions. One hundred ninety-six were killed.

"Empty your pockets!" Whitcomb pushed Kermit toward the row of sinks. Kermit complied carefully, not anxious to get another slap across the mouth.

Another agent felt him from his armpits to his ankles. "He's safe."

"Cuff him." Kermit's hands were seized and secured quickly. Whitcomb picked up Kermit's belongings, looked them over quickly, then dropped them into a pouch. He kept the plastic visitor's pass in his hand.

"Let's go."

At the door, Whitcomb stopped and asked, "Just a minute. I want to know where you got the idea that blowing up people you don't know was fun."

Kermit wanted to say, "From a comic book." But his heart wasn't in it. Such a shame, he thought; Celia's probably got a long time to go.

He merely shook his head.

The four agents marched Kermit across the lobby; the

crowd was parted before them by the security men. All eyes in the room were on them.

Whitcomb guided them toward the desk. "Here," he said to the nurse, and the threw the visitor's pass on the counter. "He won't be needing this any more."

The nurse looked at the pass. "Wait, sir," she called after them. "I have a message for Mr. Kermit."

The agents turned back. "We haven't got time," said Whitcomb.

The nurse came around to them. "But it's urgent. Mr. Kermit's wife is in the Federal Isolation Ward."

Whitcomb grunted, then nodded.

The nurse looked at the handcuffs, then she read the message card. "Dr. Hobbs wants you to know that your wife went into labor more quickly than we expected. Her pains became regular almost immediately. The baby is expected any time within the next—" she looked at the wall clock "—the next thirty minutes."

Whitcomb turned and pushed Kermit toward the door.

"But there's more," said the nurse, following them. "Mr. Kermit must remain here."

"What?" Whitcomb whirled on her. "This man is under federal arrest! He can't stay!"

The nurse was unruffled. "I'm sorry. Mrs. Kermit has been asking for her husband."

"I'm sorry, but this guy is going to the Federal Building right now!"

"This is a federal project! You could upset it! You'd better speak with Dr. Hobbs!"

Whitcomb swore, but he followed her to the desk.

Kermit watched hopefully; perhaps he had a chance.

Whitcomb came back, downcast. "They threatened to call the Director himself!"

"Please, Whitcomb," Kermit said. "I beg you. Can't we stay here until my baby is born? I have to know if it's normal."

Whitcomb glared at him. "You and these people are asking a hell of a lot! Did a single one of the people you killed have a chance to beg you?"

"Please. It won't be long. I have to know."

One of the other agents spoke up. "He's not going anywhere, Whit. We got him cold. And we won't close the case any faster if we take him out now. And the Director might . . ."

"Okay, okay," Whitcomb said. "Bring him over to the

desk and let him call her. Just remember it's me who'll get the chop if the Director says no go!"

Kermit was allowed to talk to Celia briefly by phone. Then the agents seated themselves and Kermit in the crowded waiting area.

Kermit hunched over, hands on knees, and fretted. Two agents sat beside him; Whitcomb and the other stood in front of him. "Don't try a single thing, Kermit, or you'll be out of here so fast the building will rock."

Whitcomb's words clicked over a memory in Kermit's mind. No, he thought; no, no.

Kermit watched the minute hand of the clock crawl through ten minutes. They'd stopped him. Now he would never get to the stadium of the dog track as he'd planned.

Three more minutes passed. Kermit looked at the nurse, but she shook her head when she saw him.

The plan he had denied before came back to him. He'd known he might be captured before it was time; computers that tracked men down were just too good. He'd prepared for the eventuality but the courage for the finality of it had escaped him. As he watched the clock, he realized that the showdown had come. The last ditch in his program of them-or-my-baby. Courage welled up; he could do it.

He crossed one leg over his knee and tapped his fingers on his shoe. The agents watched him but lost interest. Then he uncrossed the leg and untied his shoelace in the same motion.

"Please," he said. "Let's go to the desk and ask."

Whitcomb waved him up. "All right. But then we go."

Kermit started to get up. "Wait. My shoelace is untied."

He reached down carefully, took up the ends of the lace, closed his eyes and prayed and said goodbye, then jerked the lace hard.

Dynamite caps and plastic explosive concealed in the shoe shattered Kermit, the chairs, the agents, and other people in the lobby in a deafening explosion. The glass doors crashed outward; hard and soft debris hit the walls. Moments later, screams of dying and injured people pierced the smoke left by the blast. Powdered green plastic and spattered red pulp dripped from the ceiling.

On May 10, 1982, a human bomb detonated in the lobby of Our Lady of the Angels Hospital in Denver. Over a hundred people were caught in the explosion. Sixty-four died outright; eighteen more died in the emergency ward.

On May 10, 1982, by coincidence, the first normal baby in Denver in three years was born in the same hospital. Six more normals were born there in days following. Doctors announced a major breakthrough against the plague that had affected the entire world. Enthusiasm was short-lived, however; no more normal births have occurred at that hospital or at any other hospital using the Lady of the Angels' methods. The anomaly is being studied by government scientists. In the words of the Angels' chief physician, "We have new evidence to evaluate from this circumstance. A verdict should be reached soon."

The He-Man Ethos in Science Fiction

by

Joanna Russ

(Adapted from a speech given at the Philadelphia Science Fiction Convention, November 9, 1968)

It is a real scandal that in a field like ours, which is supposed to be so free to extrapolate into the future, so liberated from prejudice and popular nonsense, so rational and so daring, both readers and writers still cling to an illusion, a freak, a myth, a Paleolithic caricature, of what a real man is. It's a scandal that ruins many stories. The real he-man has only to appear and the story dies. He has only to look at a woman for her to turn into pure cardboard.

Science fiction is still—naturally but unfortunately—subject to a set of values which do not have the slightest necessary connection with science fiction. I would call them traditional masculine values, except that they are really those values in desperate retreat; hence the exaggeration, the fantastication, and the shrillness. What are they?

The only real He-Man is Master of the Universe. (This leaves out quite a lot of people.) That is:

The real he-man is invulnerable. He has no weaknesses. Sexually he is superpotent. He does exactly what he pleases, everywhere and at all times. He is absolutely self-sufficient. He is emotionally dependent on nobody, for this would be weakness. Toward women he is possessive, protective, and patronizing; to men he gives orders. He is never frightened by anything or for any reason; he is never indecisive; and he always wins.

In short, he is unhuman.

There is only one thing wrong with this creature and

that's what's wrong with all mythologies. Everybody knows that he doesn't exist, but we still believe—despite what we actually know about other people and ourselves—that he ought to exist, that he somehow constitutes an ideal standard, or that men ought to try to be like that, foredoomed to failure as the effort inevitably is. Men who do not try are not real men; they're not virile; they're sissies; they're beyond the pale. I won't go into the mess this makes of heterosexuality, or the artificiality of this kind of gender distinction, or the godawful strain on real human men of trying to live up to this kind of culturebound nonsense.

I will say only that the he-man kills every story in which he appears. That's bad enough from a writer's point of view. Insofar as such stories are alive, they live through their peripheral characters, or their alien characters, or their incidental comedy, or other interesting things that occur on the sidelines. But you cannot make a story out of sidelines; stories which do not live through their central characters, their central conflicts, or their central systems of value become mere grab-bags.

Most important, this *machismo* business messes up one of the most important and fascinating subjects science fiction can deal with today. I mean power. What we think about power, what we expect powerful people to do, what we think power is, whether we have any power and of what kind, what people we give power to—these questions are not only important in science fiction; they are crucial questions for all human societies and always have been. Power is a problem because it exists, as vulnerability is a problem because it exists. Americans are obsessed with both, but we don't ever solve the problems they present. We just go round and round Robin Hood's barn with the same old mythological nonsolutions. And we insist more and more stridently and desperately that power equals masculinity and masculinity equals power, power over women if over nobody else, but preferably power over other men, or over mountains, or over money.

It's bad enough not to be able to think clearly about sexuality, but it's worse (much worse, given the kind of absolute, ultimate power science fiction writers are fond of writing about) when you can't think clearly about power. We look at real political or moral situations and instead of seeing what's there, we see our favorite myths of Penis, Strength, and Gun. There is no chance to write anything real or see anything real—one can arrive only at the same mythologically foregone conclusion, and that's no

help at all. Of course our whole culture is caught up in this sort of thing, not just science fiction, but science fiction (theoretically, anyway) has a unique chance to speculate about all these things, not just swallow popular stereotypes. Although (as I've said) speculation is what we hardly ever do.

One of the strangest phenomena, in this connection, is the insistence on an either-or situation. Characters in stories are either all-powerful or completely powerless. Either the hero is conquering the world, or the world is returning the compliment by conquering *him*.[1] Alexei Panshin once complained about characters who are strangled by their vacuum cleaners.[2] If you have to be invulnerable to be a real man, if you have to control other people (at the very least, people with whom you come into personal contact), then no real male human being is a real man. He is *therefore* weak and absolutely vulnerable. Q.E.D. We are frozen into the poverty of this either/or: winner/loser, masculine/feminine, totipotent/nullipotent. Morally speaking, this is criminal blindness.

One also finds what has been called pornoviolence (again, part of our whole culture) or what I'd call "boastful suffering"—characters who are tortured, flayed, or impaled alive in various ways, or who have to drag themselves along spaceship corridors in "a blaze of pain" (it's always "a blaze of pain" in these stories; nobody ever feels just Bleh), or they climb mountains with their lungs bursting so that the author can enjoy himself sadomasochistically by showing you what strong stuff his heroes are made of. When the characters undergo rapture, they usually undergo it in the same strenuous fashion and it's the same bullshit.

Power is a real thing. It exists. To have power over other people, to control other people, is a real experience which produces real emotions, real problems, real anxieties, real pleasures. I know what I'm talking about; as a teacher, I have certain kinds of power over certain people and other people have power over me. A writer can depict realities. But if she/he is all hung up on the masculinity-equals-power bit or the heroes-must-control-everybody-else-or-they're-not-heroes bit, he/she will produce either con-

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[1]If you're interested in *her* (such as she is) see "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," *Red Clay Reader # 7*, ed. Charleen Whisnant.

[2]In "Paranoia and Science Fiction," SFWA letter symposium (Alexei Panshin, James Blish, Joanna Russ), 1967.

ventional sludge or a kind of pornography. If you read the chapter on Pornotopia in Stephen Marcus' *The Other Victorians*, you'll find that pornography's unforgivable sin is not writing about sex but *not* writing about sex; pornography excludes the reality of sensuality and sexuality. It's like eating sixteen meals of nothing but spun sugar. Pornoviolence excludes real violence (that is probably its function). It excludes the real experience of what violence is and means and feels like. It excludes real power and the real experience of what power is and means and feels like. (There is a kind of pornoparanoia that does the same thing for the experience of being a victim.) In their place it puts myths and fantasies—that is, destructive nonsense.

There is something else wrong with the he-man ethos and this is the worst thing of all: it leaves very little for the real man *to enjoy*.

For the qualities of control and invulnerability (for total control implies invulnerability), every other human quality has to be given up. The he-man is superpotent (he has to be, since potency is seen as an expression of strength), but does he have superpleasures? Not in the stories I've read, despite the authors' rather unconvincing blather to that effect. Pleasure, especially sensuous pleasure, involves languor, amorousness, letting-go, childlikeness, a kind of loss of self, and no Real Man can afford these—they would be weakness. The super-he-man does exactly what he wants—that is, nobody controls him—but is he therefore superspontaneous or superimpulsive? Again, no. These would be dangerous; they would put him off guard and expose him to possible failure. Is he superhappy? Usually not. Perhaps this is because although he can be fond of other people in a parental or protective way, nobody can be tender toward him. Tenderness involves emotional dependency and dependency is weakness. People can admire (or adore) the he-man, but nobody can love him, for love is possible only between equals and he can have no equals, by definition. Equality means failure in competition. He is in fact a bleak, overcontrolled, defensive, rigid, compulsively competitive, unhappy, and very lonely man. Competition and triumph are the only joys available to him, if one does not wish to include outright sadism. The price one pays for mastery and superiority is—quite simply—the whole rest of life.

Conventional feminine values (little used in science fiction, by the way) display an equal and opposite deformation of humanity.

I would like to see science fiction exhibit, in its projections of human relations, the daring, the wildness, and the extravagant imagination that have already been applied to gadgetry of every description. So many science-fiction stories (like other stories, of course) operate on assumptions about people and values that would hardly be adequate to the social relations of a bunch of flatworms. The stereotypes of gender that infect us all are not even adequate to an understanding of people as they are—the most conventionally limited and deformed people—and they have no relation at all to the future of human potentiality, which is certainly one of our most important subjects. Aside from Samuel Delany's work, some of Mack Reynolds', and of course Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness,* there is little recognition of any of the above in science fiction. Once in a while it dimly occurs to some writers that women are really pretty-much-men; it hardly ever occurs to anybody that men are really pretty-much-women. People-as-they-are-now exhibit in many, many areas of their lives the most anxious and abject brainwashing. Our job as science-fiction writers is not to take this brainwashing at its face value; after all, we're the ones who are supposed to see through culturebound prejudices.

"Mainstream" writers can take refuge in things-as-they-are—as-it-was-thus-it-ever-will-be-God-bless-the-status-quo. We can't and it's about time we stopped. When the he-man dies, sex will flourish (look at the anthropological evidence), literature will be vastly improved, and those who mourn the passing of the quaint old ways can always watch reruns of *King Kong.*

Omnia Triste

by

Rick Norwood

When does an anecdote become a story? A story an anecdote? This little gem by Rick Norwood looks like anecdote but reads like story; a supremely efficient treatment of an old, old, story.

Rick writes: "If I were to write much of an introduction to this story, I would run the risk of it being longer than the story itself. But foremost in my mind right now is not the start of a writing career, but my wife, Lynne, and our first child, who will be born between the time I write these words and the time you read them."

The Norwoods are obviously thinking small at the moment.

Rudolph Kent lit a cigar and was drawing strongly on it when a genie appeared in the smoke rising from the discarded match. The genie was a squidgy little man who wore only a turban and a loincloth. He seated himself cross-legged in the ash tray.

"And your third wish?" the genie asked.

Rudolph Kent, who had never seen a genie before, bit down on his cigar and leaned over for a closer look. "All right, I'll bite. Why are you offering me a third wish when I haven't had a first wish yet?"

"Oh yes you have. You don't remember, of course. Your second wish restored everything to exactly as it was before I offered you three wishes."

"In other words, I only get one wish. That sounds like a gyp to me."

"You should be thankful for one wish. I don't get around to everybody, you know. Now, make it snappy. I've wasted enough time with you already."

"I don't believe any of this," Rudolph said, "but I'll go along with the gag. I wish I were irresistible to women!"

The genie nodded and got to his feet. "Funny, that was your first wish, too."

Stranger in the House

by
Lisa Tuttle

Lisa Tuttle is a pretty young woman who is a little fey and who looks far too innocent to handle a horror story. But appearances deceive, and in "Stranger in the House" she gives expression to one of the universal horrors of childhood.

She explains the genesis of the story this way: "It began as a homesick story—it was mid-July and I hadn't been home since April. Walking barefoot in New Orleans in the evening has the same feel of doing that in Houston; and that's what I was doing when the nearly incessant chatter inside my head started being a story. That's all. Just a Going Home story. I suspect everyone writes one sooner or later; I've gotten mine out of the way early."

I wonder if Criticism can come up with a better phrase for the "artistic transaction" than "the nearly incessant chatter inside my head"?

Sharon knew all the patterns of this neighborhood. She was standing on the corner of Newcastle and Devon, near the house where she had once lived. She knew where she was, and what the women and children who would be home at this hour of a hot summer day would be doing, but she did not know why she was standing where she was. She felt dizzy and put a hand on top of her head, feeling

the heat caught and reflected in her sleek dark hair, and wondered what were the realities of sunstroke.

She closed her eyes, trying to sort the confusion, but forcing memory made it more recalcitrant. She opened her eyes and again took in the familiarity of the neighborhood she had lived in for the first twelve years of her life.

I must have blacked out for a minute, she thought. It was a temporary solution, not one she believed, but something to hold onto until she found the answer. It was not a serious problem, after all. She knew where she was.

She began to walk down Devon, toward the house she had once lived in. It seemed the logical place to go.

Bill drove with only one hand on the wheel. The other arm was draped across the back of the seat. "You're the one who used to live here—so where do we go today?"

"I haven't been in Houston for years." She shrugged. "I don't know. What do you feel like doing?"

"It doesn't matter. What do you want to do?" When she didn't answer, or even look at him, his voice sharpened. "Come on, there must be something here you want to see—or some place you want to visit. You haven't been here for . . . how old were you when your old man left?"

She lit a cigarette. A mistake: he saw her hand tremble.

"Yeah, you told me once when you were drunk. The sad, sad story about your father skipping out. You don't remember telling me, huh? What are you always so—"

"Would you keep your eyes on the road?"

"Don't worry about it. I've been driving since I was twelve. I know—let's go see your old house. What do you think of that?"

She watched the buildings as they passed them, reading the signs, noticing a new shopping center.

"Wouldn't you like to see your old home again? You can say hello to the rats and roaches—let 'em know you've come up in the world with one husband behind you already and working on—"

"OK," she said, to stop the growing bitterness of the argument.

"What?"

"I said yeah."

The house had not changed. The oak and mimosa still stood in the front yard; the ivy and honeysuckle still battled for possession of the front flowerbed; the gutters were peeling yellow paint and the magnolia by the kitchen door

was in bloom. In almost thirteen years the house and yard had managed to remain exactly as she remembered them. It didn't seem likely, but neither did the alternative: that her memory was faulty.

Sharon walked around to the side of the house where there were four windows. The first two were masked by curtains; the last two were the ones Sharon knew best, for they belonged to the room she had shared with her sister. She went to her old window and looked in.

Everything was so familiar, so right, that she did not at first feel surprise. Everything fit, everything was in its place: the scratched wooden play table in the center of the room; the two beds, one beneath each window; the sheets of manila paper covered with crayoned designs and taped to the blue walls.

She was home again, and unsurprised, until she remembered that she was twenty-four years old and had not even seen this house for half that many years. Her mind must be playing tricks on her. She was seeing things and her mind was tricking her into thinking that she remembered those same things.

Déja vu, she thought. That's what it's called. It's normal, it's natural. I'm tired, the sun is hot, I've been smoking too much lately, and Bill . . .

Bill. An image in her mind suddenly of a dark-haired, scowling man leaning against a bright-red Mustang. She knew then that she must have come here with Bill, to look at the old house. But where was Bill?

The answer came quickly: With the car. She set off down the street. He wouldn't have parked far away.

"This seems like a pretty nice part of town. You never told me about your childhood."

She was still gazing out the window. So much had changed.

"Talkative, aren't we?"

She thought of the wine he had insisted upon with breakfast. She had said nothing then, and would say nothing now. She knew her silences infuriated him.

"I guess your father had a good bit of money."

Those townhouses were new, and that office building.

"You lived pretty well until the bastard skipped out."

She folded her arms, holding herself.

"You can't blame me for guessing when you never tell me anything."

She turned the volume up on the tape-player: "Home, where my thoughts are strayin' . . ."

The car was not parked on the street. Other cars beamed reflected sun into her eyes, but there were no 1972 Mustangs. All the cars seemed to be at least ten years old. She went around the block, knowing that almost anything could have happened, for she could not remember the circumstances of their arrival.

A car drove past, an old green Ford that still looked shiny and new. She glanced at it, had a glimpse of a short-haired woman in sunglasses driving with two small girls bouncing in the back seat. The familiarity tugged at her mind.

The farther she walked without seeing either Bill or the car the lonelier she felt. It began to seem clear to her that she had been deserted. Perhaps he had been drunk, and they had quarreled (their arguments had become too frequent lately), and she had demanded— But, alone? Would he have left her alone?

Eventually she returned to the house on Devon. The green Ford was parked in the garage.

"Jesus Christ!" Bill pounded his horn; a woman glared. "The worst drivers in the world, around here. The number of people in this city who are allowed to drive cars . . ."

"You ignored a yield sign," she said. Not asking for an argument.

"The hell I did. If you're so good, Little Miss Silence, why don't you . . ."

"Just drive," she said wearily.

"You're really suffering, aren't you? I mean, I really give you a pain. Well, listen, lady . . ."

When she saw the Ford in the garage she remembered being nine years old. The car had been new, then.

She heard the kitchen door open and slam, and two little girls came running from around the magnolia tree. She saw them mount bicycles in the garage and moments later they sailed past her as she stood, feet curling on the hot street. One girl was dark-haired and thin, pedaling fiercely. The other was a plump, blond, happy-looking child.

Sharon knew the blond child. It was her sister Ellen, fifteen years ago. But the skinny kid—

"That can't be me," Sharon said aloud. Then she began to laugh.

"So which street is it?"
"That one. No, you passed it now."
"Well, why didn't you tell me?"
"You can circle the block."
"I know I can circle the block, goddammit; that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about you never telling me anything."
"You'll miss it again if you're not careful."
"Listen to me, you bitch," he said, turning to glare at her.
"Watch out . . . !"

When the two little girls came riding back Sharon was resting beneath a tree in the yard next door. She stared at them, knowing where they had gone, who they had seen, and what games they had played. They pretended not to see her; either that, or they did not notice her. Sharon knew that, from shyness and parental warnings against strangers, they would feel themselves bound to ignore her. She watched the dark-haired child who pedaled with such singleminded intensity and felt no bond, no sympathy, no feeling of kinship. That little girl was not herself any more than she, Sharon, was again physically nine years old.

Not physically nine, no, but somehow she had come back to the happiest time of her life. She remembered the years between six and eleven as a sort of paradise where parents never quarreled and little girls were never lonely or unhappy. She remembered fears, but they had been fears banished by daylight or the presence of a comforting grown-up.

Sharon waited under the tree until the sun had almost set, shedding worries like used skin. Bill was gone, her former husband did not exist, and her father had never left. When she saw the two little girls, released from the dinner table, ride past her again, she stood up—wanting with a sudden intensity to be on her bicycle again—and walked to the house.

The sun was out of sight, but had not completely set. She stood before the front door, gazing at the dark varnished wood, and touched the doorknob. It was still slightly warm where the last rays of the sun had rested. She opened the door and stepped inside.

The foyer and living room were empty. She could hear

sounds from the kitchen where her mother was washing dishes. She rejoiced in the smell of the house; partly her father's pipe from the den (she heard the crackle and rustle of newspaper), partly the lamb-chop-and-lima-bean smell left from dinner, party indefinable but familiar.

Quick steps on linoleum alerted her and she moved silently into her old hiding place: the space between the piano and the window. She felt awkward, too large for a space that had been fine when she was nine. As the room grew darker she made herself comfortable and hoped that a bit of protruding knee would not be noticed.

Time passed, and Sharon heard the two little girls come home laughing through the kitchen door. She tensed suddenly at the sound of a light footstep and then a sharp click. A light had been turned on. Sharon relaxed, knowing who it was. Sharon had always been frightened of the dark, and had liked, to the mystification of her mother, to have a light on in every room.

Sharon smiled slowly. The light wouldn't help. She knew that light often was dangerous, for in lighting up the dark corners it forced the monsters to come out into the open. Nine-year-old Sharon still had a lot to learn.

Sharon stood up and stretched. From the den she could hear the television, and felt a sudden terrible loneliness that she could not run in and join her family. She could imagine her mother with Scott on her lap, her father with a detective magazine (through with his paper by now), and the two girls with red Popsicles, all watching television. They all belonged, and she was suddenly the outsider.

Sharon went into the hallway, and from there into her parents' bedroom. She felt no fear, although the room was dark. Happy in her freedom from fear, she moved farther into the room and walked around. She even stepped into the closet. As a child she had been afraid to enter the room when it was empty, and nothing could induce her to walk past the open closet door after dark. It had always seemed to her the most likely hiding place for whatever lunatic or burglar needed shelter. She had feared that someone would be lurking in the closet, waiting for her, ready to grab a little girl for some mysterious purposes. But Sharon was no longer afraid.

Scott's room was also dark. She walked past it and entered her bedroom. Both the ceiling light and the bedside lamp were burning. She turned off the ceiling light at the door. Suddenly she was flooded with the desire to have everything again as it should be. The room was right,

the setting was perfect. Only she herself was out of place, in a too-old body. Sharon longed to be able to go to the dresser (with the painted-daisy drawer knobs) and pull out her blue cotton nightgown. She would take off her clothes and pull the nightgown on over her head. Then she would turn down the covers on the bed, go get an apple (afterward she would have to brush her teeth), and kiss everyone goodnight. And then . . .

Sharon remembered the ritual. Always afraid that Something lurked under the bed—something with long arms and a penchant for grabbing small girls—she had devised a method of getting into bed safely. First, she would turn off the ceiling light. Then, beginning at the door, she would run toward the bed, leaping up and onto it from as far away as she could. That way her feet, her vulnerable legs, did not come too close to the edge of the bed, and nothing could grab them. Once in bed she would turn out the lamp and lie still, heart pounding, and wonder if perhaps tonight the thing under the bed would be able to come out and get her, sending long, bony arms up over the sides of the bed, creeping for her throat . . .

And then Sharon would dive under the covers, feeling that out of sight she was somehow safe. Ellen had never shared her fears, and Sharon had often envied her safety in ignorance.

But Sharon could not do that tonight. Now there was someone else to sleep in her bed, someone else who would be kissed goodnight and get to eat an apple. Her place was already filled. This was her home, the only place she wanted to be, and someone else had stolen her role.

Sharon felt dizzy. Her stomach growled. She had not eaten all day. And then she knew what she had to do.

She turned off the lamp and stood for a moment in darkness before rolling under the bed to wait. She did not mind waiting, and she was not afraid of the dark.

The Good Life

by

Robert Thurston

Bob Thurston won NAL's First Prize award last year for his story "Wheels." It demonstrated —as do his contributions this year—his fine surgical eye for the strange values that underly so much human motivation.

Of "The Good Life," Bob writes: "I cannot be tempted by the so-called good life. I will not be swayed from my life of dedication, my desire to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number, my overwhelming need to be a contributor to social progress. There is nothing *in the good life that you could offer me. Unless, of course, you really do want to get rid of that Zenith Chromacolor television set with the magic tuner, or that seven-foot-tall blond ski instructress, or that . . ."*

1. FACE UP TO YOUR FEARS

King Edward IV (family name Edward, first name an inheritance from a falling branch of the family tree, grandson of King Edward Jr.) lived in a house of love. Doors gave him friendly shoves. Rooms brightened when he entered them. Lamps were grateful when he turned them on. Princess Telephone wrapped herself around him, cooed in his ear. The bed whispered, "Glad you're back," when he sat on it. Rugs pleaded, "Step on me again." Everything in

the house found every opportunity to remind him of love.
Including his wife.
Especially his wife, who was much too lovely.
He was more afraid of her than the rest.

2. BE YOUR OWN BOOSTER

I am handsome. Rich. Witty. The center of everyone's attention. I have wet dreams about Jacqueline Bissett. Everything is good.

I cannot commit suicide because I can't bear thinking of the loss to the world.

Nothing bad has ever happened to me. When does it come?

3. SERMONS IN STONE

King Edward IV was the world's finest acidhead. He dropped lethal amounts and experienced only wonderful things.

"It's all incredibly beautiful. Everything. Love in all shapes."

"Of course, dear. For you."

"You are the most fantastic creature in the world."

"No more than you deserve, dear."

He went down to the ghetto in his Silver Shadow, tried to absorb the misery of the people there. But they would not let him. They whisked away litter, scrubbed their hovels, were eager to teach him how to use a blade. They took up a heroin collection. He shot all they could bring him, felt no debilitating aftereffects. The marks on his arm healed immediately. Afterward, they gave a street carnival for him.

4. TIP-TOP SERENITY

A quiet night, a walk in the suburbs listening to the rustle of television aerials. 263 Motorcycle Freaks jumped out of trees and blocked his path. Blinding light from chrome and metal. Joined in chorus, their snarling sounded like the world's biggest H-D gunning its motor. As they advanced toward him, their heads looked like riders on elephants.

Fear filled up King Edward IV's body in a second. This is it, he thought. I'm going to die the most horrible of deaths—stomped to death by 526 horseshoe cleats. At last. It's all over. Beautiful.

Beautiful.

The word was written on his face, stamped on his forehead in metal and chrome letters. They read it, mouthing the syllables.

"He's cool," one of them said.

"Love, man," the leader, who looked nothing like Peter Fonda, said. He passed by King Edward IV. The rest formed two lines and walked past him reverently.

5. SMILING THROUGH

He got drunk at the greatest cocktail party in the history of western civilization. The guests crowded around him and asked him wonderful questions. His wife clung tightly to his arm and sent him the warmest looks of love anybody had ever seen. This cannot be happening, he thought.

The back of the crowd, so eager to hear his every word, pushed against the front of the crowd. The front of the crowd plunged forward. They backed him and his wife up against a fourth-story window, which happened to be open at the time. They both fell through.

Dropping, his wife still fastened to his arm, he thought: How great. Finally the time has come. But it's *not* great. She will die, too, her beautiful body smashed to pieces on the pavement. It can't happen this way. It's too awful. She's too beautiful. That's why it's been good up to now. That's—

His thought was broken off as they landed on a pile of mattresses in the open van of a secondhand-furniture truck which had just crashed through the window of a florist shop.

In the morning he had no hangover.

6. THE GAP BETWEEN THE AMERICAN DREAM AND AMERICA'S REALITY

He watched the television coverage all day. Reporters seemed to be everywhere: getting in-depth interviews with the radicals, the radiclibs, the hardhats, the politicians, Raquel Welch (while on her way from addressing a student rally to entertaining the National Guard, who'd been assembled just outside the riot area), newsmen from other networks, black militants trying to find an angle they could use to join the action, Eric Hoffer. He watched the tension grow, trying to gauge the point at which the riot would begin. Difficult to calculate, because this was

going to be the greatest riot of the decade. Or so NBC's Joe Garagiola said.

He figured it just right. When he got there, the air was thick with flying debris, speeding bullets, speeding bullets shattering flying debris. Sides had blurred, violently moving bodies crashed and shattered against each other. Everything was ugly, appalling, worse than the TV coverage.

Taking a deep breath of the tear-gas-ridden air (feeling no ill effects from the gas), he walked into the melee. He was wearing his best Establishment suit with a large peace symbol sewn on the back.

His walk across the park made all three networks. He stood in front of a rifle, which misfired (the rifleman cried, tore off his good-conduct medal, plucked a flower and put it in the barrel of his gun, hurled the weapon away, and walked in front of his buddy's rifle, which misfired). He ran under falling things, and they were deflected by members of the crowd. People with their feet on other people's faces looked up at him, and promptly removed the offending feet. People on the ground who thought they were dying made miraculous recoveries. Newsmen stopped prodding fights. At the end of his trek, the worst thunderstorm of the year ended the riot. There were no major casualties.

7. YOUR EMOTIONS CAN MAKE YOU SICK

I will concentrate on hating her, this house, and the good life. I will concentrate hard. I will find out what nausea is all about. I will find out what diarrhea is all about. I will have a bad trip. I will sell my wife, divorce this house, and move to Schenectady. I will wait for a good president and assassinate him. I will crouch in a tower and pick off passersby. I will buy my own talk show and put it on all the networks. I will hate *The Love Machine*. I will make somebody hate me.

My dreams are getting odder. A good sign. Except I enjoy them very much.

Last night's: I get chauffeured in a Silver Shadow to the gates of Heaven. St. Peter gives me the keys and says, "Get used to the heft, baby." Thomas More aims a karate kick at my crotch, but misses. He runs away, shouting—"I will not sign. I will not fucking sign." Christ reaches out to touch the hem of my robe. God gets up off His throne and offers me a seat.

8. SUNDAY CROSSWORD

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9. DUMMY REVERSAL HELPS

He sent away for an inflatable doll (Hi! I'm Karen, the 38-22-36 that every real man should own. Inflate me.) It arrived in a plain brown envelope. He spent all afternoon blowing it up. In full balloon it was an extraordinarily beautiful creature.

He placed it sitting up on the living-room couch. He had dressed it in a see-through blouse, short skirt, and blond wig. Sitting down beside it, he mussed up its hair, tore a provocative rip in its blouse, and hiked up its skirt. He put his hand on its thigh. He sat with it for a long time, waiting for his wife to come home from shopping and the beauty parlor.

She came into the living room, looking more beautiful than ever.

"Hi, love," she said. "Hi, Karen."

10. ADVICE COLUMN

I will burn down all two billion MacDonald's Hamburger Stands and stand by and listen to the big sizzle. I will learn to sneer at David Susskind. I will murder beautiful girls and hang beaver pelts from my belt. I will steal the Kennedy graves.

11. ASTROLOGICAL FORECAST

Aquarius: Jan. 20–Feb. 18. From now on all Aquarians will have only good things happen to them. This is Your Age, Aquarians! (It's all your fault, King Edward IV, you dumb shit.) This sign will henceforth be deleted from the Zodiac.

12. IMPROVE YOUR GOLF GAME 100%

He could not shut off the Mozart that continually played inside his head, nor could he move other than gracefully, or slough off on his golf game when he wished. Financially, things couldn't have been better. Hoping that the national recession would touch him, he reached out for it and it backed away in shy propriety. He patted children on the head, but they did not turn to gold.

As things grew even better, a haze of contentment threatened to muddle his brain. He struggled against it. Every night he spent in his library desperately reading the gloomiest passages from his vast collection of nihilistic works.

He continued to make long lists of what he was going to do. He did his writing while sitting on the bare floor of the hallway. He ignored pointless house-sounds. His wife sat on a stair, her beautiful face hidden in shadow. Occasionally the Princess Telephone rang, but nobody answered it.

The more degenerate and evil an idea was, the more he happily laughed over it while adding it to his list. The laughter perked up the spirits of the crowd outside, who had gathered hopefully for a glimpse of him.

13. DEUS EX

"You should give it up, King boy, you ain't got the first bloody trace of a chance."

He looked up from his list. A rather chunky middleaged woman in a filmy robe was in the last few inches of floating down to the floor. The hopelessness suggested by her statement intrigued him immediately.

"Would you please repeat what you said. Please."

"Quit. Your quest is D-double oom—doomed."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is true. There is no way that you can alter your fate. Nothing bad has happened to you, nothing bad

will ever happen to you. You are slated for A-1 treatment in this world, so clap your hands behind your head, open your legs, and enjoy it."

"How do you know all that? Have you escaped from a mental hospital or something?"

"I know because I come from Up There. No, I haven't escaped, I'm just here on assignment."

Edward looked at her face closely. Trapped inside the bored facade and weary wrinkles was an angelic expression.

"Then you're from Heaven?"

"Yes."

"Then there is a Heaven?"

"Score one for redundancy."

"Who are you?"

"Nobody you'd've heard of. I'm God's wife. Or, rather, I used to be. Now I just run an occasional errand."

"Wife?"

"Yes, well, that's some story. Some story, believe me. He's not so crazy for it. The Sumerians knew about it, but He wiped it out when He wiped them out. Anyway, we're not here to discuss ancient history, I'm here to straighten you out. And the straightener is this: Good luck is not a thing to fret about. Some people get their lumps, yes, but if they didn't then the fortunate like yourself would have nothing to judge your rewards by."

"You really believe that? You sound like a churchschool primer."

"The comparison is not inappropriate. The trouble with you people is that you treat all the old truths as outmoded homilies and prefer to fashion lies into truth. Anyway, my mission is fulfilled and you can ruminate at your leisure."

She began to float, backward and upward, away from him.

"Will I not even die a painful death?" he shouted after her.

"It will, I'm sure, be like the fall of a pin onto a field of styrofoam."

"Then—then things will go on like this forever—for eternity?" King Edward IV looked like a man halfway through a stomach cramp.

"I said nothing about eternity," she said just before her mouth passed through the ceiling.

Sand and Stones

by

Geo. Alec Effinger

Maybe it is my own rather extensive experience in the military-governmental complex that makes this Effinger story so powerful for me. But next time you fill out an application blank for anything *you really want, notice how careful you are. . . .*

Piglet writes: "There's a nice somnambulistic quality here that I like. I tried to give the story the tense quality of those dreams that are just turning into nightmares. To all of us at times such concepts as authority, ambition, duty, and service seem little more than fantasies; at rarer, madder moments, life itself is a thin dream, and this is the nightmare from which some of us won't awaken."

He stood white, like a spot favored by God in the dull-gray landscape. He moved over a colorless plain; sometimes the ground was stony and sometimes sandy. When he moved over the stones they clicked and rattled against each other. When he moved over sand there was a rustling sound that soon grew monotonous. When he didn't move he heard nothing at all. There was absolutely nothing to see that was larger than the small stones beneath him: there were no rocks or boulders to attract his eye, no wind-built dunes of sand, no ridges or mounds to bring the horizon closer, no ravines to provide a momentary diversion.

He looked as drab as the desert. He suspected that the

effect was intentional. The whiteness of his Havoc suit was a cold white, without a gleam, not the least brightness to contrast with his surroundings. If he looked down beyond his feet, studying closely the shadowed boundary where the dead ground began, he could sense that his scuffed boots were slowly turning the same and eternal shade of gray. The grayness itself had to grow and live its strange, predatory way; the very quality of color was an enemy here, and soon the boots would shade into the sand, and then his uniform trousers, his tunic . . .

And wasn't that what they expected him to feel?

There was nothing interesting in where he was, what he was doing, or even what he was himself. His huge kep held the most potential for amusement, but he had trained himself to resist it. In appearance it was uninvolving: it was the same flat white as his uniform and constructed of a smooth material whose texture was neither coarse nor slick. The corners of the pack were carefully designed, so there were no sudden, sharp angles nor beguiling curves. The kep measured six feet in height, four across, and, when fully packed, two feet thick. As he wore it, it rose a foot above his head and extended down nearly to his feet. It spread out on either side of his narrow shoulders, so that he looked as though he were mounted to a block like a rare insect. It was filled with his equipment, but the Forces technologists had circumvented the weight situation so that as long as an item was packed away in its proper place it contributed nothing to his burden. He carried only the weight of the kep's outer shell.

Soon his arms grew tired from holding the mover. The weariness was a change, and he welcomed it as an alternative to total boredom. The mover, like his killer, was a metal bar that measured four inches by four inches by three feet. Like everything else within his pack, it was colored the uniform flat white. The mover was made of a heavy metallic substance, and served to pull him along wherever he pointed it. His speed was regulated by the obliqueness of the angle at which he held it; he did not dare change speeds unnecessarily, for they were surely observing him and would find such changes to be symptoms of weakness. Now he held the mover perpendicular to the ground, and he came to rest.

He paused for only the time necessary for one deep breath, for he was required to repack each piece of equipment immediately when he ceased using it. First he stood the mover carefully upright on one of its flat ends. Then

he unbuckled the kep's straps on his chest and around his waist, shrugging out of the harness and gently lowering the pack to the ground. On the back of the kep was a color lock: five panels that changed hue in response to varying amounts of electric current. He tuned each to the proper shade of the proper color, taking a good deal of time, for the panels did not have a large tolerance for error. His hours of practice with the kep's lock enabled him to open it on the first attempt. He drew another deep breath, knowing that he was doing well in the eyes of the Havoc Forces' evaluation personnel.

Beneath the stiff flap of the kep his equipment was packed with regulationary order, arranged on a stacked series of trays. He removed the topmost tray, containing a transceiver module that would not operate wherever it was that he was, a copy of the Forces' standard manual on alien linguistics and emergency protocol methods, several boxes of condoms, an eight-foot banner celebrating the five hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Havoc Forces, with two collapsible poles, guy wires, and six stakes, and a marker buoy with two dye capsules. He placed the tray on the ground according to the instructions he had received during his training period.

He pulled apart the magnetic seams of the kep to remove the second tray. This tray held his entertainment rations, which he knew from the reports of previous candidates to be the most dangerous material that he carried. Even the briefest of glances at the contents of the second tray during his time in the field would be rated an Error. He had received his rations only minutes before lifting out to the exercise, and had not had time to examine them. He was certain that his curiosity was a carefully metered variable, and that a large section of his final report would concern his attitude toward these potential distractions. He remembered that the tray held several popular novels (two of them openly seditious), lifelike sensuals of nude women and men and other organisms, programs of several types of music, a variety of narcotics and hallucinogens, and even an illegal intercranial stimulus propagator. With an expression of disinterest he placed the tray on the ground, adjacent to the first and at the proper angle.

He parted the seams farther and removed the third tray, which contained a chronometer, an empty canteen for use in the most unimaginable emergency, a white metal bar with a beacon at one end and a siren at the other, his personal toilet articles (which he knew also to

be an Error even to touch), his Book of Reward, a bundle of personal message plasties and a bundle of the official sort, and an alto recorder that he didn't yet know how to play. The third tray joined the first two, in exactly the proper place in the formation.

In the fourth tray were many cellophane packets. Some of the packets contained white lozenges about the size of a thumbnail; these were food. Others contained white pills about half that size, and were water. There were enough of both to last him many months. When he placed the fourth tray on the ground, it formed the last side of a regular pentagon consisting of the four trays and the base of the kep. The pentagon was the symbol of the Havoc Forces.

He peeled the sides of the kep away to allow him access to the bottom tray. It was divided into two identical parts, each with a lid and a three-panel color lock. He opened one of the two boxes and placed the mover inside. It would not function while it was within the correct section of the correct tray. Then he relocked the box and pressed the magnetic seams together around the fifth tray. He replaced the fourth tray and then the third, fitting together the sides of the kep from the bottom upward. He realized that he must do something meaningful, no matter how trivial, in order to justify his rest to the evaluation staff. Therefore he removed the chronometer from the third tray and studied it briefly, fearing to take too much time and thus commit an Error. Six days, he thought. I have been here for six days.

The second tray and then the first were restacked within the kep, and the sides rejoined tightly around them. He pulled the flap over and down and relocked it. I must show them how efficient I can be, he thought as he walked around the kep and strapped on the harness. I will walk until I am completely exhausted, and they will see that I am so. Then I will stop and eat, combining a rest period with an eating period. After that I will be allowed to take out the mover once again.

He began walking across the silent plain. It was much more difficult than traveling with the mover: his feet sank in the gray sand or he slipped on the unsure footing of the gray stones. His legs ached, but he knew that it was not yet time to stop. His chest pained him with each breath, but he was sure that he was not yet exhausted. He kept going, and the sun stayed high overhead, as it had been for six days, a dull patch of lighter cloud in the

grayness of the sky. Even the minimal pleasure of watching the shadows lengthen was denied him.

He walked for many miles, although there were no landmarks that he could use to judge the distance, and nothing moved on the ground or in the sky to indicate the passage of time. His body was filled with pain, but as long as he could take another step he did so, proud that the evaluation personnel were surely impressed with his extra effort. As the fatigue grew within him his thoughts, too, turned gray; inside and out he was becoming more and more a suitable addition to the scene.

The clicking of the loose stones roused him. The sound was originating from a point some yards ahead of him. It clearly indicated the presence of something else moving in his vicinity. He worked to focus his eyes.

There was another man moving over the gravel, suited in a uniform and kep exactly like his but colored a dull, dark red. The other man had already sighted him and balanced his mover on the ground.

The man in white felt his throat grow dry with fear. He knew that his weariness gave the other a definite advantage. Perhaps it was a mistake to walk so far that I am now weakened, he thought. Perhaps the evaluating staff wasn't impressed, after all. It occurred to him that his trek might even be an Error, and a fatal Error at that.

He knew that as far as time was concerned, *he* had the edge on the man in red, who was required to pack his mover away before he could begin any offensive activity. The man in white forced himself to move slowly, as he had been trained, avoiding the panic reaction that would only waste time and energy. He unfastened the two straps and lowered the kep to the ground. The man in red was doing the same. Don't watch him, thought the man in white. It will only waste time.

He could barely restrain his anxiety as he set the five panels of the color-lock: this was probably the most critical operation. Here was the greatest potential for misjudgment, which could only prove deadly under the circumstances. But once again he opened the kep on the first try. He began to feel confident, because even if his adversary had done the same, the man in red still had an extra lock to open in order to store away the mover.

The thought that his enemy had several extra steps to complete permitted the man in white to operate under less tension. He set the trays on the ground in their proper formation, and all the while he felt more secure. If I

had been using my mover, he thought, this would have been a closer contest. But then I wouldn't be as tired as I am now.

He opened the box in the fifth tray and removed the white metal bar. Then using the mover excessively may be an Error, he mused. The man in red used his, and now . . .

Even as he held the bar out at arm's length he knew what he had done. His arms weakened and his legs felt numb: it wasn't the killer. He had opened the wrong box and taken out *his* mover instead of his killer. He was already moving toward his enemy, and the stones beneath him knocked against each other. The sound made the man in red look up, confused. The man in white turned the mover to the vertical position and ran back to his kep. His vision was blurred with tears. All that he could do now was to follow the procedures, although the man in red would have him easily. The man in white put away his mover, hoping that some time-consuming disaster would stall his enemy. He opened the box that housed his killer, but he had difficulty with the color lock. He adjusted the middle panel twice before the box would open, all the time expecting to die with the next breath. Nothing happened. Maybe, he thought, maybe . . .

He hid behind the kep, though he knew that it could not provide protection from the killer of the man in red. But what was delaying his opponent? The man in white took out his killer and moved around the kep.

The enemy in red, his kep, and all his equipment had disappeared.

Obviously, this had been the test. The actual problem programmed for him by the evaluation personnel had occurred, and he had made an Error. How many Errors was he allowed? Perhaps he had already proved himself unacceptable to the Havoc Forces. He didn't know what to do, now. How could he possibly recoup his losses? No more grand schemes, he decided. He packed the killer and took out a food and a water lozenge from the fourth tray. After the meal and a short rest period he opened the box that contained the mover, which he balanced beside him on the ground. Then he repacked the kep, stacking the fourth and third trays and sealing the sides of the kep around them. He glanced at the chronometer: six days. One more to go. He finished packing and hoisted the kep onto his back and fastened the straps. Holding the mover at one end with both hands, he pointed it in the

direction that he had been heading before the meeting with the man in red.

As he moved the ground changed beneath him from stones to sand, from sand to stones. He held the mover out at arm's length, and soon his muscles began to ache, but he did not stop. At first his mind was troubled, then it was too spent even to worry, and then, at last, his thoughts were a solid, cold, gray fog. He moved and he breathed, but that was all that he did. When he came to the moraine he stopped. The mound of boulders was weirdly out of place on the plain, but he had no more curiosity. Having stopped, it was necessary to pack the mover. Then he had to make some meaningful response to the presence of the pile of rocks. Deep within his drowsing consciousness he was glad that he had discovered the moraine, because it might mean that his test had not ended with his Error. There might still be hope.

Once more he broke down his kep, and stored away the mover. His blunted faculties could see but one significant operation: he took out his killer and held it toward the large gray rocks. It was a senseless action, and of course nothing happened. After a short while he packed the killer away and reformed the kep. He set out on foot again.

When he couldn't walk any farther he stopped, took off the kep, and slept. When he awoke he resumed his journey, moving and walking until his chronometer indicated that the seventh day was nearly over. He was relieved, but he did not know how long he would have to wait. His instructions made it clear that his actual testing might go on beyond the end of the seventh day. His behavior while he waited would also be observed. If he passed the test, he would be picked up—eventually. He waited.

And, far away, on the monitor screens of the evaluation staff of the Havoc Forces, he looked like a small gray lump. He was so small and gray that he blended right into the gray of the landscape, and he could not be seen at all.

The Writer As Teacher

by

James Sallis

I came into writing via poetry, and just as I can no longer differentiate my impulse for poetry from my work in fiction, I find that I can no longer separate in my mind two later vocations, teaching and editing, from my original vocation as writer. I suspect that this is true of many others—that teaching and editing, for instance, are not so much complementary as coincidental: functions of the same impulse—and that what occurs in the case of many writer-teachers who become more teacher than writer is an inordinate expenditure in one direction, and a consequent draining of energy away from the other.

This presumes an integrity which I cannot lay claim to; I am not writer, editor, and teacher in one; rather, I find that, at different times, I am more one than the other. Thus, as an editor I find myself writing long letters concerning revision and conscientiously following the development of writers I have helped or perhaps published for the first time, even feeling proprietary toward stories I've published. As a teacher I take an editor's pleasure in new writers and significant talents, I gain some of the impetus needed to continue my own work, and I form new friendships. (The friendship of writers is something apart from most.) As a writer I benefit, and suffer, from both; without the others I would have written more but, by the same token, what I *have* written would not be as good.

Granted, I am speaking of virtually ideal conditions. My editing began with *New Worlds*, one of the finest fiction magazines ever produced, and one which always maintained the closest contact with its writers; my teaching has been before talented, dedicated students who, truly and

more than anything else, wanted to learn to write and already knew that writing was difficult work.

Today, just as surely as psychology and psychotherapy are changing under the influence of such people as Alexander Lowen and Rollo May, the techniques of teaching are undergoing a transformation. Much of this is a summary shift away from classical, academy teaching to something more in line with situational tactics; the new emphasis is on student-teacher relationships, or more properly, the breakdown of the old relationships, and the free exchange of ideas and feelings. The classroom experience becomes, increasingly, a free-structured encounter. It attempts to take under its aegis, not a single discipline, but the entire world as configured *in* the discipline, just as a critic of Edmund Wilson's gifts and stature transcends criticism and becomes, instead, a type of cultural historian.

To this new teaching the writer, by nature, easily accommodates himself. He is accustomed to the flux of ideas in operation, and he has a way, part contrivance and part improvisation, of dealing with that flux. Similarly, writing is by definition a discipline in which a small portion of the world is investigated to such point that it begins to show the pattern, the lineament and cross-hatching, of much larger motions. The writer works at the base line of all perception and knowledge, language—and as he manipulates that language, exposes the various temporizing models by which we retrieve, not only our individual lives, but also the world; he traces the lines which sensation must cross in becoming feeling, intuition in becoming idea. Writing is an attempt to move, to change.

On a practical level, the writer as teacher offers superior experience, his own enthusiasm, and a battery of critical approaches gained by him over the years of his writing, chiefly as a product *of* his writing. Of the three, enthusiasm is possibly the most important: writers like what they are doing, and their world, in large part, is bounded by it. In giving of enthusiasm, and in spreading individual resources over so large a field, so many people, the expenditure of energy and ego is formidable; I suspect this is why good teachers often burn out at a relatively early age. But it is what they have to give. In writing, one attempts to influence a number of people, individually, at a (very) great distance; in teaching, one attempts the same in close quarters; the formula is the same, part con job, part inspiration. And while the immediate expenditure may be much greater in teaching, the writer may see this as

a temporary way out of the essential loneliness of his profession. It is not, I think, simple economics which accounts for the number of writers firmly ensconced in universities.

The pleasures of teaching, like those of writing, are largely internal and personal: a belief that what you are doing *matters,* that you are doing your best, that you are having effect. Regardless of how successful one's "students" may be, tangible results—a renewed sensitivity to language, stories published, even this book—are not the final mark; what one remembers are the moments he struck deeply into another person's individuality and happened onto real communication. I have said that writing is an attempt to move, to change. The same is true of teaching, but whereas in writing one may never know the effect his work has on others, here one sees, and feels, the results of that attempt; and one judges himself according to the frequency with which these moments are achieved.

At the workshop, with seven teachers and twenty-five students, these moments occurred often, and as often among the participants themselves as between teacher and student. It is to be hoped that in future years, as we gain further experience, they will come more regularly and prove more durable. Thus far, we have not demonstrated that writing can be taught, only that it may be learned; the distinction is a vital one. And it sets our future goals.

"READ THIS BOOK . . . AND THEN YOU MAY UNDERSTAND, AT LEAST INTELLECTUALLY, WHY IT IS THAT THE CLARION/TULANE KIDS ARE CONSIDERED . . . A VERY SPECIAL, VERY LOVING, AND VERY TALENTED GROUP OF WRITERS."—Harlan Ellison

Science fiction, once found only in pulp magazines that the reader was forced to shield behind a plain brown wrapper, has now become an accepted literary genre. Today, writers' workshops have replaced the pulps as a training ground for the new generation of authors. One of the most important of these workshops was founded in 1968 by Robin Scott Wilson at Clarion State College. The highly successful results of this enterprise were published in the first volume of this series, *CLARION*, which Theodore Sturgeon calls "the most valuable book yet written about science fiction."

The present anthology is the product of two 1971 Clarion Workshops, conducted at Tulane University and the University of Washington under the supervision of Harlan Ellison, Robin Scott Wilson, Ursula K. Le Guin, and others. Maintaining *CLARION'S* high standards, *CLARION II* contains some of the finest examples of speculative fiction being written today.

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